The Hip Hop-eration Story

Advice on being built to last by Billie Jordan

The Hip Op-eration Crew is the oldest dance group in the world (Guinness World Records). They're a hip hop dance group with 22 members from Waiheke Island aged 68 to 96 years old. The average age is 80. As the founder, manager and dance teacher of the dance group, 46 year old Billie Jordan has had an inside view of why her dancers are healthier than many of their senior aged peers.

"The senior citizens in my dance group are fantastic ambassadors for longevity and wellbeing and I hope that when I'm their age, I will be just as healthy as they are. We've been together for three and a half years now, and despite the fact over 13 of them are in their 80's and 90's, not a single member has died. Instead, their wellbeing seems to just get better over time and they're outliving their friends of the same age.

Even the doctors on the island tell me they've noticed a significant difference in the health of the dancers in the Hip Op-eration Crew compared to other people of the same age in the community who aren't in the dance group.

"My crew members can dance non-stop hour and a half at weekly rehearsals – which even young people would find tiring!"

There are some very noticeable differences between my dancers and their peers of the same age - and they all relate to physical and mental well being. My dancers exercise and socialise more than their peers and they make an effort to continue to learn new things. The dancers diets are also different to many of their peers - takeaways are a very rare meal, preservatives almost non-existent and they never overdo alcohol or smoke. None of them go on alternative diets and they always have well balanced home cooked meals ensuring they get all the minerals and vitamins their bodies need to stay healthy.

From their example, I've learnt how important it is to continue exercising and moving as I get older as- it doesn't just do your body good but it also increases your endorphin levels so you are happier and can cope with stress better than others. You don't have to run a marathon, you just need to exercise every day - preferably with other people.

Another factor, which I never considered important for wellbeing, is having an active social life; all of the members of my group make a concerted effort to socialise with others and have fun. It's keeps them young.

Whenever possible they socialize with all ages, its stimulating and the learn new perspectives'

Our oldest dancer is 96 years old!

I try and emulate this and now have a much wider mix of friends who are 15 years younger than me through to 50 years older than me.

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As we age, our brain cells die off, so if you want your brain working on all cylinders throughout your life span you need to work at it. All of the crew members who continue to learn new skills, read a lot of books and work on stimulating their brain seem to have a greater awareness and ability to resolve problems than those who don't. Also, the people who play a musical instrument in my group seem to learn other skills quicker and can adapt to change easier.

"When i ask the crew what two things they wish they had done when they were younger, it's the same two answers every time; protect my ears from loud noise and my skin from the sun"

The crew members who were careful with the amount of sun they were exposed to look a lot younger than those that didn't. Also, loss of hearing really restricts your ability to converse with others and enjoy simple things like the birds singing, television, radio and music. Hearing aids are incredibly expensive and cost around $6,000 for a decent one. So the best solution is to take care of your ears when you're young and limit your exposure to loud music.

To ensure I'm built to last like my crew members, I'm going to keep exercising and socialising, learn new skills throughout my life, protect my ears from noise and my skin from the sun, start learning a musical instrument, have a sensible balanced diet and pack in a lot of fun right to the very end!!

The Hip Hop-eration Crews Top 10 Tips for Longevity

1. Socialise with all ages
2. Learn new skills
3. Have lots of fun
4. Exercise regularly
5. Protect yourself from the sun
6. Stimulate your brain
7. Protect your hearing
8. Learn a musical instrument
9. Read Books
10. Eat whole foods

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