

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

 MindLeaps





Our Mission

MindLeaps creates educational paths for children and youth living in under-resourced communities through the creative arts and 21st century skills built on data-driven metrics.

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FOUNDER'S NOTE

Dear Friends,

First, I'd like to thank our new acquaintances for taking the time to learn about MindLeaps, and I'd like to thank our returning supporters and champions for following our **2023 journey**.

This year served as a reminder of what makes me most proud: **MindLeaps is a Family**...and quite a global family!

On December 29th, 2023, two members of the MindLeaps Family each got married: Vedaste Ndayambaje in Rwanda, and Caitlyn Casson in NYC. Vedaste, a 28-year-old Congolese refugee, is the Country Director of MindLeaps Rwanda. I've known him since he was a young student studying to get a business degree in Kiziba Refugee Camp. Caitlyn, a 31-year-old American dancer, is a MindLeaps trainer who has worked with us in the USA, Rwanda, Guinea, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. I've known her since she took dance classes as a teenager in Philadelphia.



These young leaders and the rest of the MindLeaps team **served over 2,700 children and youth in 2023**. Much of this work was through MindLeaps' flagship Dance & Data program that develops social-emotional learning skills. Another 670 children were sponsored in formal education, and 330 parents and caretakers participated in our savings-and-loans program to improve their economic livelihoods. We continued to work in **six countries on three continents** with a staff of 82 country nationals and five Americans.



Where We Work

But, when I listen to people like Vedaste and Caitlyn talk about their work at MindLeaps, I don't hear statistics or numbers.

Vedaste says, **"MindLeaps showed me my value. I am now helping other kids discover their self-worth."**

Caitlyn says, **"Dance has given me a sense of belonging, joy, and purpose. Every child deserves their own meaningful place in this world."**

This program makes us the best versions of ourselves and inspires us to support others.

Several moments in 2023 allowed us to see the best of who we are together:

- Opening our **38,000 ft² new center** in **Guinea**
- Celebrating the **high school graduation** of **Rwandan** orphan Eric Mugiraneza, the second child ever to be sponsored by MindLeaps
- Recognizing Bouchra Medine, one of our **Mauritanian** girls who, coming from a community that once did not allow girls to go to school, **ranked #1** in her academic examinations



Rebecca Davis and Apollo Levine gathered with MindLeaps beneficiaries in Guinea

The most memorable years, as our newlyweds are about to find out, are those that are filled with successes and struggles. In 2023, we learned that a **conscientious effort to continue to lift up girls** in our programs is important and must remain steadfast. **Building a foundation for positive relationships between ethnically diverse groups** requires time and consistency, whether in the Balkans or back home in New York City. And, **involving our program alumni in leadership positions** always makes us stronger.

With all that we had to celebrate and learn from in 2023, it's hard to believe that 2024 will be an **even better year**. We are getting ready to celebrate our **10th Anniversary**, and we will spend time **reflecting on MindLeaps' origins** in 2014 and **envisioning its next decade**.

As always, MindLeaps is incredibly grateful to its foundation, corporate, and individual supporters, as well as its staff, volunteers, and partners who enable this work to be done.

Thank you for being a part of our story, and know that you, too, will always have a place in the MindLeaps Family!

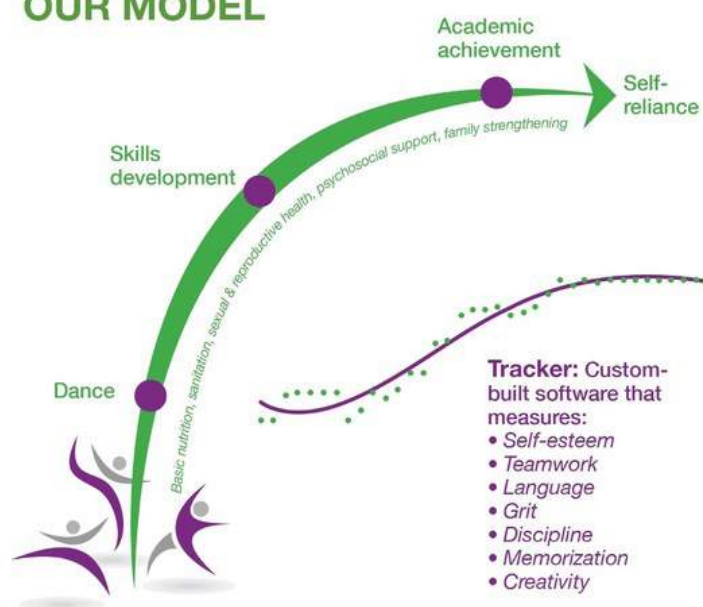
Sincerely,

Rebecca Davis

Founder & Executive Director

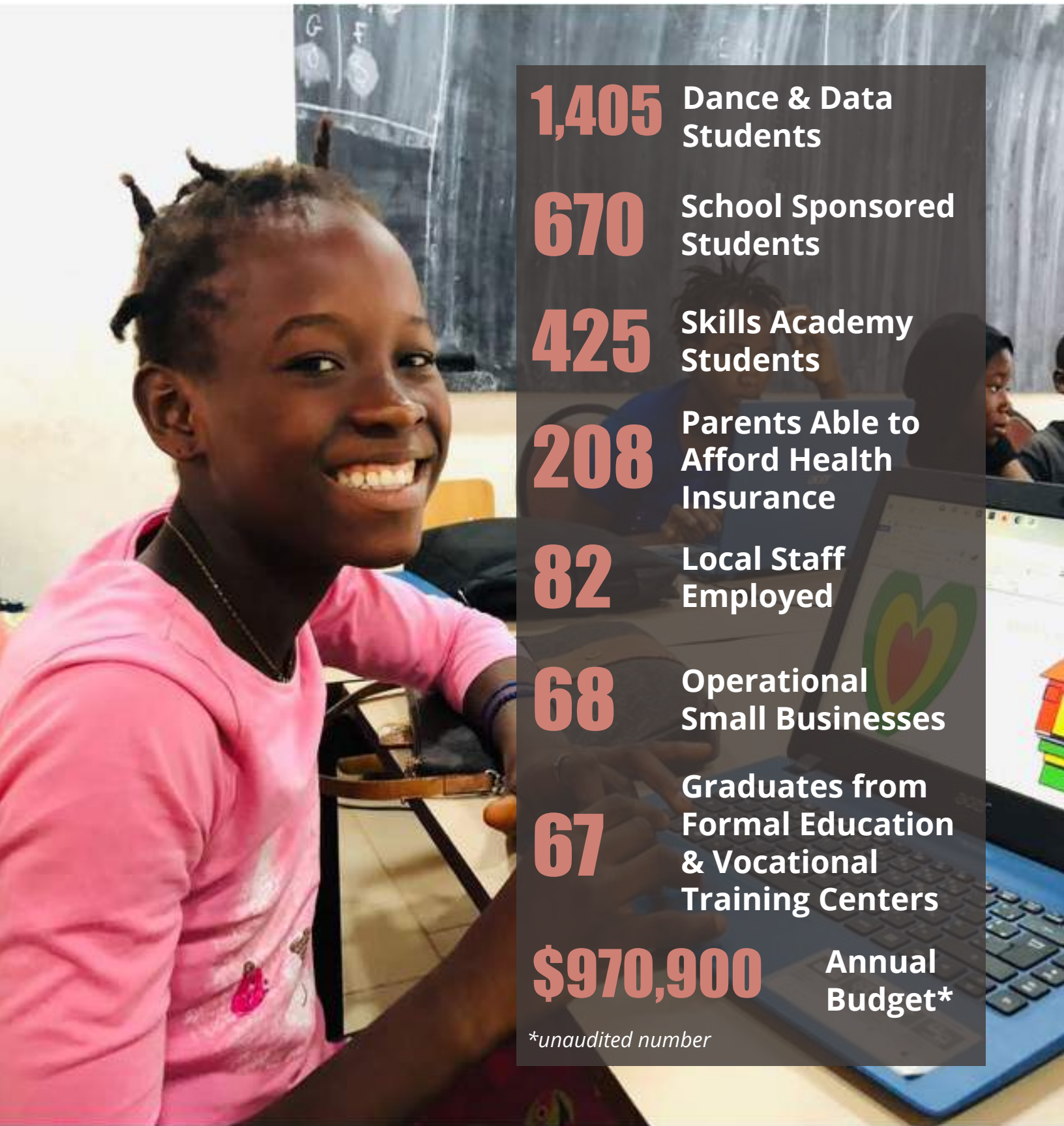


OUR MODEL



MindLeaps Theory of Change

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS



ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

FY 2023

Global: MindLeaps Graduates Join Our Staff

Nine students who thrived in MindLeaps programs and graduated from high school were hired this year as staff members.



