



Background Information

Mission & Vision

Moving in the Spirit is a nationally recognized youth development program that uses dance as a vehicle to transform the lives of children and teens in Atlanta, Georgia. Through programs that integrate high quality dance instruction with performance, leadership and mentor opportunities, Moving in the Spirit impacts 200 children and teens annually, and reaches thousands more through public performances and workshops. Our dynamic curriculum encourages young people to make positive lifestyle decisions and attain higher levels of academic achievement, while building a strong foundation of self-esteem. Ultimately, Moving in the Spirit educates, inspires and unites young people through dance, in order to help them become successful, compassionate leaders.

History

Moving in the Spirit began in 1986 as the hopeful vision of Dana Lupton and Leah Mann, who believed they could unite their love for dance with their commitment to social justice. What began as a dance class for a small group of girls at Stewart Avenue Shelter, has blossomed into a large and diverse organization consisting of 6 different programs and 16 weekly classes. In its 24 year history, Moving in the Spirit has been the recipient of numerous awards and accolades, including the national Coming Up Taller Award, presented by the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities (2005).

Population Served

Moving in the Spirit is located in southeast Atlanta, and primarily works with young people from our city's most challenged neighborhoods. Participants are 78% African American, 3% Hispanic, 3% Asian, 4% Multi-Racial and 12% Euro-American. We serve children ages 3-5 (24%), 5-7 (20%), 8-12 (38%), and 13-18 (18%).

Moving in the Spirit maintains a strong commitment to making our program accessible to young people from low income families. Each year, we provide need-based scholarships to 65-80% of participants to ensure their ongoing participation. Moving in the Spirit offers a safe and structured environment in which children who are faced with hardship can find hope, while learning tools for self sufficiency and economic empowerment.

Program Design

Moving in the Spirit's unique curriculum is based on the Positive Youth Development model, a research-based framework that aims to cultivate competence, empowerment, and a sense of belonging within children. Positive Youth Development enables youth to achieve short-term outcomes, like healthy relationships with others, and long-term outcomes like integrity of character. Some key features of Positive Youth Development include

- Engaging youth in meaningful activities to help them feel valued
- Giving youth a voice as active participants, so they become equal partners in the process of planning and implementing program activities
- Teaching youth to take responsibility for their actions and participate in civic discourse
- Connecting youth with the community, to help them find their place within the larger social environment
- Surrounding youth with consistent, positive role models to foster security, hope, and an overall sense of purpose

Program Content

For our 200 program participants, Moving in the Spirit offers training in modern dance, African dance and ballet, provided by Atlanta's most accomplished professional artists. During a portion of each dance class, youth discuss issues relevant to their lives, including peer-pressure, poverty and intolerance. Movement is then used as a creative medium in which to explore these issues, and ultimately equip students with positive coping skills. Moving in the Spirit provides students with ongoing leadership opportunities within the organization, including public speaking, teaching assistant positions, and membership on our Board of Directors. To further deepen our impact, Moving in the Spirit pairs our dancers with caring adult role models in the community through our Mentor Program.

Outcomes

Our community benefits from Moving in the Spirit's programs because we...

- Provide children with a safe, structured environment that encourages their growth and success
- Empower young people by helping them learn responsibility and respect
- Equip students with tools to develop effective study habits and prepare for college
- Promote physical fitness and healthy lifestyles for youth
- Create access to high quality arts education for low income families and others facing socio-economic barriers
- Give children the tools and opportunities they need to take their place as tomorrow's leaders

Through a rigorous evaluation process, Moving in the Spirit is able to measure the impact we have on students' lives. Commitment to student evaluations ensure that we are fulfilling our mission, while providing funders and stakeholders with meaningful data on the impact of their gifts. In our most recently completed year, students stated that Moving in the Spirit encouraged them to **improve** in the following: setting personal goals; finding alternatives to gang violence/negative peer involvement; finding alternatives to using/selling drugs; and working hard in school. A comparison of pre- and post- test scores further indicate that students raised their capacity to focus, enhanced their listening skills, and increased their ability to have positive interactions with peers.

Compared with Georgia's 56% graduation rate, 100% of Moving in the Spirit's teen company members over the last five years have completed high school and gone on to college, vocational school or military careers. This success rate reflects Moving in the Spirit's commitment to combating truancy, monitoring academic performance, and providing children with practical skills to help them with achieve their potential.