



Since 1986, Moving in the Spirit (MITS) has been positively transforming the lives of young people in underserved communities across Atlanta with its dynamic dance-based youth development programs. Nationally recognized for its innovative offerings and community impact, MITS cultivates young, confident leaders through programs that inspire, educate, and enliven. Moving in the Spirit's mission is based on the belief that dance can be a powerful tool to build sustainable relationships, values, and life skills.

Moving in the Spirit helps young people develop their confidence and leadership skills, in an effort to help participants overcome the social and economic challenges they face each day and realize the potential for their lives. MITS programs are physically and mentally demanding, and provide an effective vehicle to instill values important for personal success. This year, we are proud to celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and we hope we can count on your support to help us leap into a new decade of service.

### **PROGRAMS**

Moving in the Spirit is comprised of several interconnected programs that offer participants the opportunity to grow and mature within the organization over time. Students typically begin in our introductory Stepping Stones program, with the opportunity to advance to the Junior Company, and ultimately the Apprentice Corporation. Each level of training is suited to the individual child's intellectual and technical growth. It is common for participants to stay with Moving in the Spirit throughout their entire childhood and adolescence.

**Stepping Stones** (ages 3-16) provides age-appropriate weekly dance classes to children during the school year. The program reaches out to at-risk youth in a variety of settings, including the Moving in the Spirit community theater (The Beam) and sites throughout Atlanta. Community sites for 2006-07 are: Atlanta Children's Shelter, Coan Middle School, Warren Boys and Girls Club, Refugee Family Services and Study Hall at Emmaus House. In these venues, we teach dance fundamentals while using movement as a creative tool for self-expression and acquiring values.

**The Junior Company** (ages 8-12) recruits and accepts students from Stepping Stones and the community who show an aptitude for and commitment to dance. The Junior Company provides these students with additional dance training and performance opportunities. By signing "employment contracts" that outline goals and expectations, students learn the workplace values of accountability and responsibility. The Junior Company performs at venues such as schools, parks, churches and neighborhood community centers. Every year, the dancers participate in three-day tour to another city in Georgia.

**The Apprentice Corporation** (ages 13-18) is an intensive training program that uses dance to teach problem solving and critical thinking skills. With more rigorous dance training, students develop and practice repertoire that they perform in local venues and on the annual Tour. Apprentice Corporation members are encouraged to participate in a corollary internship program, which provides on-the-job training in the areas of administration, dance instruction, and theatrical production. Each year, two Apprentice Corporation dancers serve as members on the Board of Directors, providing our teens with a deeper understanding of business etiquette and consensus-building techniques.

**Men in Motion** works congruently with the Junior Company and Apprentice Corporation to provide additional support, performance opportunities and exposure to positive male role models for young men in our programs. Under the direction of Moving in the Spirit alumnus Chris McCord, Men in Motion provides a comprehensive set of activities for young men, including a weekly dance class, mentorships and educational programming.

**The Mentor Program** pairs Moving in the Spirit dancers with caring adult mentors who provide support, encouragement and exposure to new experiences. Mentors encourage students' academic success, social development and understanding of the world around them. Mentors are carefully screened and receive monthly training sessions. Mentors commit to a one-year relationship, and interact with one Moving in the Spirit dancer through weekly phone calls, bimonthly activities, community service outings and school functions.

Moving in the Spirit focuses on impacting key areas of children's development and encourages them to grow into thriving leaders in their communities. We work toward these goals through integrating dance and educational programming. As an integral component of the programs described above, Moving in the Spirit conducts monthly **Leadership Workshops** to provide young people with age-appropriate information on topics including pregnancy prevention, body image, violence prevention, healthy lifestyle choices and drug prevention education.

During **The Tour Explosion!** Apprentice Corporation dancers travel the country, while inspiring diverse audiences with powerful performances that address racial injustice and reconciliation. Since the program began, Apprentice Corporation members have taken their thought-provoking shows to more than 35 US cities and countries, including New York City, Toronto, Chicago, Los Angeles, the Czech Republic and France. During the tour, our teens visit college campuses, participate in public speaking engagements, and conduct service and educational activities with youth organizations in other cities. We strive to teach the Apprentice Corporation teens workplace skills and consensus-building techniques by involving them in the planning and implementation of the tour's production.