January

Guinea: Opening of New Center

Construction of the center was completed in 2022 and it opened officially in 2023. The compound has dance studios, classrooms, sanitation and nutrition facilities, as well as apartments for long-term volunteers.



February

Rwanda: Stacey Abrams Visit

MindLeaps Rwanda hosted former Georgia State Representative and US national political figure Stacey Abrams at the Jim Bell Center in Kigali.



July

USA: 2nd Annual Summer Camp at Children of Promise

We continued our partnership with Children of Promise, working with children affected by parental incarceration. MindLeaps trainers taught 8-11 year olds in Bronx throughout July and August.



August

USA: UNFCU Foundation Awards

Founder Rebecca Davis received the 2023 Women's Empowerment Award at the United Nations Federal Credit Union (UNFCU) Foundation's Annual Gala.



October

North Macedonia: Studio Opens in the Capitol

For the first time in four years, MindLeaps signed a lease to have its own space for programming in the Balkans. We are building a team in the capitol, Skopje, working in partnership with SOS Children's Village.



December

ANALYTICS: MEASURING IMPACT

MONITORING & EVALUATION (M&E) SOFTWARE

MindLeaps flagship Dance & Data program is called just that because of the software application used in connection with every dance class. The software was custom-built and tailored to MindLeaps' dance curriculum so that **qualitative elements** of movement can be **evaluated, measured, and captured in quantitative terms**. These quantitative data points serve as performance metrics charting changes in cognitive skills and social-emotional learning for each student in each class for each of our 7 skills.

Memorization

Grit

Discipline

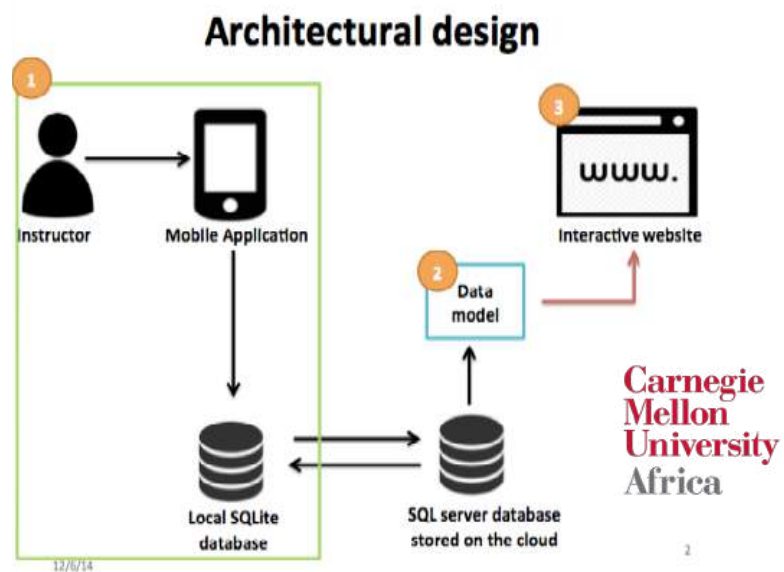
Teamwork

Self-Esteem

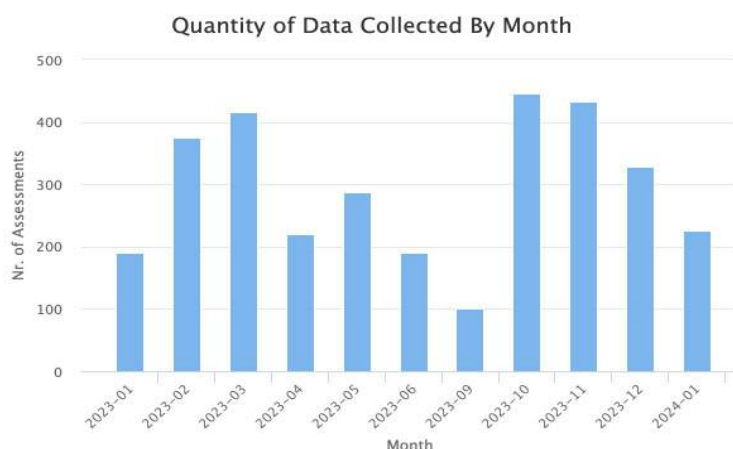
Creativity

Language

Developed in collaboration with Carnegie Mellon University psychologists and software engineers, MindLeaps M&E software is an innovative assessment that relies on observation of particular movements a child performs in the dance space to reduce graders' subjectivity and overcome language barriers. The software consists of an Android tablet containing the rubric and an online analytics website. The data from the tablet syncs to a front-end web application that stores student and class information. A mathematical model is applied to the data to generate graphs demonstrating learning curves of individual and group achievements.



Throughout the following pages, you will see exports of graphs from MindLeaps M&E software. The skills are measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 7, co-designed with Dr. Janelle Junkin of Drexel University.



MindLeaps also uses the software app to compare program data. Leadership teams can decide how consistent or robust programs are running through the sheer quantity of data collected. In 2023, there was a total of 54,285 assessments recorded. Below, you can see the amount of data collected from one of MindLeaps' five program sites in Rwanda, the Jim Bell Center in Kigali. Each "assessment" is the combined score of all 7 skills for one particular child for one particular class.

Thank you to lead software engineer Tomislav Pesut for ongoing maintenance, upgrades, and optimization of MindLeaps M&E software.

Published research about MindLeaps impact was reported in the Journal of Public Diplomacy:

A YOUNG WOMAN'S STORY



MEET FATY IN MAURITANIA

More than **37% of women in Mauritania are married before they turn 18**, in part because marriage is seen as a pathway to a stable future. Low levels of literacy and few formally educated adults mean that the El Mina community doesn't have a strong tradition of supporting academics or seeing the possibility for upward mobility of their children, especially girls.

When she started at MindLeaps, Faty had not completed formal education. In El Mina, many children work to help make ends meet for their families. This is common in single mother homes, such as Faty's.

At twenty-two, Faty was motivated to find a path for herself. Her levels of self-esteem and grit rose quickly in the MindLeaps dance program, and these skills helped her simultaneously excel in the vocational training program, learning sewing and hairdressing. Young women who master these trades are able to find work and earn a basic income, giving them more autonomy and flexibility in deciding their futures.

Faty displayed a multitude of talents: she thrived in her vocational training and became a strong dancer. She was a vibrant and involved community member. Faty clearly had - what we often call - **the MindLeaps' spirit**.



Walking in El Mina neighborhood



Faty at monthly MindLeaps Mauritania staff presentations

Upon graduating from MindLeaps, Faty began to take small jobs in the neighborhood but asked if she could come back and volunteer in the dance program. Faty saw no reason why she couldn't practice both her professional and artistic skills. Before long, she had evolved from a student to a team member.

In 2022, Faty was offered a contract to become a staff member and she accepted! This young woman had gone from dropping out of school to securing **two** respectable jobs in the community.

In late 2023, following her marriage and pregnancy, she vibrantly returned to work as a wife, mother, and outstanding female role model. **Her life path demonstrates that young women can celebrate and uphold the family values of their community while pursuing their own dreams and livelihoods.** Faty is not just an inspiration for girls in Mauritania but for women around the world!



RWANDA

OVERVIEW



Rwanda is a study in resilience. This small, landlocked East African country – known as “*The Land of a Thousand Hills*” – has made incredible strides over the past three decades. Given that more than half of the country’s population is under 20 years old, continuous efforts are needed.

Although 71% of Rwandan students complete their primary education, only about 20% go on to complete their secondary education. Today’s youth, raised by generations who were affected directly by the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi, need holistic support.

Conflict within families, coupled with poverty and intergenerational trauma, creates a need for programs like MindLeaps based in healing, building positive relationships, and developing social and emotional learning skills.

In 2014, MindLeaps opened our permanent center in Nyamirambo, Kigali. Since then, our program has expanded beyond Kigali to work with refugee children and youth in three different refugee camps, and with children with disabilities in Nyabihu.

