



# **A Three-Phase Model for Street Children to Leap Out of Poverty**

**MindLeaps**

A Global Educational Model for At-Risk Youth  
(formerly RDDC)

## Mission

**MindLeaps** is a not-for-profit organization using an innovative model to reduce the number of street children and out-of-school youth in post-conflict and developing countries. **MindLeaps** combines a dance program to improve cognitive development with vocational training to prepare youth for a stable life in school or in the workplace.



## About Us

Founded in 2005 (as RDDC: Rebecca Davis Dance Company), the organization changed its name in 2014 to reflect its new international orientation.

Working predominantly in Rwanda and Guinea, **MindLeaps** has locally-based staff and carries out its programs in conjunction with local partners. Teams of international instructors and volunteers support the programs through “train the trainers” projects year-round.



## The Problem

Imagine a “street child” – a boy or girl with no place to sleep – who is illiterate, without parents, lacking clothing, using drugs and barely manages to eat once a day. These children will form entire lost generations in some developing and post-conflict countries. Without the basic necessities of life or any sort of programmatic intervention or support network, such boys and girls have no

chance of participating positively in their communities. Instead, they resort to begging and stealing on the streets to survive each day.

Street children do not just need food and shelter handed to them. They need a comprehensive program that can reform their aggressive behavior from street life and equip them with skills that are in demand in their country’s labor force – thereby opening the way to employment and self-sufficiency.



**10 million street children in Africa<sup>1</sup>**

**Tens of thousands of unwanted children in Guinea are forced to work in slave-like conditions<sup>2</sup>**



1. Source: Street Children Resources, *The Street: Playground or Dwelling for Some Children*, 2005  
2. Source: IRIN News, *Guinea Children Exploited, Abandoned, Sold Into Slavery*, 2008

## MindLeaps 3 Phase Model

### ■ Phase I: DANCE

- **MindLeaps** uses dance – an activity that is loved – as an entry point to the development of a street child's mind
- Kinesthetic-based curriculum focused on cognitive and behavioral skills
- Transformation from aggression and survival to optimism and discipline
- Use of a data application to measure the improvement in core skills over time



### ■ Phase II: VOCATIONAL TRAINING

- When the youth reach an average of 70-80% in their core skills, they move into vocational training
- English Language Training
- Computer Skills & Job Training



### ■ Phase III: YOUTH ADVANCEMENT

- Youth who continue to thrive receive support to go to local boarding schools or help securing jobs
- Multi-year support to attend boarding school
- Assistance in outside job placement
- Work-study positions in English, IT or Dance with **MindLeaps**



## Educating & Re-integrating Street Children in Kigali

### “What is a Street Child?”

### Why Does MindLeaps Serve Boys in Kigali?

## MindLeaps in Rwanda

**MindLeaps** serves street children in Rwanda between the ages of 9 and 18 years. Five days a week a team of local Rwandan staff work with the youth in three core programs:

- **Dance:** to improve cognitive and behavioral skills
- **Basic Computer & IT Skills:** to develop a key vocational skill
- **English Language:** to help children who will re-enter the schooling system

**MindLeaps** also provides key support services to improve the health conditions and decrease malnutrition rates:

- **Sanitation Program:** a chance to shower, wash clothes, brush teeth
- **Meal Program:** one hot meal a day

In Rwanda, it has been difficult for some survivors of the 1994 Tutsi Genocide to care for their children because of the challenges of post-war reconstruction. If a parent cannot provide food and shelter, the child will often flee to the streets and try to survive there. Other street children have been orphaned and have nowhere else to go. In Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda, there are at least 7,000 reported street children.<sup>3</sup>

Rwanda is unique: more girls go to school than boys!

Enrollment Ratio of females as a Percentage of males in Primary School: 102.6%<sup>4</sup>

Enrollment Ratio of females as a Percentage of males in Secondary School: 105.1%<sup>5</sup>

**The biggest need in Kigali is serving boys living on the street.**

**15% of youth go to secondary school<sup>6</sup>**

**37% of youth finish primary school<sup>7</sup>**

**82% of the population lives on less than \$2/day<sup>8</sup>**

**50% of the population is under the age of 19 years old<sup>9</sup>**

### Country Background

Rwanda, is a country in the Great Lakes Region of Africa with a population of 11.78 million (2013). All of Rwanda is at a high altitude, with a geography dominated by mountains in the west, savanna in the east, and numerous lakes throughout the country. The climate is temperate with two rainy seasons and two dry seasons every year. According to the World Bank in 2013, Rwanda's GDP per capita was \$633 USD.



