



Dear [head teacher name],

Between 2013 and 2014 your school took part in the National Institute for Health Research funded study, Active7, which was run by the University of Bristol. Active7 was a dance-based study for Year 7 girls, examining whether dance could help to increase the physical activity levels of girls.

Many girls become less active as they move to and progress through secondary school. Often the activities available to them are not of interest, so they disengage. To improve the health of adolescent girls, it is important to find activities which they enjoy. Dance is one such activity. Following a successful pilot study in 2011 Active7 focused on providing after-school dance for Year 7 girls.

Your school was a 'control' school, for which it received a £500 thank you donation. Schools acting as 'intervention' schools received 40 after-school dance sessions for Year 7 girls (delivered by expert dance instructors). The main finding was that girls who received the dance programme were not more active than girls in the control group at the end of the study. Girls from the intervention and control groups were already relatively active prior to engaging with Active7, obtaining an average of 53 and 49 minutes of weekday physical activity respectively. This could explain why changes in physical activity caused by Active7 were minimal. Unfortunately attendance also declined over time, with only one third of girls in all schools attending two thirds of the sessions delivered.

The project was financially affordable. Whilst participation was free for schools and girls, we recorded all expenditure. Each session cost £1.57 per child. Or, for two 75 minute dance sessions per week between January and June, the total cost was £2401 per school.

The nine intervention schools delivered at least 37 of the 40 planned sessions. This indicates that staging dance sessions within the school schedule is manageable. The study had a number of positive effects on participants. Girls reported enjoying Active7. Sessions were found to improve girls' sense of confidence and competence in dance. Participation also provided opportunities for girls to take ownership of sessions and develop their team working and leadership skills. Girls also commented on how Active7 introduced them to new styles of dance and provided opportunities to make friends and develop relationships.

The project taught us some important lessons about running effective after-school projects, including:

- Dance is an *enjoyable* and *affordable* after-school activity
- Girls like choice in their physical activity (dance style and music choice was enjoyed)
- *Girls loved the opportunity to take ownership of elements of the dance sessions*
- 'Open enrolment', where participants can 'drop in' to sessions (rather than having to attend a whole series), may improve retention.
- Having one session per week (instead of two) may increase attendance
- Breaking a course of physical activity sessions into themed blocks (such as five sessions on street dance, five on contemporary) may enthruse participants

We understand that not receiving the intervention can be disappointing, but having control schools is a crucial scientific element of our research. We are very grateful for the part your school played.

Yours sincerely,

[Active7 Trial Manager]