THE JIM BELL CENTER

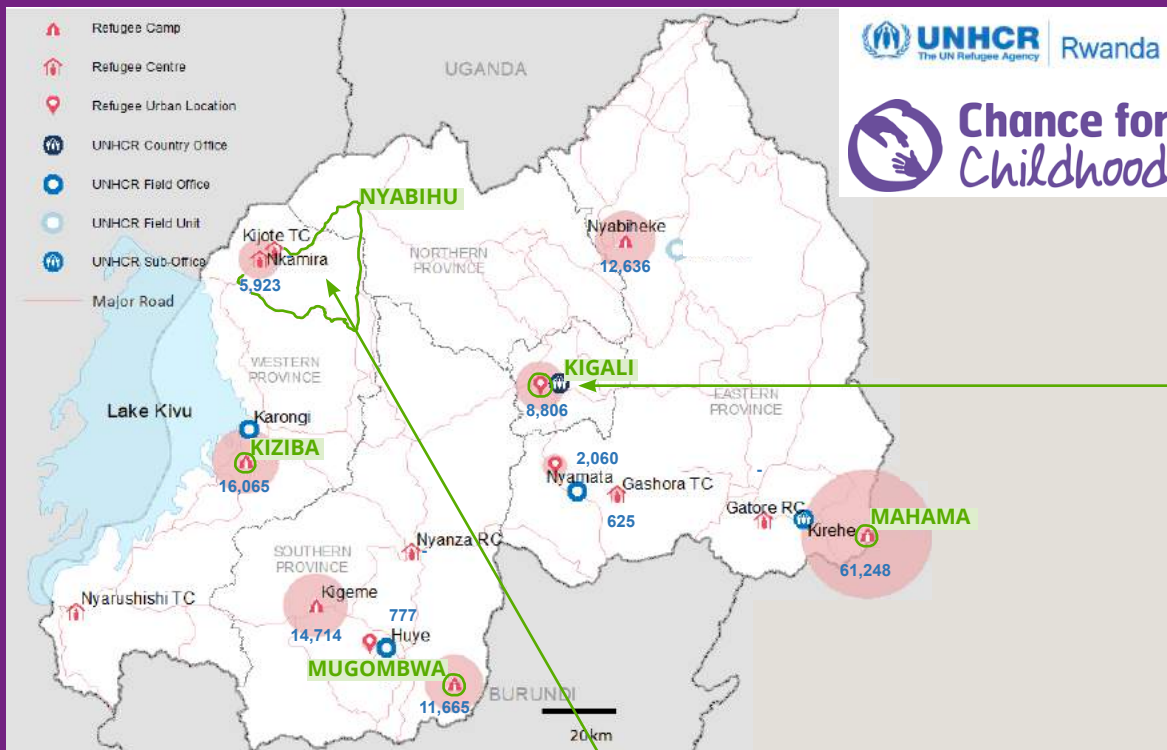
Our center in Kigali opened in 2014 and is dedicated to the memory of Jim Bell, a humanitarian, educator and long-time supporter living in Scotland.

Since its opening, our center has grown to serve over 1,500 children and youth each year.



PROTECTION

In 2023, MindLeaps enrolled 460 youth in our flagship dance program to develop social-emotional learning skills. Our staff of 29 Rwandans worked in 5 locations across the country to ensure each child participated in a minimum of 72 hours of training.



MindLeaps serves an average 90-120 meals per day to ensure children have the physical strength and mental concentration to commit to their studies at school and participate in our after-school tutoring program at the MindLeaps Center.

Partnering with Chance for Childhood, MindLeaps continued to work with differently-abled children to boost their social-emotional learning skills and improve educational outcomes.

EDUCATION

In 2023, we supported 351 children and youth in primary and secondary school. Of these students, we fully sponsored 121 in boarding school. These young people transitioned from **living on the streets to integrating into school and society**, and culminated their trajectories with MindLeaps by **graduating from high school**.

We provided Community IT classes to 75 recent high school graduates from the area surrounding MindLeaps Center in the capital city of Kigali. This supported their **transition from education to employment with digital skills**.



Rwandan students after school completing their assignments outside the Jim Bell Center

LIVELIHOODS

MindLeaps Rwanda houses our most robust **Family Strengthening Program**. In 2023, **230 parents and caretakers of MindLeaps' children were enrolled in Self-Help Groups**, which are community gatherings with savings-and-loans programs. We funded **49 small businesses** to create income-generating projects for women to achieve self-reliance and support their families' needs without outside aid.

We know the program is working because **90% of these parents and caretakers purchased health insurance for their families**, which was previously funded by MindLeaps.



In Rwanda, we see the strength of our **holistic approach** to stabilizing children inside their families while equipping the youth with a bright future through education and work-ready skill development.

Above: Salaama Numukobwa (left), Family Strengthening Coordinator, with mothers from the program

Left: Sandrine Mungwakuzwe (right) with mothers from the tailoring business

SPOTLIGHT: MERCER ON A MISSION

In 2023, and since 2018, MindLeaps has partnered with **Mercer University** in a cultural exchange program that builds the practical knowledge of American business students and the capacity of small businesses run by our single mothers in Kigali. The 2023 *Mercer on Mission* partnership brought together 20 American students with 27 Rwandan mothers in an intensive series of workshops and training for five days in May.

The impact lives on through a permanent store at Mercer University's campus in Georgia where MindLeaps' made materials can be bought:

<https://imwerwanda.com>



Two Mercer University Students and a Rwandan mother in our program

MERCER
UNIVERSITY

GUINEA



OVERVIEW



Guinea is a West African country on the coast of the North Atlantic Ocean. In 2010, the country experienced a transition to civilian rule and its first democratic election. However, since then, political unrest and a coup d'état in 2021 have resulted in many nascent democratic processes coming to a halt. The same year also saw another outbreak of the Ebolavirus, compounding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both pandemics have had devastating health and socio-economic effects on the country. These circumstances have contributed to an increased lack of access to basic needs — education, food, or hygiene services — for many Guineans, especially youth.

In 2023, Guinea ranked #182 of 191 countries on the UN's Human Development Index

In 2011, projects with various partners began in Kindia, and in 2017, MindLeaps moved operations to the capital city of Conakry. This year, we opened MindLeaps' first custom built center: a beautiful, 38,000 ft² compound. At the inauguration, US Ambassador Fitrell and Broadway's Apollo Levine spoke and encouraged the community to take ownership of this new home. This center is now a permanent safe space to continue to expand our dance and education programs.

OUR NEW CENTER

On February 25th, we hosted the inauguration of our MindLeaps Center in Nongo, Conakry. This new structure serves the community and has become of the heart of MindLeaps' operations in West Africa.



PROTECTION

In 2023, 160 children were a part of MindLeaps' daily activities for the entire year. Of these, **80 out-of-school children joined Dance & Data** in January intending to boost their learning skills and return to school in the new academic year. Another **80 children** - who had completed the Dance & Data program in earlier years and received school sponsorship - **were enrolled in the After-School program**. These students continued to learn more in dance and spent time in tutoring to supplement their academic education. We have seen that these tutoring programs, especially when combined with dance, improve re-enrollment rates and school performance.



Student Souleymane in dance class

Why is MindLeaps so Popular in Conakry?

One of the main reasons children join the Dance & Data program is the reputation of MindLeaps in the community among kids:

"You get to dance...and then they send you to school...and you still get to dance if you do your homework!"

LIVELIHOODS

This year also marked the start of our **Family Strengthening Program** - a critical step to prepare children and their parents to thrive without the ongoing assistance of MindLeaps. Led by Mabinty Camara, 30 parents attended weekly gatherings at our center to start a **savings-and-loan circle and develop business ideas**. MindLeaps partnered with **Orange Fondation** to help increase access basic technology training at our **Women's Digital Dreams Lab**. The growth of this program helps parents provide school fees for their children who are not enrolled at MindLeaps and also cover ad hoc expenses independent of outside help. **It is a critical piece to empowering mothers to reach self-reliance and manage the family unit.**



A Guinean mother working on her IT skills

EDUCATION

MindLeaps had **229 children enrolled in Education programs** in 2023. Of these, **124 children were sponsored in formal education**, **75 girls and women completed digital literacy training**, and **30 youth participated in our Julia Taft Refugee Fund program with the US Embassy**.