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3. Source: Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, 2012, Rwanda

4, 5, 6, 7. Source: UNICEF, 2008-2012

8, 9. Source: National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2012



## Teaching Health in Rugerero, Gisenyi\*

Once a year, a team of **MindLeaps** teachers travels to Rugerero, a survivor village near the border of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Working with 150-175 poor, rural boys and girls, the program has dance classes followed by health training to address community issues, such as water conservation and HIV+/AIDS.

At the conclusion of the program, the children perform a dance-theater piece with the lessons learned woven into dance, drama and song. In this way, the children become educators for the wider community.



## History in Rwanda

Rebecca Davis first traveled to Rwanda in 2008 and saw the need to engage street children and at-risk youth in an activity that would lead to job skills or education. In 2010, a pilot program launched in Rugerero. From 2011 – 2014, **MindLeaps** worked in collaboration with FidesCo Rwanda to serve street children in Kigali. In 2014, **MindLeaps** opened its own center in Nyamirambo, the area with the highest concentration of street children.

### 2014:

- 415 Youth Served
- 300 hours of Computer & IT Training
- 600 hours of Dance Classes

### Our Team:

- Eugene Dushime, Country Director
- Bashir Karenzi, Assistant Director
- Innocent Nkusi, Dance/IT Instructor
- Ssali Joseph Eugene, Dance/IT Instructor
- Keilah Creedon, English Teacher

*\*This program is generously supported by the David Williamson Rwanda Foundation.*

## Our Impact

## MindLeaps in Guinea\*

In 2011, **MindLeaps** and Association Benka-Fissa officially launched a partnership to create dance and language/literacy training in Kindia, Guinea.

- Serving boys & girls between the ages of 10 and 19 years
- Targeting youth in extreme poverty with lack of access to education and unstable family lives
- Improving the safety, education and health of youth through productive physical and mental activities leading to employment

The goal of the **MindLeaps** program is to keep the children safe, educated and fed by involving them in productive physical and mental activities targeted at youth employment.

**Dance:** 4 hour classes in classical ballet, modern, hip hop, traditional Guinean dance and acrobatics.

**English Language:** Basic and Intermediate classes that focus on conversational English.

**Nutrition:** Rice meals served to the children to improve malnutrition rates.

### 2014:

- 205 Youth Served
- 256 hours of English Language & Literacy Instruction
- 1,920 Rice Meals Served

### Our Team:

- Ansoumane Conde, Country Director
- Fode Keita, Children's Coordinator
- M. Doumboya, English/Literacy Teacher
- Ibrahima Mara, Association Benka-Fissa Representative

**43% of the population is living on less than \$1.25/day<sup>10</sup>**

**63% of males and 79% of females between the ages of 15-24 are illiterate<sup>11</sup>**

## Country Background

The Republic of Guinea, a country in West Africa, is currently going through democratic transition. Guinea's 11.4 million people belong to twenty-four ethnic groups, which are experiencing political and economic tension. Guinea is also struggling to improve the country's employment opportunities. In 2011, Forbes ranked Guinea as one of the world's five worst economies with GDP per capita at \$440 and the inflation rate at 17%. Kindia, the city in which **MindLeaps** is based, is located two hours outside of Conakry, the capital.



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In 2014, Guinea suffered another setback with the outbreak of Ebola. As of February 2015, there were 2975 identified cases and 1944 deaths.<sup>12</sup> Investors have pulled out of the country and the economy is expected to contract in 2015.<sup>13</sup>

***\*This program was generously supported by The US Department of State, Public Affairs Division in 2014***

10. Source: UNICEF, 2007-2011

11. Source: UNICEF, 2008-2012

12. Source: World Health Organization, February 4, 2015

13. Source: World Bank, January 20, 2015)

## The Story Behind MindLeaps

Entrepreneur and choreographer, Rebecca Davis founded **MindLeaps** (formerly Rebecca Davis Dance Company) at the age of 23. Originally inspired to create works about history and social issues, Rebecca's perspective on the power of dance changed after producing her 2008 ballet about the genocide in Darfur. Curious to understand life after mass atrocities, Rebecca visited Rwanda. Instead of finding answers to her questions, she found hundreds of homeless children who loved to dance and wanted a dance teacher!

