



ABC 7 CHICAGO

Ailey Dance Camp provides positive outlet for West Side kids

By: Marissa N. Isang

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The Alvin Ailey Dance Camp has been using the power of dance to positively impact the lives of children in the North Lawndale neighborhood for the last three years, offering a creative outlet and making ABC7 Eyewitness News Chicago Proud.

Kids like Ryan Southworth are wrapping up the free six-week Ailey dance camp sponsored by the West Side Cultural Foundation. "I've learned a lot of technique and how to respect myself and respect others," Southworth said.

"The program is for 100 students ages 11-14 and they teach West African, jazz, ballet dance and in addition to dance they have workshops on leadership, self-discipline and communication as well," said Natashee Scott, president and CEO of the Westside Cultural Foundation.

The Westside Cultural Foundation came together with the Chicago Park District, the Steans Family Foundation, the AUSL Network Schools, 24th ward alderman Michael Scott and Chicago LAMP (Lawndale AMACHI Mentoring Program) to make the camp happen.

Scott said no previous dance experience is required of the students; only the commitment of themselves and their parents. Having a program like this means more to the community than just a summer of fun.

"It means everything for me to have this in the West Side so we can change the narrative of the West Side of Chicago," Scott said. "Focus on it being a safe and peaceful community of people who care about one another and a destination for arts and culture."

Participants are learning from experienced Ailey-trained dancers about the art of movement and the history behind the dance.

"One of the things I think we do is we engage them to understand what the theme is, which is joy. Then we allow them to be themselves inside of that so they can feel comfortable enough that we can teach them what movement is," said Dereque Whiturs, an Ailey dancer and camp instructor.

Instructors hope dance builds confidence and provides a safe space for kids to be themselves. "Maybe take them away from some of the stuff that is happening in their community that is not so positive and give them an outlet to where they can be themselves and be positive. Then maybe learn that this is something they want to do on a regular basis," Whiturs said.

"People my age grow up around bad things and end up in gangs and stuff and I think that Ailey camp really prevents that," Southworth said. Students would like to invite all of you to their free final performance tomorrow at Collins Academy. You can catch a show at 1 p.m. or 7 p.m.

Watch here: <http://abc7chicago.com/entertainment/ailey-dance-camp-provides-positive-outlet-for-west-side-kids/3863459/>