Student (NAME) drawing a map of Guinea and West Africa

*"This program has enabled me to learn new behavior, to live in harmony in my professional life and in society."
- Participant Djeinabou Barry*

This was MindLeaps Guinea's second time receiving the Julia Taft Fund. The goal of this grant is to **work to close gaps in refugee aid** by supporting innovative local initiatives that simultaneously serve refugees and the host community. MindLeaps implemented our **Virtual Academy** to help youth access basic technology and compete seed grants to start small businesses.

The youth completed **244 hours of coursework** in Business Entrepreneurship, Project Management & Budgeting, Communications, Child Development, and Inclusion.

SPOTLIGHT: DEBI AND COLLEEN



Colleen (left) and Debi (right) with some of MindLeaps Guinea staff

American English teachers Debi Maller and Colleen Simon have become some of our most popular volunteers! Last year, Debi and Colleen traveled to **Rwanda** and worked with our children over their summer break from teaching in New Jersey and Connecticut. **Their time was so impactful that MindLeaps Guinea requested they come to Conakry!** In July and August, our wonderful American teachers flew to West Africa and lived onsite at guest accommodations. Our French-speaking staff improved their English tremendously, including learning the phrase, *"It's raining cats and dogs!"*

UGANDA



OVERVIEW



Beautiful Uganda has the largest freshwater lake on the continent, Lake Victoria, as well as the source of the longest river, the Nile. The country hosts the largest refugee population in Africa and the 4th largest in the world – a total of 1.4 million refugees. Refugees are organized in “settlements,” rather than “camps,” as they are given land to cultivate; have freedom of movement; and are allowed to legally work in Uganda. In 2023, MindLeaps worked in the capital city of Kampala and Oruchinga Refugee Settlement in the southwestern part of the country.

Upward mobility is difficult for youth in Uganda, whether living in refugee settlements or the capital. Across the country, about 45% of primary school children and 30% of secondary school children drop out before completing their education. Systemic educational realities – such as high dropout and low re-enrollment rates – result in stunted individual growth and economic advancement. In settlements such as Oruchinga, this is exacerbated by the few schools and opportunities for employment.

In Uganda, 61% of refugees are under the age of 18 years. MindLeaps programming helps foster a sense of stability, hope, and community for these youth.



MindLeaps works with partner organizations and holds programming at our own studio location in Katwe, one of the urban slums of Kampala. The dense population growth of Katwe started as early as the first part of the 20th century when railway tracks connected it to Western Uganda.

In 2023, **200 Ugandan and urban refugee children** completed our Dance & Data program in Katwe. Another **80 children** completed the Dance & Data program in Kamwokya, another urban slum in the capital, where we partner with **Save Street Children Uganda**. The goal in each location is to boost social-emotional learning skills that helps to improve academic performance.

IN KAMPALA



One of MindLeaps' communities in Kampala

ORUCHINGA REFUGEE SETTLEMENT

In Oruchinga Refugee Settlement, MindLeaps worked with **302 children in Dance & Data** and **139 children in Education**.

It is often difficult for families to make ends meet in Oruchinga. There are no regular cash subsidies or foodstuffs provided to the refugees, and although school fees are low, school supplies are an annual cost that families must find a way to afford for their children. Under these challenging circumstances, sometimes children are only able to stay in school if outside support is provided.



MindLeaps students in Oruchinga with their new school supplies

In Uganda, the World Food Program used to give monthly support averaging \$3/person; however, that has now ended. Only individuals with specific needs - like unaccompanied minors and people with disabilities - are eligible.

Our School Sponsorship program helps children who have completed Dance & Data transition into formal education or maintain their enrollment by providing school supplies and tutoring. In Oruchinga, there are only four primary schools for a settlement that houses over 6,000 refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, and South Sudan. **The sustained involvement and encouragement from the MindLeaps team increases re-enrollment rates despite overcrowded classrooms.**



Students developing teamwork skills



Trainer Cathy and student Mugisha Steven working on the splits

FROM CHILD TO FAMILY

In 2023, the most important achievement in Uganda was **extending our program from the children we serve to their parents and caretakers**. Our goal is to serve the different needs of each family member and advance the family unit as a whole.



Parents holding up certificates for completing the business training

The Family Strengthening Program started this year and serves 50 caregivers in Kampala and 30 parents in Oruchinga Refugee Settlement. This program positions parents and guardians to run income-generating projects that meet the needs of their refugee community.

The Kampala program was made possible by our longstanding partnership with the **United Nations Federal Credit Union Foundation**. The structure of the Family Strengthening Program consists of 6 months of business training and seed fund investments to start small businesses. By the end of 2023, the first nine businesses were already turning a profit.



MindLeaps staff visits a small business of an Ugandan beneficiary

We also introduced the Family Strengthening Program in Oruchinga to build a path towards self-reliance and sustainability. So far, the parents have completed business training, and some have started income-generating projects. Although profits are minimal, it eliminates the support needed from outside organizations like MindLeaps. **Most importantly, it empowers caregivers to believe they can care for and protect their families - even under the circumstances they face living as refugees in another country.**

WHAT'S NEXT?

We are excited to announce a grant from Jewish Helping Hands to fully renovate and expand our studio in Kampala! This will allow MindLeaps to serve children and families, not only through dance and business training, but also by providing meals, regular academic tutoring, and computer classes. Stay tuned for our next LEAP!



MAURITANIA



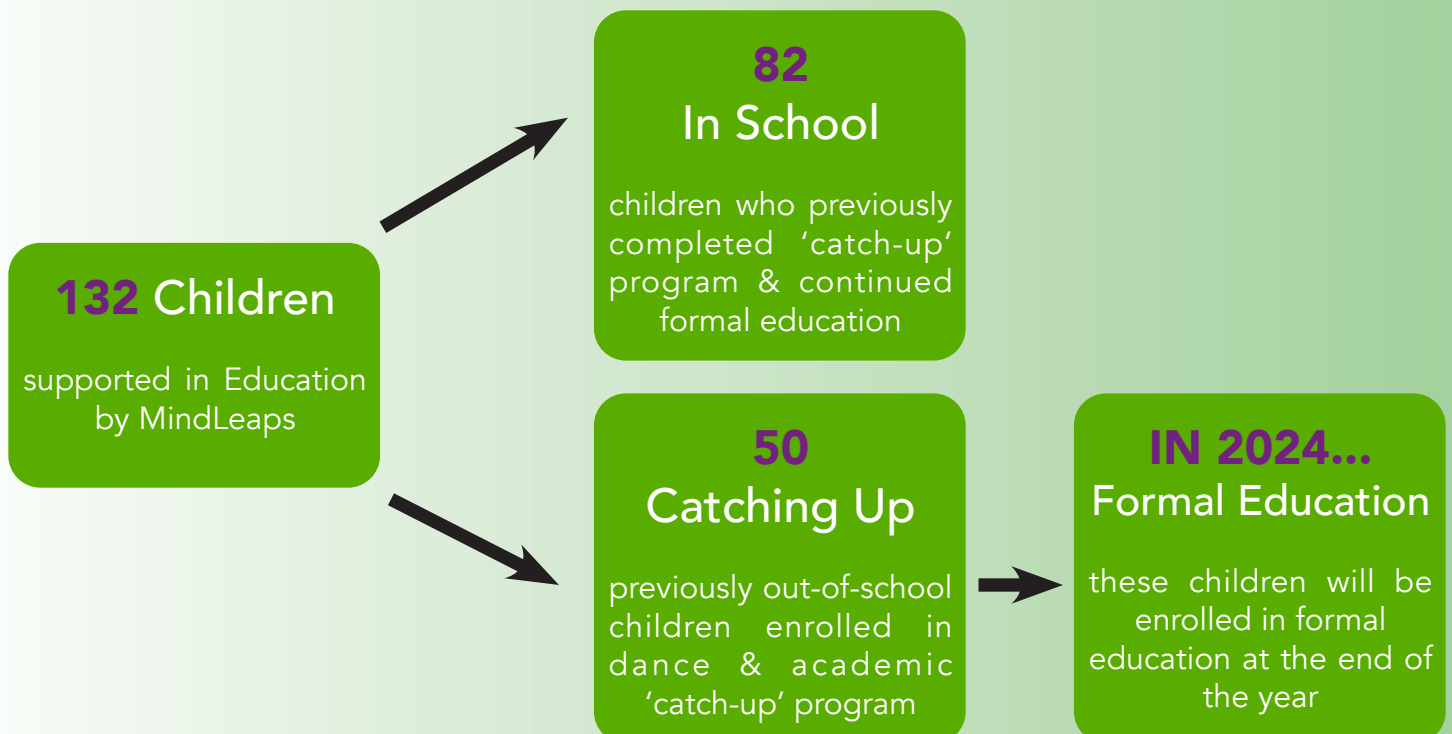
OVERVIEW

Bordered by the Western Sahara and the Atlantic Ocean, Mauritania is the largest country in the world lying below 3,300 feet in elevation. The country's rich and complicated history has influenced the evolution of Islam. It has sometimes become synonymous with religious extremism and the growth of radicalization.