Over time, Rebecca decided a model could be developed that capitalized on children's love of dance while transforming their behavior to become school ready – thereby paving a road out of poverty for street youth. For three years, she traveled across Africa and the Balkans to work with educators, dancers, psychologists and local community leaders to



build the model that is now MindLeaps. In 2013, Rebecca moved to New York to lead up the business side of the organization's operations and seek more resources for expansion.

## Rebecca Davis, Founder & Executive Director

Although originally from Vancouver, British Columbia, Rebecca was classically trained in the Russian Vaganova method of ballet while studying in Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Krasnoyarsk, Russia. She received a degree in choreography from The Saint Petersburg Conservatory under the tutelage of Nikolai Boyarchikov (former Artistic Director, The Mussorgsky Ballet). She is a two-time Fulbright scholar and summa cum laude graduate of Temple University with a Bachelors of Business Administration in Entrepreneurship. She holds a MA in International Relations with a concentration in Peacekeeping from American Military University. In 2010, she was awarded the Carl Wilkens Fellowship from the Genocide Intervention Network.

Rebecca has choreographed six full-length ballets: *Antigone* (2006), *Helen Keller* (2007), *Darfur* (2008), *Greed: The Tale of Enron* (2009), *Van Gogh* (2009), and *Braving The New World* (2010).

CCTV's *Faces of Africa* produced the 2013 documentary *Dance Up From the Street* about Rebecca's work in Rwanda. She has been featured on MSNBC's *The Melissa-Harris Perry Show* and *Voice of America*. She has given two TEDx talks and served as a speaker at the Pan-African Film Festival, the UN Film Festival and several universities.

In 2015, Rebecca was featured on the January cover of *Dance Studio Life* magazine and chosen as the Generous Heart Award recipient. She is the 2015 Greater New York City's Fulbright Alumnus-in-Residence for her work involving arts, technology and education in conflict zones.



# Measuring Impact



## Economic Impact

**MindLeaps** measures our investment in the local economy and the salaries paid to the local people to execute our programs.

## Social Impact

**MindLeaps** measures the duration of our programs and sustained impact on youth. The programs in both Rwanda and Guinea have run since 2011. The new center in Rwanda has added an additional level of stability.\*



## Educational Impact

**MindLeaps** measures how many students complete the full program and leverage their new skills to help support themselves or further their dreams. To date, 54 years of boarding school have been funded in Rwanda and 11 youth are currently in boarding school. In Guinea, five graduates have gone on to perform professionally and tour the world with UniverSoul Circus.



*\*This center has generously been funded by Level8 Projects.*

## How Much Does it Cost?

It can be surprising how far \$1 – or less – will go to providing the basic needs of life to children around the world.

Program Costs in 2015					
PROGRAM (based on 60 kids)	DANCE	MEALS	COMPUTER SKILLS	HEALTH PACKAGE	BOARDING SCHOOL
COST/YEAR	\$60/child	\$132/child	\$180/child	\$84/child	\$1800/child
COST/MONTH	\$5/child	\$11/child	\$15/child	\$7/child	\$150/child
Description	Six hours of dance classes per week	Hot meal, clean drinking water daily	Four hours of computer training per week	Towel, soap, toothbrush, daily shower, ability to wash clothes, uniform, medical insurance	Three meals/day, dormitory for sleeping, school uniforms, tuition fees, full education



## Support MindLeaps

All donations are tax-deductible.

### Individual Support

Please consider helping one more child exit a life on the streets:

Checks payable to **MindLeaps**:

3171 35th Street, #3R

New York, NY 11106

Online donations:

[www.mindleaps.org](http://www.mindleaps.org)

### Corporate Support

**MindLeaps** is partnering with corporations to improve the content and delivery of our Computer Science and English Programs in Rwanda. Interested parties, please contact Rebecca directly at: [davis@mindleaps.org](mailto:davis@mindleaps.org)



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