
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

Nicola Byrom

Student Run Self Help

Age: 26

Education: DPhil in Experimental Psychology - University of Oxford

Background: Undergraduate degree at University of Nottingham

University: Post Doctoral Researcher - University of Oxford

Area of Interest: Mental Health

Nicola Byrom has completed a DPhil in Experimental Psychology at Oxford University and is currently working there as a post doctoral researcher. In 2009 she launched Student Run Self Help www.srsh.co.uk, a volunteer-run organisation which provides self-help groups across the country for students with mental health problems such as depression and eating disorders. The project is entirely driven by young people's personal experiences of living life with mental health problems, to make sure that the work they do is relevant and needs-led.

Nicola herself experienced mental health problems as a teenager at school, which led to her taking time off school and considerable disruption to her life. Once recovered she continued her studies as an Undergraduate at University, but found that talking about her experiences with new people in a new environment wasn't easy. She also found that, if other students were experiencing mental health problems, or had friends with mental health problems, it was something they were not confident talking about either.

This inspired Nicola to set up Student Run Self Help when she was an Undergraduate at the University of Nottingham. Her main aim was to give students the courage and confidence they needed to talk to their peers about problems they may be facing, and to understand that mental health problems are perfectly normal and that talking about them can be a good idea.

Following on from the success of setting up the project at Nottingham, Nicola felt she wanted to continue the project in some form at Oxford, whilst she was studying for her DPhil. Initially, she felt that she would just write up her experiences and pass the project on to someone else, but then she spoke to the Student Hubs team who suggested she apply for funding from UnLtd.



“None of this would have existed without the initial funding from UnLtd, which enabled us to carry out the proof of concept work, and eventually to find funding from other sources.”

In terms of social impact, Student Run Self Help has now trained well over 200 students from 18 different Universities in the UK. They typically deliver 2 days of intensive training to a group of 15 or so students, comprising 4-5 volunteers from each of 3 or 4 Universities at a time. These volunteers then return to their Universities and run the self help groups themselves.

The biggest challenges for Nicola have been that although she has the psychological know-how and practical skills to set up and deliver the project, she has found running a business, to be a totally different skill set.