Over the last six years, MindLeaps has worked in the capital city of Nouakchott in partnership with SOS Pairs Educateurs to advance the lives of Mauritanian children through social-emotional learning, education, and youth employment.

The four dominant languages spoken and recognized as national languages in Mauritania are Arabic, Fula, Soninke, and Wolof. Because of this linguistic diversity, there is *no one common language* among the MindLeaps staff! Meetings are always multi- or tri-lingual events, and we have learned how to build and thrive in diverse environments.

EDUCATION

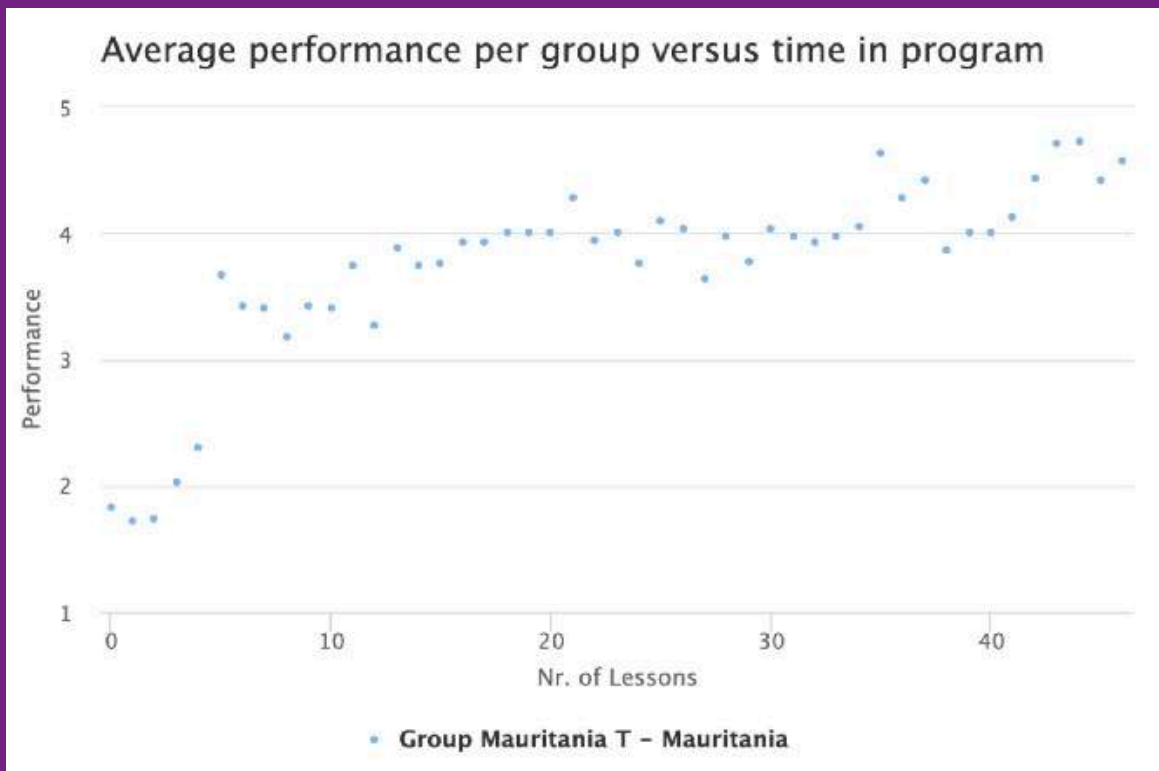


MindLeaps Catch-Up program consists of daily classes in French and Arabic to develop literacy skills.

DANCE AS SPORT

Given the conservatism and traditions of the country, MindLeaps' Dance & Data program is known as **"the local sports program"** that attracts children and youth daily to the SOS Center. In 2023, **110 children completed the program, 77% of which were girls.**

Our students showed a demonstrable improvement in social-emotional learning skills in 2023. In this graph from **MindLeaps' M&E software application**, there was an improvement from an average score of 1.9 to 4.8 on the 7-point scale for 25 girls over 45 lessons (90 hours of instruction).



This measures composite scores of 7 skills:

**Memorization,
Grit,
Teamwork,
Discipline,
Self-Esteem,
Creativity, &
Language**

For further explanation, see [Analytics](#) (p. 8).



Three of the MindLeaps' girls at El Mina 3 School



Young Mauritanians graduating from the Vocational Training Program in 2023

HUMAN RIGHTS

In 2023, MindLeaps continued its partnership with the **US Embassy** to promote the freedom of expression and knowledge of basic human rights for girls and women in Mauritania. We were fortunate to receive a two year US Embassy grant, **Creative Expression and Human Rights**, to support our work. This \$200,000 grant helped us to **build community awareness around the national protection of children and curb gender-based violence**, supporting the Government of Mauritania's own goals to build awareness and public support for new laws.



Through this project, twenty young women were trained as **Human Rights Defenders** in advocacy and supported to create innovative social action campaigns in their communities about **gender-based violence, birth rights of children, and divorce rights of women**. The Human Rights Defenders also did a pre/post-test survey analysis with 200 participants to determine if the campaigns improved local knowledge of basic human rights.

Here are a few highlights of the findings:

In your community, do all the children have birth certificates?

Yes – 33%

No – 38.5%

No Response – 28.5%

*In your community, do people think that boys have more rights than girls?**

Yes – 56%

No – 22%

Sometimes – 22%

**translated from Arabic*



20 Female Human Rights Defenders After Training in Nouakchott



Mothers receiving surveys from Human Rights Defenders

We're committed to aligning our work with efforts of others in Mauritanian society to support gender equity and human rights. On average, **communities showed a 5-10% increase in awareness of basic human rights** following action campaigns that included community dialogues, theater sketches, TikTok videos, and social media messages.

NORTH MACEDONIA



OVERVIEW

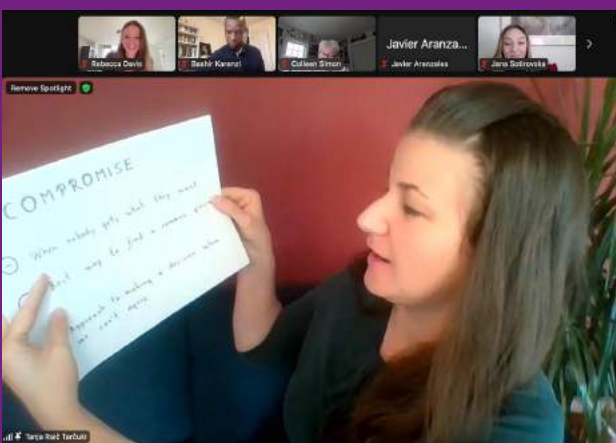


North Macedonia gained independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Following the wars throughout the Balkans in the late twentieth century, conflict reached North Macedonia in 2001. Lasting less than a year, the Armed Conflict pitted the minority Albanian and majority Macedonian communities against each other, and is now seen as a turning point for ethnic relations, leaving a lasting ethnic divide and gap between the two communities.

The dominant religion of the Macedonian majority is Eastern Orthodox Christianity, while the Albanian minority is largely Muslim. With this religious divide as well as different languages, the educational system separated along ethnic lines. Albanians and Macedonians study in separated spaces, and there is little or no opportunity for youth from these two communities to naturally interact. MindLeaps, however, takes a different approach: our North Macedonia team teaches Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Roma, and Bosnian students together.

Youth unemployment rates in 2023 were 35% (compared to the world average of around 17%). Beyond the societal and interpersonal challenges with ethnic divides, all youth struggle to find employment and resources for practical skills training. MindLeaps programming addresses both the educational and unemployment gaps as well as works towards social cohesion among youth in North Macedonia.

