



Summer camp uses dance to teach students life skills

By Andrea Smith

July 22, 2019

Of all the mantras Anai Espinoza and her fellow campers recite each morning at AileyCamp, the eighth grader's favorite is this: "I am in control."

"It makes me believe I have the power to choose the right thing," she said.

Anai is one of a thousand students in 10 states this summer attending AileyCamp, a free six-week program for youngsters in financial need or with academic, social or family challenges.



CTRL + Click photo to watch: *Youth camp teaches dance, life skills*

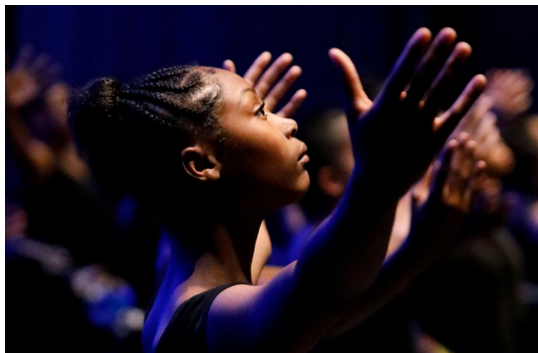
AileyCamp was founded in 1989 in Kansas City, Missouri, by world-renowned dancer, choreographer and director Alvin Ailey, who died later that year. In addition to teaching the students dance, the camp introduces them to the visual arts, creative writing and other communications skills. It also teaches them how to eat well, resolve conflicts and become leaders, according to a description of the program on the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater website.

Atlanta Ballet's Centre For Dance Education has admitted about 100 students to its camp each summer since 2014. About half of those have some exposure to dance, but very few have professional training, said Atlanta AileyCamp director Diane Carroll Sales.

"The most important thing is to accept campers that are willing to dance — they want to dance — because we are dancing most of the day," Sales said. "But the core of the program is personal development."

The Atlanta camp ran this year from May 30 through July 5, concluding with a performance July 6 in the city of Jonesboro, about 15 miles (24 kilometers) south of Atlanta. Sponsors covered the cost of dance training and attire, breakfast and lunch, field trips and classes for creative communication and personal development.

At the end of camp, Atlanta Ballet offers 10 students a full-tuition scholarship for a year of training, which is eligible for renewal, Sales said. One scholarship covers \$800-\$2,300 worth of dance classes, depending on the placement level.



Kameron Davis attended his first AileyCamp about 10 years ago, when he was in middle school, at The Fox Theatre in Atlanta. He trained for three years after that with the Atlanta Ballet on a scholarship, and later became a dance instructor. Davis said he doesn't think his mother could have afforded dance classes without the scholarship.

Kids at school teased Davis when he began dancing, but AileyCamp offered a safe haven and confidence boost, he said. He said he enjoys giving back to the program by helping new campers build their confidence.

"It's an open door to finding new things, doing new things," Davis said. "When I got to AileyCamp, it just reassured me that, 'Hey, it's OK. Everybody is different. You shouldn't be judged by what you do just because not a lot of people do it.'"

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