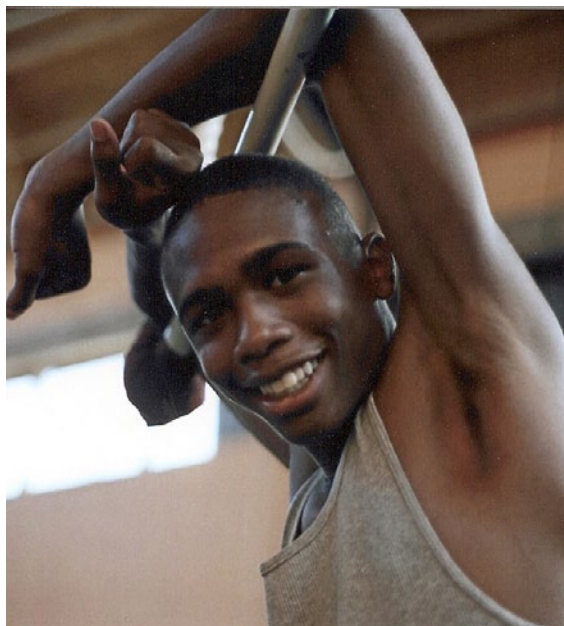


Alex: Moved in the Spirit

By Erin Weller Dalton

Alex was shy and withdrawn. He would not make eye contact with his peers or teachers and was enrolled in special education classes at his school. Despite his extreme shyness, Alex got into trouble at school because of behavioral problems. He was removed from several after-school programs, which simply could not keep his attention or manage his behavior. Then Alex was brought to Moving in the Spirit, a program that reaches out to Atlanta's underserved youth and helps them overcome the challenges in their lives through the creative power of dance, an excellent source of physical activity.



Under the direction of Chris McCord, a Moving in the Spirit alumnus and Men in Motion instructor, Alex began to develop mentally, socially and artistically throughout his first school year at Moving in the Spirit. By the spring, Alex was regularly leading his peers in their technical warm-up with confidence and ease during their Saturday afternoon classes. That May, Alex participated in the program's end-of-year production, "Story Catcher," dazzling more than one thousand supporters with a dynamic piece entitled "Shadow" during the show's two-night run at the Rialto Center for the Performing Arts.

Alex's caregiver, Jeannetta, is simply blown away by the profound changes she has observed in Alex. "I have seen such an improvement in Alex's behavior at school, and he's putting an effort into calming down at times when he would have become frustrated. During Moving in the Spirit's Summer Camp, I watched Alex get his peers to line up and pay attention. He never would have done anything like that before he joined Moving in the Spirit. He's more social and affectionate now. He hugs me! During the Summer Camp show, I looked up on stage and there he was, dancing, moving ... and then, he smiled – a smile I'd been waiting to see for twelve years."

"The Atlanta Falcons Youth Foundation provides ongoing opportunities for community organizations like ours to share best practices and gain access to the most cutting edge youth development research available in our country," said Dana Lupton, Executive Artistic Director of Moving in the Spirit. "The Falcons roundtables have afforded me the opportunity to meet the finest collaborators in our city and bring valuable knowledge back to my faculty and students, including Alex. He continues to gain confidence, resiliency and leadership skills that will empower him for life – a transformation made possible by the Atlanta Falcons Youth Foundation."

Moving in the Spirit integrates high-quality dance instruction with performance, leadership and mentoring opportunities, in an effort to help young people overcome the challenges they face each day and realize the potential for their lives. Alex is just one child out of many whose inner spirit has been awakened. In a recent conversation with Jeannetta, Alex put his hand on her shoulder and said, "I think I found Alex. I don't think he was lost really. I just know I feel good when I'm moving around."

Through the support of countless community leaders and volunteers, Alex and more than 200 young people impacted by Moving in the Spirit's programs will continue experiencing the power of dance and movement while gaining the skills they need to become tomorrow's leaders.

Alex's story is a powerful and touching example of the value of Moving in the Spirit's programs for young people in Atlanta.