EDUCATION



Tanja Raic Tarcuki leading an online DARE workshop in October

A virtual workshop was held with civil society leaders in North Macedonia and youth from the MindLeaps Youth Alumni Network to explore how communication strategies can increase or decrease polarization. Led by **Tanja Raic Tarcuki**, the workshop used the **European Depolarisation Activism for Resilient Europe** (DARE) curriculum that provides safe spaces to explore disinformation, misinformation, and radicalization.

DANCE & DATA

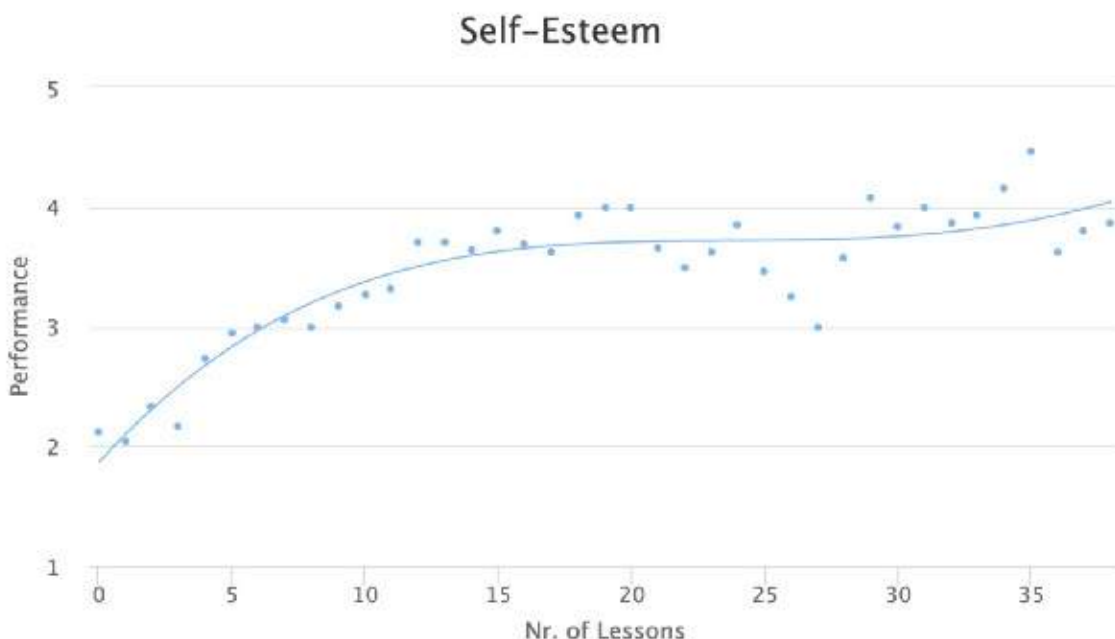
In Fall 2023, MindLeaps launched a new partnership with **SOS Children's Village** in Skopje, the capital city of North Macedonia. SOS Children's Village is an internationally renowned NGO that follows the family model, providing support for children suffering from neglect and abuse before they can be safely reintegrated into family units. In North Macedonia, SOS serves 60 children below the age of 14 years, 25 of whom are enrolled in the MindLeaps dance program.

A highlight of the year for children in the dance program was performing at the *US Embassy's event 30 Years of Independence: Celebrating Greater Diversity from Within* on November 17th. For these Macedonian and Roma children, it was a huge experience to present their skills and be applauded by an international group of diplomats. Although they may be trying to survive in a foster system "at home," they are *normal and successful children "on stage."* The MindLeaps kids performed side-by-side with children from our partners, **Abstract Dance** and **Emin Duraku Dance Troupe**.



North Macedonia trainer team meeting with US Ambassador Fitrell

Another way to see how events like these integrate with our program and increase Self Esteem is through the data collected in our M&E software.



Here, we can see that this group of children improved from scores of 2 to about 4 on the 7-point scale over 37 lessons.

YOUTH ALUMNI NETWORK

The MindLeaps Youth Alumni Network started during the pandemic to create a permanent way to help Macedonian and Albanian youth stay in touch with one another and preserve the relationships that they built while involved in MindLeaps' programs.

A unique, bold idea emerged that empowered four young adults from the Alumni Network to take on a leadership role in designing future strategies for all of our work in the country. Executive Director Rebecca Davis and the MindLeaps North Macedonia Board of Directors agree that **youth needed to be put at the center of evolving the strategy in the country.**

MEET THE YOUTH COMMITTEE:

Omer Hamiti
Vesna Jovikj
Berat Haxhiu
Matea Mihajlova

By Fall 2023, the Youth Committee decided to put in place new, full-time hires that could take their strategy to the next level and dedicate their complete focus to building our work in the country. In September, we welcomed **Program Coordinator Ena Bendevska** and **Dance Coordinator Nenad Stojchevski** to the MindLeaps Team.



A MindLeaps student in the new studio

Along with our new team members, MindLeaps took possession of our **first dedicated space** to house our program and operations in North Macedonia. The MindLeaps Center was renovated to become a dance studio, office space, and meeting place for youth. It officially opened at the holiday party in December.

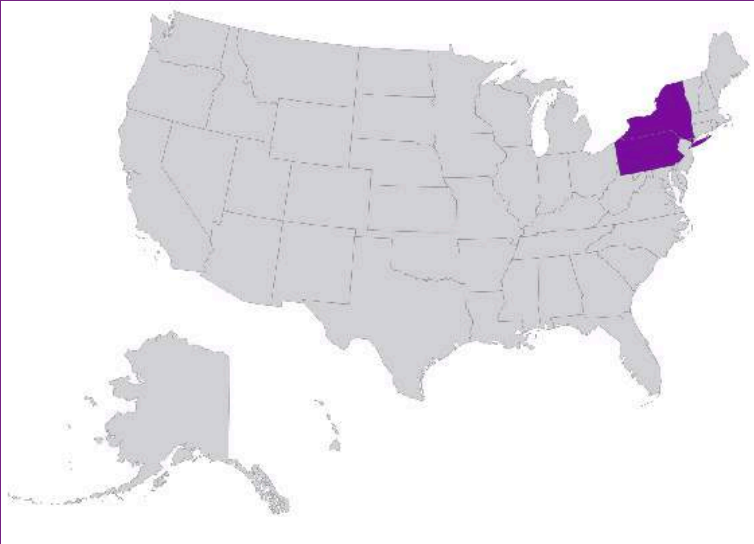


Trainer Eva high fives students in dance class



UNITED STATES

OVERVIEW



The United States has the highest incarceration rate of any country in the world. Over five million people are under supervision by the criminal legal system. This system is built on racial disparities, extractive business practices, and misaligned incentives. Nearly two million people, disproportionately African American and other POC minority groups, are living in prisons and jails instead of their communities.

In New York, MindLeaps works in the Bronx. While many strides have been made to improve social and economic disparities in the Bronx, South Bronx remains the poorest urban congressional district in the country. Data from the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) of NYC public school students show that the prevalence of parental incarceration (parent who had spent time in jail or prison) for students in the Bronx is 25.2%, the highest in all of New York City. MindLeaps' NYC program is run in partnership with Children of Promise, a community-centered non-profit in the Bronx that runs after-school programming and summer camps for children affected by parental incarceration.

In 2023, MindLeaps expanded our newest program to include a second site in Philadelphia to strengthen safe spaces to help remediate the effects of skyrocketing gun violence. The Philadelphia program collaborates with Sunrise Of Philadelphia, which offers free and structured programming to prepare youth for success in education and future careers.



