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Youth dancers motivate peers

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Monique James and Siobhan Burke haven't met yet, but they already share a love of dance and a teenager's outlook on life.

But Burke, who at 18 has studied Irish step dancing most of her life, knows better than most people her age how a little inspiration and a whole lot of perspiration can pay off. It's that experience that James and others who take part in programs at the Peekskill Youth Bureau's Activities Center are interested in hearing about.

They'll get that chance tomorrow when Burke and her dance troupe visit in advance of a Wednesday performance at the Paramount Center for the Arts known as Youth Movement 2005.

"I just hope to show them that it's really possible, with a lot of hard work, to accomplish a lot in spite of your age," said Burke, a freshman at Barnard College in New York City. "I think a lot of times when kids see performances and works of art, they're always done by adults, and that makes them seem a little unattainable."

James, 15, had to give up dancing after a year and a half when her instructor moved away.

"I love dancing. I wanted to become a professional dancer," she said. "I still do, but I want to do other things, too."

Directed by Croton-on-Hudson resident Barbara Sarbin, Youth Movement 2005 is about youth inspiring youth. The idea, Sarbin said, is that someone who is inspired by what they do is naturally inspiring to others.

"I think that's the key, that you can relate better to people not just your own age but with your own experience," she said. "You look at them, and you're like, 'I want to be like them.'"

Sarbin is president of Something Good in the World Inc., a nonprofit organization that provides educational programs to students and schools in Westchester and Putnam counties and New York City. Wednesday's performance will benefit the organization's Blue Star Youth Movement, which offers programs for teenagers, many of whom are from Peekskill.

Sarbin's dancers will present a video tomorrow from their performance last year in Scarsdale. Then they'll talk about themselves and their experiences and try to initiate a dialogue with their young audience.

On the Web

To learn more about Something Good in the World Inc. and to watch a brief video featuring interviews with the teenagers involved, visit www.somethinggoodintheworld.org.

Justin Adams-Pallais, 15, has studied tap dancing for seven years. It won't be hard to break the ice with his fellow teens, he said. For one thing, he'll speak to them on their level. A lot of times young people put adults on pedestals, he said, so they end up feeling intimidated and close their minds to what adults have to say.

Seeing dance performances in Irish, Caribbean, Indian and American Indian traditions, then hearing from the dancers personally, will make their messages more meaningful, Adams-Pallais said.

Those who attend the presentation will be admitted free to Wednesday's performance at the Paramount.

Valerie Swan, director of the city's Youth Bureau, is happy to see her kids exposed to diverse art forms rather than the usual hip-hop, as well as the lessons the young dancers have to offer.

"They're going to talk about how they channeled their energies into dance, which I think is a great thing for the kids of Peekskill," Swan said.

They'll have a receptive audience if Chris Grier, a sophomore at Peekskill High School, is any indication.

"You can relate to them better than adults," said Grier, 15. "When a parent tells you something, it can go in one ear and out the other."
