



Ailey Camp Chicago offers summer dance program for local youth

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CHICAGO (WLS) -- The talented kids at [Ailey Camp](#) Chicago are rehearsing for their upcoming grand finale, a show you can see for free! It's a program inspired by dance legend Alvin Ailey. He made history with his moves and his trailblazing company. Ailey founded the project to give kids a life-changing experience.

The program has been in Chicago for 25 years. Nasha Thomas was an Ailey dancer for 12 years. Now she's the National Director of Ailey Camps. "That's the great thing about the arts; you start a class, you must finish," Thomas said they're playing a video game and losing, they turn the game off and start another game. You can't do that in a dance class. You're going across the floor, you start and finish."

"Dancing and performing around the world was amazing," Thomas said. "This is home. These young people, I love them. I might put them out, but I also tell them, 'I love you.'"

Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Park District and the Chicago Housing Authority all help find kids who can benefit from Ailey Camp. "The goal is not necessarily to be a dancer, but to be a good citizen, and they walk away with an appreciation of what an artist may go through," said Ailey Camp Chicago Director Lazette Rayford. "It's amazing to see them just blossom, just blossom and grow."

Participants in the camp said it has taught them skills beyond just dance.

"It's just about keeping your confidence and knowing you can do it, it won't stop you from anything else," said Lindbloom Science Academy sophomore Sunyatta Johnson.

The students also hope to encourage even more kids to join them in the joy of expressing oneself. "It's important to me because as an African-American boy, I don't see other boy's dancing," said LaSalle Language Academy 8th grader Noah Davis-Williams. "I feel like if I do it, other African-American boys will do it." The free Ailey Camp performance August 5 at Maria Saucedo Scholastic Academy will be open to the public.