NEW YORK CITY

MindLeaps worked with three different cohorts of children, ages 8 to 11 years, at **Children of Promise**. A total of **60 students completed the MindLeaps Dance & Data Program** in 2023. We also introduced a new program track for **"accelerating students,"** which were children who had demonstrably improved their social-emotional learning development and expressed an interest in continuing with MindLeaps after their cohort ended. These continuing students learn more complicated choreography and work with guest teachers to broaden their exposure to different dance styles. Our long-term hope is that some of these young dance enthusiasts will become MindLeaps teaching assistants in the future. This is also an important step to more **deeply integrate MindLeaps into the Bronx by hiring former program participants to become its future leaders.**

MEET HAILEY



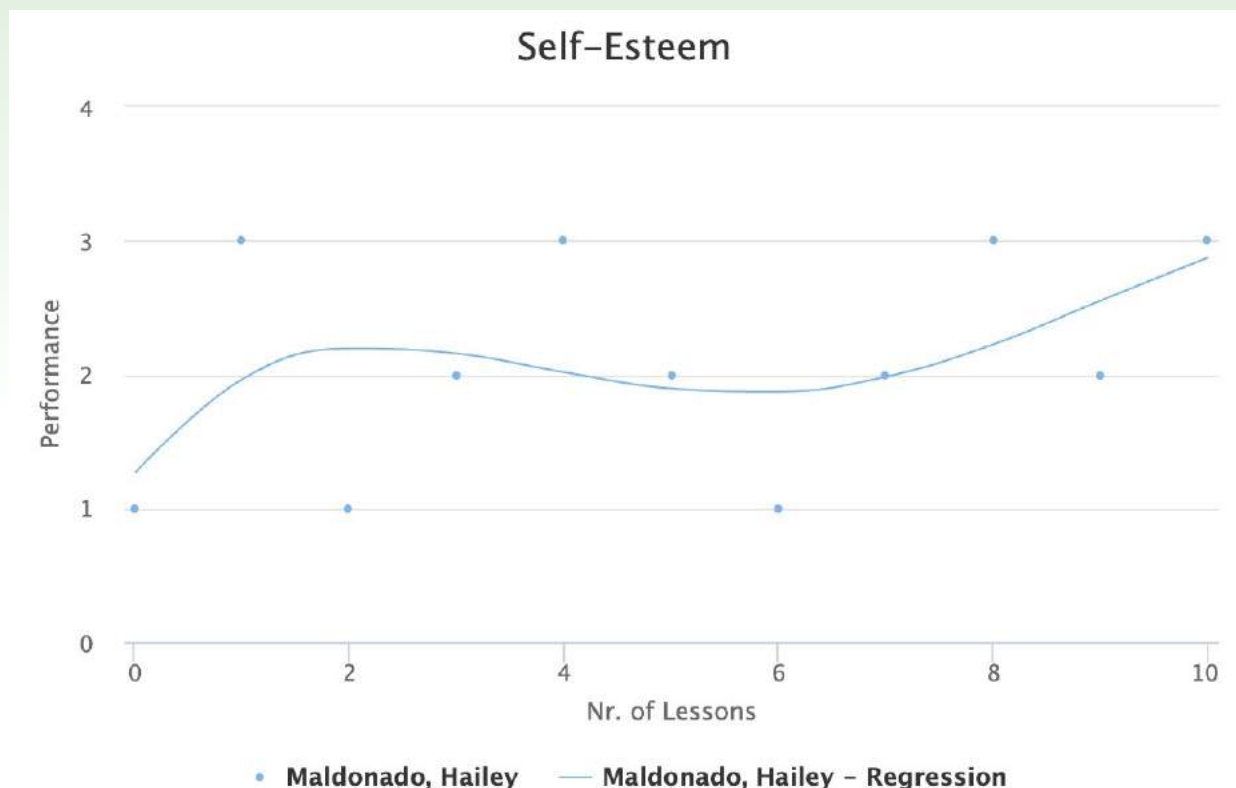
Hailey was a student in our summer 2023 cohort at Children of Promise. It was clear from the first class that she liked movement and dancing, but she lacked the self-confidence to try steps that she couldn't do or recognize. She enthusiastically watched from the corner.

With encouragement from the MindLeaps trainers and the consistency and regularity of the program, things became more predictable for Hailey and she started testing out some of the moves in the back of the room. She also could recognize how difficult moves could become easier with practice.

By the end of the summer program, Hailey danced in the front line of every class. She told us on the last day, *"Today my father is coming home from prison."*

Hailey's story reminds us how MindLeaps works: it creates a path for children to discover the self-confidence that does exist inside them. Once they learn how to bring it out and conquer their initial fear, they can transfer it to a new environment. The dance studio is just a practice ground for life.

Hailey's self-esteem moved from 1 to 3 on the 7-point scale over 10 consecutive classes:



Bregy Elementary School is a program site managed by **Sunrise of Philadelphia**, a large umbrella organization that provides free out-of-school time programming across the city. Deep in South Philly, children are unsurprised - and sometimes even unphased - to hear about shootings on the streets or in the subway close to their school. Providing structured after-school learning is essential to increasing their safety in the neighborhood.

MindLeaps Philadelphia Team worked with students from 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade over five months. The 2nd graders showed the most consistent improvement, and one of the learnings from this program was clear: **younger students gravitate more quickly to MindLeaps' methodology in an urban setting like Philly.**



Trainer Jameel jumps at our Philly location



2023 Train the Trainer (NYC and Philadelphia)



NYC student Kiatri practicing handstands

Another highlight of this program was **Stepping**. Step-dancing is deeply rooted in African and African-American cultural traditions and was popularized in the USA on college campuses. It is a percussive and highly energetic art form that relies on the feet and body to create the rhythm of the dance.

Working in Philadelphia was also a chance to go back to MindLeaps' roots! As you'll read in [Organizational History](#) (p. 34), before "MindLeaps," we were "Rebecca Davis Dance Company" - located in South Philadelphia!

ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

THE STORY OF MINDLEAPS

Founder Rebecca Davis had a life-changing moment that set her on course to build MindLeaps. As a young child growing up in Canada, she discovered a passion, which later became an obsession: **connecting the mind and body to achieve a similar goal**. She was perplexed by how she used her mind at school and used her body in dance class – but rarely, if ever, was she asked to use her mind and body at the same time to grasp new ideas. Dance was about executing physical shapes and tricks; school was about sitting still and “thinking.” She wondered, **why can’t our minds and bodies work together to process ideas at the same time?** This core question became the foundation of her life’s mission: using dance to develop **how we think and what we think**.

RDDC: Rebecca Davis Dance Company was the predecessor of MindLeaps, and it was Rebecca’s answer to **what we think about**. RDDC produced professional, original contemporary ballets about social issues – such as the growth of totalitarian regimes or the corporate greed at Enron. While running this dance company, Rebecca realized there was something more powerful about dance than performance. In 2008, Rebecca choreographed a ballet that reenacted the story of US Marine Brian Steidle and his experience witnessing the genocide in Darfur, Sudan. After every performance, audience members would ask, “What can I do to stop the genocide in Darfur?” Rebecca had no answer for them – and that bothered her. Motivated by these questions, she traveled to Rwanda, another post-genocide country, to learn about rehabilitation and reconciliation. Rebecca was amazed to discover how dance, an integral part of African culture, could be used as a tool to bring together different ethnicities and play a role in restorative justice. She started to consider whether **dance – used more as a tool than a performance art - influenced how we think**.



RDDC in Philadelphia in 2007



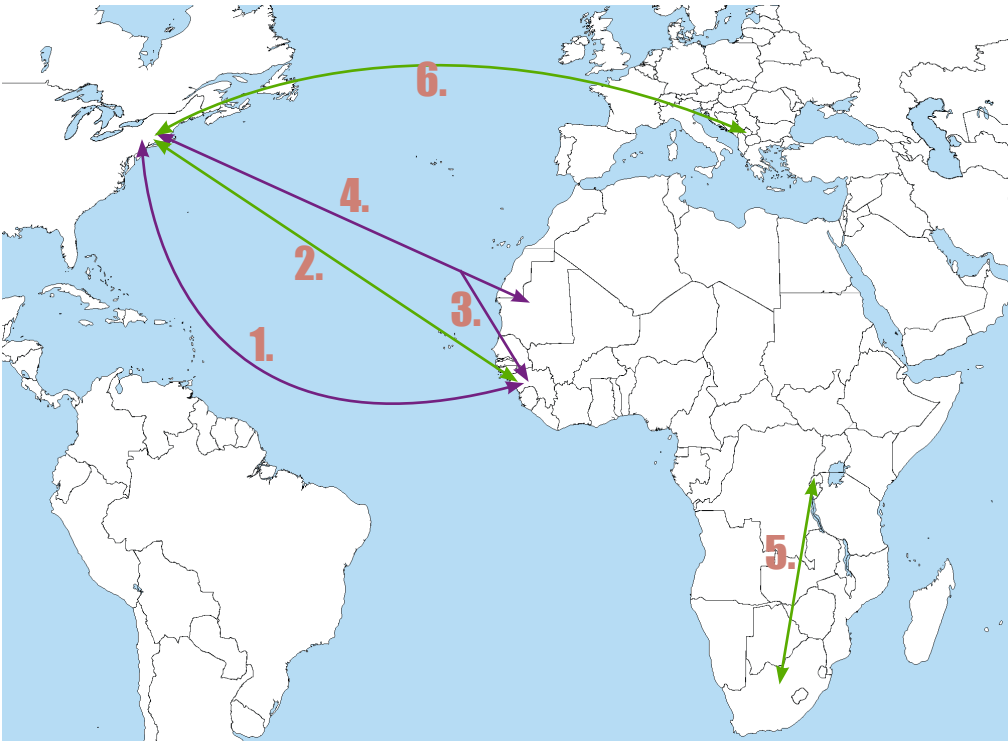
MindLeaps in Guinea in 2023

Rebecca dedicated the next five years of her life to traveling around Africa and the Balkans. She joined up with **educators, psychologists, mathematicians, engineers, and dancers to determine how movement patterns can predictably improve behavior**. By 2014, the foundation of **MindLeaps** had emerged: a codified dance program that improved cognitive thinking skills and social-emotional learning in children living in unstable environments. **MindLeaps tackled how we think about ourselves**.

