

Owens '16 creates community through dance

Christie Owens '16 believes in the power of camp. She also believes in the Movement Fundamentals (MF) curriculum that Luther professor of dance Jane Hawley '87 created. So when it came time to decide on a senior project, Owens thought: *Why not combine the two?*

It was an ambitious idea that involved working closely with Hawley to pull together all the logistics—budgeting, staffing, housing, pricing, marketing. But the pair pulled it off for the first time in the summer of 2016. This past July, Owens returned to campus to coordinate the second annual Luther College Summer Dance Camp.

The camp employs current and former Luther dance students, exposes young dancers to a life-changing curriculum, and introduces young learners to campus and a distinctly Luther experience.

In her daily life in Minneapolis, Owens is a master scheduler. During the school year, she's a special education paraprofessional who works in a nonverbal autism classroom. She's a certified yoga instructor who leads trauma-informed yoga at a mental healthcare facility. And she's a personal care assistant for a 30-year-old paraplegic woman

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and a six-year-old with autism. In addition, she'll be presenting, for the second time (the first was as an undergraduate), at the National Dance Education Organization's annual conference in Texas in November. It's little wonder that she can manage all the moving pieces involved in a summer camp. More interesting is that Owens is running a dance camp.

As a child, Owens wanted desperately to be a dancer. When she was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis at age nine, dance was out of the picture. Then, at Luther, she encountered Movement Fundamentals. “It was a whole new world of finding accessibility and creativity and peace with my body and its capabilities,” she says.

“Most of the world has one idea of dance, and Movement Fundamentals really repatterns you to think of dance in your daily life, in the mundane, as more than just entertainment but as an art form that you can practice and cultivate constantly,” she says. Knowing that her path would have been easier had she been exposed to MF earlier in life, Owens wanted to create an opportunity for other kids to grow up feeling confident in their bodies.

“It's about making dance accessible as a person who has not always felt like I could do dance,” she says. “These kids don't have to come to camp with a studio dance background—they could never have danced in their life—but when they're at camp, they'll look just like a person who's been

studying dance their entire life because of how we teach.”

Just as Owens is an advocate for MF, she's an advocate for camp. As a child, she attended a camp for kids with life-threatening and chronic illnesses during the camp's Crohn's and colitis week. “To me, camp is pure playfulness,” she says. “There's a certain spirit when you go to a good summer camp that can stay with you until next time.”

About Dance Camp 2017, Owens says, “It was transformative. We really facilitated an environment where kids could share personal stories, learn about self-love, and talk about body image. They really want to open up, and dance is a means to facilitate that happening.”

Owens is thrilled to be able to provide this camp despite that dance is no longer a major at Luther because, she says, “I think it shows everyone the important, touching, and life-impacting work we are doing.” She's enthusiastic about coming back to Dance Camp next year. And she's not alone—about half the campers from 2016 returned for this year's camp. “Those kids have never had an experience like that before, and they can only get that experience at Luther College Dance Camp,” she says. “It's becoming a real community.”

—Kate Frentzel

