

TEXAS OBESITY RESEARCH CENTER

UNIVERSITY *of* HOUSTON

September 21, 2009

RE: Raul Orlando Edwards

To whom it may concern,

It is my pleasure to write this letter of support for Mr. Raul Orlando Edwards. Raul is the founding owner of Houston's own Strictly Street Salsa dance company. In addition to offering live performances, Strictly Street Salsa provides group and private lessons for a wide range of students across all kinds of Latin dance. I first met Raul in the local salsa dance clubs around town, where he struck me as passionately dedicated to sharing the art of dance. Thus, when I had the idea of doing a research study assessing the health benefits of Latin dancing, I immediately thought Raul would be an excellent community partner.

The SAving Lives Staying Active (SALSA) study was conducted during the summer and fall of 2008. We randomized 50 women of color to participate in a partner-free salsa dance intervention. Women attended classes twice a week for four weeks. Raul offered to personally teach the classes one night a week and offered one of his experienced Strictly Street Salsa dance instructors to teach the class the other night each week. Both he and his colleague were professional, kind, patient and helpful, teaching women four Latin dance steps. Their instruction and leadership paid off. Women spent approximately half an hour in their target heart rate zone and showed significant declines in blood pressure after four weeks of regular salsa dancing. The study was recognized with the award of Outstanding Achievement in a community based program by the State of Texas Cardiovascular Disease and Stroke Prevention Council. Since the study, we have begun to analyze and present the data, and Raul has again demonstrated his invaluable assistance. He completed a personal demonstration of the steps learned during the study at the inaugural conference of the Texas Obesity Research Center. As well, he has served as a co-author on several abstracts that have been submitted for presentation at scientific conferences. He has also demonstrated continued commitment to the cause of salsa dancing for health by participating in several grant applications (under review at time of this letter writing) to procure more funding to further this research cause.

I highly recommend Raul as an exceptional community partner. He is smart and easy to work with, demonstrates empathy and kindness toward struggling students and is motivated and very motivating to work with. I cannot recommend a more delightful and committed partner in the salsa community in Houston!

Sincerely,



Rebecca E. Lee, PhD
Principal Investigator, SAving Lives Staying Active
Director, Texas Obesity Research Center