



Ana Hitters, 32, dances in the courtyard of the Young People for Equality centre in Buenos Aires. The centre hosts a therapeutic dance company for people with Down syndrome called Expressive Movement. Every Wednesday evening, the dancers meet for a two-hour session of dancing, socializing and fun. Parents are not allowed to take part in the classes. Instead it is opportunity for the students to develop a social life independent of their family’s control.

Dancing with Down's



Photos by Emily Cumming

(Above) Eliseo De Ruggiero, 17, strikes his best dance pose during his weekly therapeutic dance class.

(Left) Florencia Castillo, 23, does not communicate verbally because of her Down syndrome. The dance company Expressive Movement helps people with Down syndrome to communicate their thoughts and feelings through movement.

By Emily Cumming

Every Wednesday evening on a quiet street in Buenos Aires, students gather at the “Young People for Equality” (Jóvenes por la igualdad) centre to dance and express themselves – something they each struggle with on a daily basis.

The therapeutic dance program, “Expressive Movement” [Movimiento Expresivo], allows the students – who all live with Down syndrome – to explore their life experiences verbally and express their associated feeling through the language of their bodies.

Before the beginning of the 6 p.m. class, the students are dropped off one by one by parents or caregivers. The joy

and excitement of being with their peers sets off the laughter and giggles almost immediately.

Parents are not involved in their children’s classes. Instead, it is a time of independence for the students – who will most likely never have the opportunity to live a self-sufficient life. It is also an opportunity to have social freedom and to build relationships within a non-judgmental environment.

The company first came together in 2005 under the initiative of dancers Paz Fernández Alonso, 32, and Belén Gómez Ortiz, 32. For Gómez Ortiz, the dance group is not only a professional endeavour, it is also a personal project – her younger sister María Elis Gómez

Ortiz, 23, has Down syndrome and is a student of the program. María Elis, a carefree, mischievous and funny young woman, has been with the company since they put on their first production in 2007.

“I am like light when I dance,” María Elis told the Argentina Independent in an interview.

During these weekly workshops, the students move freely, contorting their bodies – some laughing, some serious in their artistic endeavour. One young woman, Florencia Castillo, 23, does not communicate verbally as a consequence of her Down syndrome, however she listens intently and moves fluidly with confidence and intelligence.

The instructors help the students to translate their “expressive movements” into a cohesive choreography. They use this choreography to present dance productions, which typically run twice a week for a month.

Last month, the students performed their most recent production Helium [Helio]. The one-hour show highlighted all of the skills developed by the dancers. The audience – mostly made up of friends and family – clapped, cheered and snapped photos.

The curtain came down with a standing ovation and when they left the theatre. The dancers were greeted like celebrities, clutching flowers while receiving kisses from their friends and families.



Jimena,15, is one of the youngest members of the dance company Expressive Movement - a therapeutic dance program for people with Down syndrome. She recently took part in the company’s dance production Helium. Expressive Movement first formed in 2005 and put on their first production in 2007.