

Kids Dance Outreach Offers Adapted Dance Programming for Youth with Disabilities

By: Emma Smythe



SUMMARY

Since 2013, Kids Dance Outreach (KDO) has served over 9,000 children of all backgrounds and abilities in Indianapolis through its various high-quality arts immersion programs: in-school programs, after school advanced training scholarship programs, adaptive dance programs and the summer program. Through their programs, children are inspired by the joy of dance and music as they are given something positive to focus on, specific goals to attain, a sense of meaningful accomplishment, an appreciation of the arts and an outlet to get moving.

Kids Dance Outreach offered two adaptive dance programs through the youth adolescent and physical activity grant through the division of nutrition and physical activity. The programs were for all children, regardless of ability, economic status, race or religion.



Photography: Jenny Danek©
Pictured: Kids Dance Outreach Associate Director, Mónica M. Muñoz, Dancer Lucy Hopkins

CHALLENGE

The COVID-19 pandemic caused disruption and challenges for KDO to offer their in-person adapted dance programming. KDO shifted their programming to a virtual platform. With the dance program moving to online, some of the children faced challenges with technology, an unsafe and non-inclusive environment and lack of participation in dance and movement from their homes. Without the support and guidance of KDO's professionally trained dance instructors onsite, the children lacked motivation and confidence. This population of children have always experienced adversity and this was just another barrier they were challenged to overcome. KDO continued to encourage participation and kept their spirits lifted from a distance.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

For more information about Kids Dance Outreach (KDO), visit <https://kidsdanceoutreach.org/>

More information about DNPA can be found at www.in.gov/health/dnpa.

"To see Lucy try new movements and push herself to learn the steps, increase her strength and stamina has been incredible to watch. The adaptive class is not for kids with Down Syndrome; it is a class for dancers. It is a program that teaches strength through movement, self discipline, persistence, and confidence through self expression."

-Sara Hopkins, Lucy Hopkins' Mother

Contact

Emma Smythe
Indiana Department of
Health, Division of Nutrition
and Physical Activity
2 North Meridian Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

<http://www.in.gov/health/dnpa>

SOLUTION

With funding provided, KDO was able to impact the lives of children with all disabilities and backgrounds. The adapted dance programming gave students a chance to be creative, experience joy, improve strength and improve their self confidence. KDO praises the support they receive within the community in which they serve. Using the YAPA funding through the division of nutrition and physical activity, KDO continued developing innovative ways to effect change in the community by creating unique and inclusive dance programming and movement for children to engage in regular physical activity. KDO educated and shared resources with their dance instructors and team about equity, accessibility and inclusion practices while providing the safest and most enjoyable ways to keep children physically active, both onsite and virtually.

RESULTS

KDO provided two weekly adapted dance programs. One in Fall 2019 and one in Spring 2020. The spring session had to pivot to an online platform due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 12 children with Down syndrome, ages 6-15 participated in both sessions over the months of October—March. In addition to KDO's fully inclusive programming in schools, KDO continued to offer specialized programming beyond the school day for dancers with disabilities. 100% of the parents of all 12 children who attended both programs, said they would continue to encourage their children to participate in future adaptive dance programs through KDO. The parents reported that after their children finished the programs, the children showed passion, increased confidence and improved communication and social skills among their family and peers. In addition, parents saw a significant increase in their child's psychological understanding, physical stamina, balance, posture, coordination and core strength.

FUNDING

This project is supported by the Indiana Department of Health, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity, in collaboration with Maternal and Child Health Title V funding.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

KDO continues to grow and expand each year with over 2,000 children participating since 2018. This growth is possible with generous support from donors and community partners, including the Marion County Department of Childhood Services, the Allen Whitehill Clowes Charitable Foundation, The Indiana Department of Health, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity and The Lilly Endowment, Inc. While KDO serves thousands of typically developing children in the Indianapolis Public School System, the adaptive dance program for children with Down syndrome deserves more support and opportunities for growth, as these children should have the same opportunities as any child. Sustainability of the adaptive dance program will occur with the continued assistance from trained staff members and future support from other community and private partners of KDO.



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