

A Once-Shy DCP Student Confidently Embarks on His Journey to College



Michael (center right) with fellow DCP Allstars.

Michael DiSanto’s dance journey began in the fifth grade when Dancing Classrooms Philly’s (DCP) Ballroom dance residency came to his school. Initially, he was uncomfortable with the inevitable: he had to learn Ballroom dance. Like many of his peers, he thought he wouldn’t enjoy it, especially not dancing hand-in-hand with girls. **Little did he know that this experience would shape his life in ways he never could have imagined.**

When Michael’s fifth-grade residency began, those feelings of discomfort dissolved once he realized he enjoyed dancing. His Teaching Artist, Mr. Andrew, impressed the then-fifth grader with his dance skills. **Instead of finding the complicated moves daunting, Michael was up for the challenge.** The excitement of learning something new made his Ballroom residency fun and drove him to continue dancing with DCP. **“I wanted to try harder things to prove to myself that I can get better at the things I like doing. I was definitely able to do that,”** he explained.

Over the next seven years, Michael strove to improve by learning more complex routines. **He enrolled in the DCP Academy immediately after his residency and then the DCP Allstars in eighth grade, both taught by Mr. Andrew.** The encouragement Michael received from Mr. Andrew made learning difficult dances easier. “I like his teaching style. Whenever you’d mess up, he would see you were struggling and not only help you, but the whole class, do the move better,” Michael explained. “He’s a really helpful person and has his student’s best interest in mind. I am really grateful that he was my teacher.”

Despite the Academy’s safe and supportive environment, Michael still had to overcome additional discomfort. “When I performed in my fifth-grade program, there were a lot of us, but

in the Academy, the focus was more on me. It was nerve-racking,” he recalled, noting the small class size in the Academy. Michael learned to cope with stage fright by shifting his attention away from the audience and to his dance partner. As he’s now a seasoned performer, being in the spotlight feels natural and no longer causes him any anxiety.

As he honed his skills in the Academy and the Allstars, he realized he was learning more than the steps and routines. **“Dancing really helped me grow personally. It helped me meet new people and get out of the house more,” Michael noted.** Michael also emphasized that although he is an introvert, he gained confidence through DCP and became less shy. After gaining confidence, he discovered his ability to make friends easily, even with older students who initially seemed intimidating. He knows he’ll build many friendships and connections when he starts at the Community College of Philadelphia in the fall.

Now that Michael has graduated and moved on from the DCP programs, he looks back on his journey with immense gratitude. **His experience with Dancing Classrooms Philly gave him more than a new hobby and passion.** It provided him with a community of supportive peers and mentors who believed in his potential, helping him to recognize it himself.

Michael plans to focus on his studies as he pursues his associate’s degree and then a bachelor’s degree in business. Although Michael has no immediate plans to continue his dance education, he thinks he will likely find his way back to the dance floor. He hopes other students who loved the residency will believe in their potential enough to continue with DCP. “You don’t want to miss out on the chance given to you,” Michael advised. “If you do choose not to do it, there’s an alternate timeline where you did, and you made so many more friends and improved so much as a person. You might regret not trying.”

All of us at Dancing Classrooms Philly are incredibly proud of the person Michael has grown into and wish him great success in college and beyond. **It is gratifying to know that our programs helped Michael recognize his potential and develop the self-confidence that will serve him well in the future.**