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## Dr Lesley Smith

### Zumba Bump

**Age:** 54

**University:** Epidemiology Researcher and Lecturer at Oxford Brookes University

**Background:** Originally healthcare (nursing) and later research

**Area of Interest:** Public Health research with a focus on women's health

Lesley started her career in nursing, and later moved into epidemiology, researching the determinants of health and disease. Her background has led her to become passionate about prevention of ill health by promoting healthy lifestyles.

Lesley is concerned that much of the UK population doesn't have a very healthy lifestyle, with many people being largely sedentary, not eating a healthy diet, and having unhealthy habits such as smoking and drinking. This is particularly the case for young women, who have adopted habits such as smoking and drinking which were previously health behaviours more common amongst men.

Lesley and her colleague, Ethel Burns, a midwifery lecturer, identified pregnancy as an opportune moment for expectant mothers to interact with their peers and to change behaviour because they want a healthy baby "Pregnancy can be a real wake up moment, and we are capitalising on that."

For this reason, they set up Zumba 4 Bump; a dance-based exercise class, followed by Bump Club, "Where women ask the questions they don't ask in the clinic".

Zumba 4 Bump and Bump Club allow women to meet, provide practical and emotional support to each other, and ask questions on health & pregnancy related topics, with input from experienced midwives.

As such, the project is a midwifery-led ante-natal group, something that Lesley and Ethel felt was important, particularly as NHS-run ante-natal care, education and support is often a casualty of NHS funding cuts or freezes. Lesley feels the ante-natal period is especially important as people pass on their health-related habits, good or bad, to their children.



Lesley and Ethel worked very closely with other midwives at Oxford Brookes and NHS midwives in the local community, in order to set up the group.

### **Biggest Challenges**

The biggest challenge is recruiting women and raising awareness. This is because they are targeting a group of women at greater risk of poor health behaviours, who were sometimes difficult to reach, and they rely on referral by community midwives.

### **Successes and Surprises**

The success of the group has been that women have come along and stayed after having their baby for several months, and are coming back each week. They have had surprisingly consistent attendance, which has been helpful because the new mothers are then part of the group supporting the next group of expectant mothers who later attend.

*"The women who joined the group have helped us with fundraising activities, raising awareness, recruiting, and have really adopted the group and taken ownership of it."*

### **Social impact**

In addition to being a fun form of exercise, the Zumba sessions have really helped the discussion group by creating a relaxed atmosphere. The discussions are helping to promote other health behaviours, with the aim of empowering women to have a greater say, and to be in greater control of

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their labour and delivery.

Women in the group have been very positive about its impact:

*“There’s no better start to life than midwifery, music & dance”*

*“The music is very uplifting”*

*“I feel supported by other women”*

*Lesley commented: “Our vision is that every woman in Oxfordshire would have the opportunity to attend Zumba 4 Bump.”*

**Website:** Currently in development

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/pages/Zumba-Oxford-for-BUMP/105365196253830](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Zumba-Oxford-for-BUMP/105365196253830)