

W.T. AND EDNA M. DAHL TRUST GRANT APPLICATION

Purpose of Request/Project Description:

The purpose of this request is to expand the Ballet Des Moines program, Dance Without Limits, to support current and anticipated community needs.

Dance Without Limits provides dance classes for children with special needs. Specially designed dance classes allow these children, with physical or behavioral challenges, the opportunity they may otherwise not have to experience the joy of dance. For many dancers, this is the first group cultural activity of any kind in which they have been able to directly participate. There is no other similar program, which employs the services of a physical therapist onsite during classes, in the state of Iowa.

Dance Without Limits provides children with disabilities exercise and the opportunity to use the muscles that are often weakened by their illnesses. These classes help strengthen muscles and allow children the chance to explore their potential and reach beyond their physical challenges. The program also builds self-esteem and instills self-confidence in the children who participate.

Children participate in one-hour classes each week over a ten-week session. The classes are specially designed to suit each child's needs. They are led by professional instructors, and volunteers provide one-on-one guidance for each dancer. Physical therapists are also available to provide additional assistance when needed. Children involved in the program are between ages 4 and 22, and classes are tailored to meet the needs of different age groups.

Movement classes are available to all participants, and more advanced Technique classes are offered to students with higher interest and skill levels. Lite-Gait equipment is available to use for children who need extra support in standing. Students in wheelchairs are also able to participate, with teachers and volunteers creating movement around their unique abilities.

At the end of each ten-week session, Ballet Des Moines hosts a Dance Without Limits Recital, where students have the opportunity to perform in front of an audience of family, friends, and the community. The recital further enhances participants' self-esteem and self-confidence, while demonstrating to the community the unique value these children individually possess.

In addition to providing this important service for special needs children, Dance Without Limits also provides a unique opportunity for Ballet Des Moines students to get involved with the community. The one-on-one volunteer assistance during classes is provided by individuals that are Ballet Des Moines students, trainees, and pre-professionals. By creating a strong community connection for these volunteers, the program fosters a desire to stay and pursue their professional dance career in Des Moines, keeping the talent here at home.

Nature and Number of Expected Audience or Participants (if applicable):

Dance Without Limits currently accepts approximately 40 children each session, with two sessions per year. In recent sessions, interest has exceeded capacity and some children have had to be placed on a waiting list. With increased financial resources, the program could be expanded to allow additional children to be accepted into the program in additional sessions.

This program impacts more than just the children involved. It also offers an opportunity for family, friends, and the community to enjoy the experience of observing dance.

Each session's recital draws an attendance of around 300 family members, volunteers, and community supporters. The experience touches all that are involved, and has been life changing for the dancers, families, volunteers, teachers, and therapists.

Statement of Need and Use of Funds:

We are seeking \$1,500 in additional funding to support our 2014-2015 Dance Without Limits season. Funding needs include choreography, costumes and props, special needs equipment, studio rental, scholarship funding, teacher and physical therapist stipends, and marketing materials.

Staff, volunteer, space, and equipment needs continue to grow as the community becomes aware of this unique program. With additional financial resources, we could grow and form partnerships with other dance organizations in the community, increasing capacity for more children to be involved. Before we can expand, funding would be needed to pay additional instructors and physical therapists.

The program also has a great need for additional equipment. The Lite-Gait trainers we have been using have been very beneficial to the program, and more are needed. We specifically need equipment suited for older and larger children. With additional equipment, space will also be needed for storage.

Having greater financial resources would allow us to hold the Dance Without Limits Recitals in more ideal spaces. Previously, we have been able to hold performances at the Urbandale Performing Arts Center, which has a well accessible stage which is very helpful for our students. However, when there is not room in the budget to pay for this space, we must rely on donated spaces that pose more challenges to use.