Over the next 10 years, MindLeaps became an integrated part of communities in 6 different countries. The organizational budget grew from \$110,000 to over \$1 million USD.

In 2023, the world was engrossed in how artificial intelligence and machine learning can build the next version of human life...but have we fully explored how much we - as humans - understand **how we think right now?**

DANCE EXCHANGES



MindLeaps recognizes that collaboration within and across communities builds lasting cross-cultural relationships. In 2023, we supported dancers to travel to 4 of our country programs to spend time in cultural and programmatic activities, teaching and learning from each other. This investment in our artists builds a broader understanding of how dance can help children and young adults develop lifelong skills.

GUINEA

1. Jameel Hendricks

Former dancer with Philadanco.

2. Apollo Levine

Apollo from Broadway's MJ: The Musical.

3. Charles Grant

Former dancer with Ron K Brown's Evidence Dance Company.

MAURITANIA

4. Charles Grant

RWANDA

5. Anderson Carvalho

Anderson Carvalho Dance Company

NORTH MACEDONIA

6. Grace O'Mara

New York City dancer.

AMBASSADOR VISITS



US Ambassador Fitrell (center) visits MindLeaps Guinea



US Ambassador Kierscht (in red) at MindLeaps Mauritania

LEADERSHIP & BOARD

MindLeaps dedicated staff make all the programs possible across six countries. Many are former MindLeaps students or dance trainers who were part of the program and grew into leadership roles.



Yves Bisina Akonkwa
Office Assistant,
New York



Aissatou Diallo
Senior Finance Officer,
Canada



Martha Bua Peace
Country Director,
Uganda



Vedaste Ndayambaje
Country Director,
Rwanda



Emmy Turikumwe
Program Coordinator,
Rwanda



Martin Mamadouno
Country Director,
Guinea



Younoussa Camara
Program Coordinator,
Guinea



Moussa Cissokho
Program Coordinator,
Mauritania



Aliou Dioum
Program Coordinator,
Mauritania



Ena Bendevska
Country Director,
North Macedonia



Nenad Stojchevski
Program Coordinator,
North Macedonia



Rebecca Davis
Founder & Executive
Director, New York



Bashir Karenzi
Africa Director, New
York



Olivier Twagirimana
International
Coordinator, Africa

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2023

MindLeaps' Board of Directors & Advisors provides essential guidance, strategic planning, and oversight. Among the Board's activities are fundraising, financial management, legal counsel, strategic planning, and monitoring & evaluation.

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Catherine Smith – Dance Instructor
Kady Sylla – Myriad USA
Roger Webb – State Department
Rebecca Davis, **ex-officio*

VOLUNTEERS

MindLeaps' volunteers provide considerable and vital support to its operations. The many roles they undertake include graphic design, translation, research and analysis, video editing, and much more. The Board is grateful to the following for their commitment and wonderful contributions:

Aida Bauer, Louise Ekelund, Debi Maller, Anne-Sophie Matichard, Sage Miller, Susan Pasley, Colleen Simon

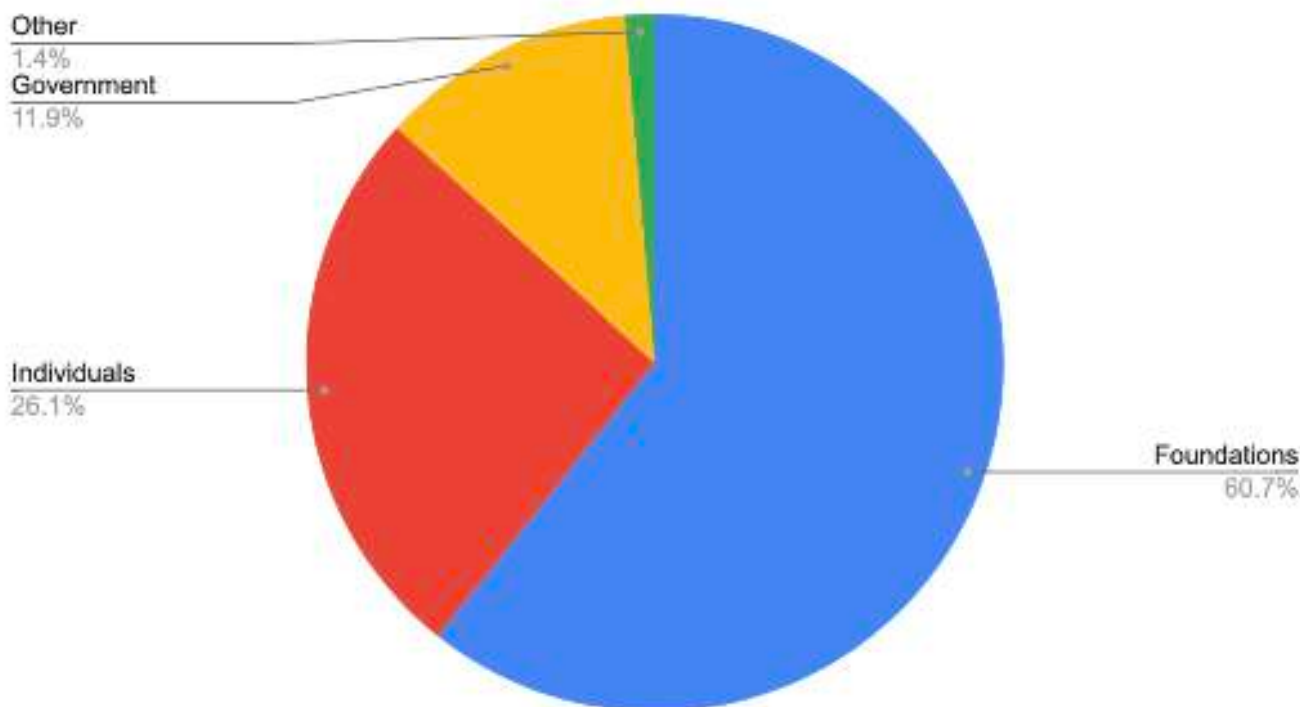
FINANCIALS

FY 2023

MindLeaps Statement of Activity (Unaudited) January 2023 - December 2023

Revenue	Total	Expenditures	Total
Foundations	\$654,864	Program Expenses:	
Individuals	\$281,468	Rwanda	\$161,418
Government	\$128,214	Guinea	\$234,847
Other:		Uganda	\$128,914
Corporate	\$11,142	Mauritania	\$98,580
Earned Income	\$3,121	North Macedonia	\$65,056
In-Kind Donations	\$631	USA Program	\$95,788
Total Revenue	\$1,077,441	Operational Expenses:	
		USA G&A	\$145,664
		USA Fundraising	\$40,633
		Total Expenditures	\$970,900

MindLeaps FY 2023: Sources of Revenue



OUR SUPPORTERS

Corporate



BANK OF AMERICA

Bank of America



Scotiabank



AllianceBernstein



Visit.org



Pentland Graphics

Foundation



JEWISH
HELPING
HANDS



Chance for
Childhood



GlobalGiving



Fondation



MDRT
FOUNDATION



THE
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CHANGE YOUR WORLD



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U.S. Embassies in Rwanda, Guinea, Mauritania



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Special thanks to photographer
Miki Powell