**Literacy in Motion** is Moving in the Spirit's annual large scale production. The show serves as a culminating experience for all participants of MITS programs, giving each class an opportunity to shine onstage before a public audience. MITS collaborates with local artists and youth organizations to create this dynamic evening of multimedia performance. In the past, collaborators have included Neighborhood Music Schools, Atlanta Young Singers of Callanwolde and renowned poet, Alice Lovelace. We believe that collaborative partnerships allow us to bridge communities, transcend barriers and deepen the cultural impact of our creative work.

#### **POPULATION SERVED**

Moving in the Spirit is located in southeast Atlanta, and primarily works with young people in underserved urban neighborhoods. Our programs serve children ages 3-4 (23%), 5-7 (15%), 8-9 (10%), 10-12 (32%), 13-15 (14%) and 15-18 (6%). Program participants are 77% African American, 9% Caucasian, 5% Asian, 5% Native American, 2% Hispanic and 2% Multi-Racial. We reach children across the Metro Atlanta area. Participants reside in DeKalb (47.9%), Fulton (43.7%), Clayton (5.9%), Rockdale (.6%), Henry (.6%), and Gwinett (1.2%) counties.

Moving in the Spirit maintains a strong commitment to making our program accessible to young people from low-income neighborhoods. Each year, we provide need-based scholarships to approximately 80% of participants. In 2005, the average household income for a scholarship recipient was \$17,461 for a family of four. The poverty line in the United States is \$19,350 for a family of four. The percentage of our students eligible to receive free/reduced lunches is 87%.

For those who do pay a tuition fee, the cost is kept exceptionally low. Tuition costs are only 20% of the actual costs needed to conduct MITS programs. We rely upon the generous contributions of individuals, funding agencies, and community partners to keep the cost to Moving in the Spirit participants consistently affordable.

#### **EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS**

In 2005, Moving in the Spirit was honored as one of the top youth development programs in the nation with a prestigious *Coming Up Taller Award*, presented by the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. MITS is the first Georgia organization and only the second in the southeast to receive the award. Moving in the Spirit dancers were selected to perform at the White House Awards Ceremony, before an audience that included First Lady Laura Bush and renowned choreographer, Debbie Allen.

Moving in the Spirit's greatest accomplishments are evident when looking at the young people who have come through the program. Chris McCord, a young man from a rough neighborhood in Atlanta, began participating in MITS when he was 12 years old. Now, fourteen years later, Chris has graduated from Georgia State University with a BA in Business and has come back to MITS as a dance instructor, creator of MITSCamp, and director of the Men in Motion program. Currently, all of Moving in the Spirit's core programs are directed by alums.

### **EVALUATIONS**

Moving in the Spirit designed the evaluation component of its youth programs to be an integral part of our activities. The purpose of Moving in the Spirit's evaluation process is to assess the impact of the program on the participant's self-concept, values, and dance technique.

Objective: Participants gain technical proficiency in dance, increasing coordination, fitness and embodiment of movement principles.

Evaluation: Assessment based on individual performance, conducted by teachers, using objective criteria.

Objective: Increase self-esteem and develop a healthy self-concept.

Evaluation: Piers-Harris Self-Concept scale and test. The Piers-Harris study evaluates each child's self-concept, behavioral and social competence, relationships with others, and emotional health. 2005-2006 results indicated significant improvements in the areas of general self-concept (positive identity), intellectual functioning (school status and cognitive function), social functioning (relationships and bonding), and physical attributes. Consistent improvements were also achieved within the domains of behavior, freedom from anxiety, and satisfaction with self.

Objective: Participants increase knowledge of values including discipline, commitment and responsibility

Evaluation: Pre- and post- test based on established curriculum. The Participation Survey was designed to measure the participant's perceptions of how Moving in the Spirit has impacted their lives and behaviors (YouthARTS Development Project, 1998). In the 2005-2006 program year, participants stated that Moving in the Spirit programs encouraged them to *improve* in the following areas: working hard in school (90%); finding alternatives to using or selling drugs (87%); thinking about career opportunities (83%); setting personal goals (78%); thinking about how their actions affect others (78%); expressing anger without using violence (74%).

### **CONCLUSION**

Today in Atlanta, thousands of children live in environments hostile to their personal growth. There is a need to create safe environments that nurture children's creativity and develop their potential. At Moving in the Spirit, we strive to help young people grow into successful, compassionate leaders and engaged citizens. A gift to MITS is an investment in tomorrow's leaders. We hope you will join us in creating possibility, transformation and promise in the lives of urban youth across our city.