University of Scranton dance group gives local kids chance to shine

BY ROBBIE WARD (STAFF WRITER)

Second-grader Allen Duverge sat in a gymnasium Friday evening hoping to learn some new dance moves.

Fifteen minutes after arriving at the Progressive Childcare Center on Olive Street in Scranton, the 7-year-old looked like a dancing pro himself, sharing the gymnasium spotlight with a college student. Dozens of college students and younger students from surrounding schools yelled and clapped as Allen showed off his break dancing moves.

"It's the only kind of dancing I do," he said after taking a break.

For more than a year now, about 35 students from the University of Scranton in a club called Urban Beats have spent every other Friday at the center, run by United Neighborhood Centers of Northeastern Pennsylvania, to teach kids new dance moves. The students don't receive special credit for visiting the kids, but they still think it's worthwhile.

"We just want them to smile," said Dana Ramalho, president of the college dance group. "We like having fun with them."

The young kids seemed to enjoy the high-octane dance moves. After watching members of Urban Beats perform, the younger students learned dance moves and interacted with the college students.

Kamille Blankenship, 11, has spent many of her Friday evenings learning dance moves. The gatherings helped her make friends and gave the fifth-grader another outlet to express herself.

"It's easy to show who you are," she said.

Many of the college students working with kids through dance said they want to teach more than dance moves. Brian Fischer, a senior business management major, said he enjoyed spending time with younger kids in a positive environment.

"It's really rewarding," he said. "We teach them life lessons when we can."

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