

# Kelley students help out with special needs dance class

By AMANDA WILLIAMS

Miss Shelly's School of Dance is more than a training ground for ballerina debutantes, it's a place where dancing becomes a form of socialization, independence and fun for a group of special-needs children and their Bishop Kelley helpers.

Seniors Channing Barker, Megan Griffin, Pallas Johnson and Catherine Youngman and Junior Candace Clark, along with other high-school helpers, volunteer two Saturdays a month assisting Miss Shelly during a dance class for children with special needs.

Shelly Ledbetter, Kelley alum from the Class of 1971 and owner of the south Tulsa dance studio, said the students have a range of unique circumstances including Downs Syndrome, cerebral palsy, spinal bifida and various forms of autism. The sessions last about 45 minutes and are free. Like other classes at the studio, the class performs a recital at the end of the year.

"Parents say they never expected to see their special-needs child on stage," said Miss Shelly. "But we get so much more back from the kids."

The Kelley students' ballet class takes place right before the special-needs class so they just stick around a little longer twice a month.

"I started helping because my school requires service hours," Megan said. "But now I would do

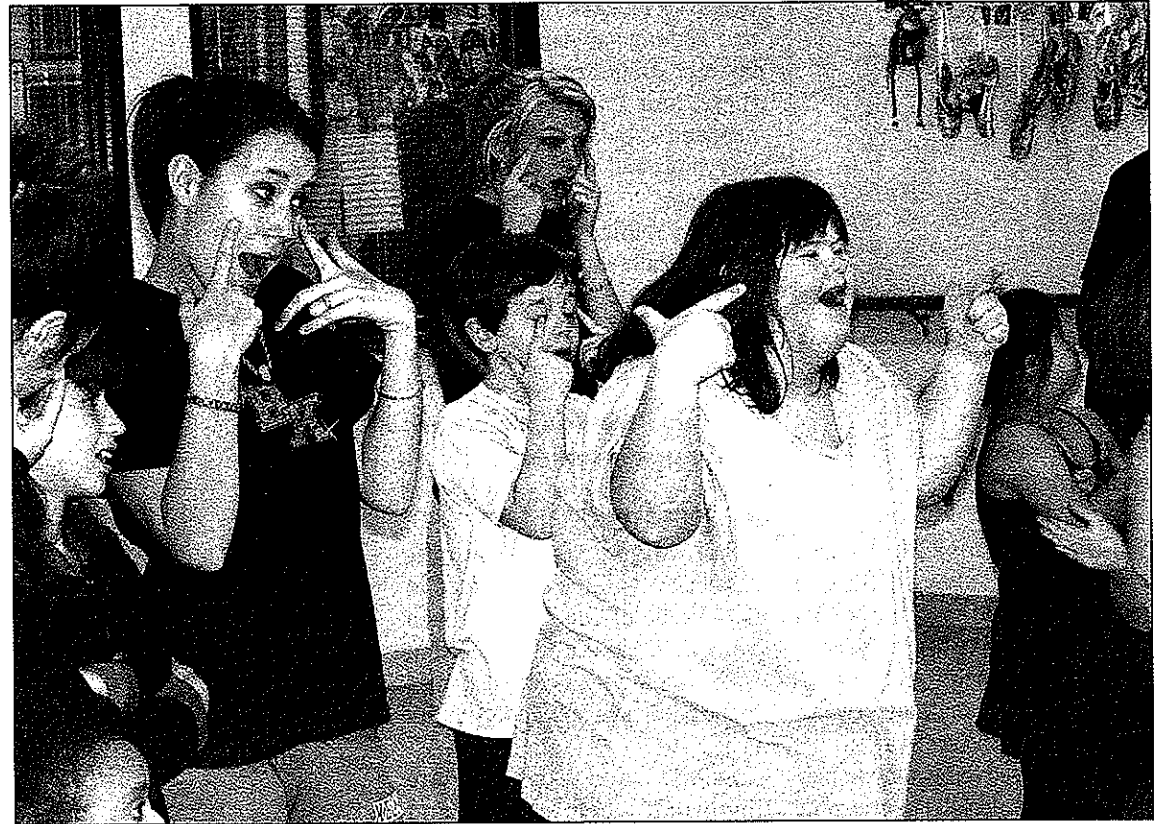
it anyways." She started volunteering with the class last year and admits to being nervous at first, but said that "every girl and boy there has just melted my heart - no one is happier to be dancing."

Catherine has been receiving dance instruction from Miss Shelly since she was 3 years old. "Dancing is one of my favorite things to do, and I am so happy to get to share this with the kids in the special ed dance class." She has been involved with the class for two years and said her experiences with the students will stay with her for the rest of her life.

The experience working closely with children who have a variety of special conditions - both physical and cognitive - has spawned future college goals for Megan and Candace.

Candace, a 12-year dance student and first-year volunteer, is considering career options working with children with some type of impairment. Graduating from Kelley next month, Megan already has developed some concrete goals.

"Next year I plan to attend the University of Kansas, where I will study occupational therapy," she said. "I have always wanted to work with children and after helping with the Saturday morning classes, I began looking into working with children with special needs."



Bishop Kelley Junior Candace Clark, left and above in "BK" T-shirt, helps students move to the music during a dance class for special-needs children at Miss Shelly's School of Dance in south Tulsa. The class, offered two Saturdays a month, draws 12 to 18 young dancers with a range of special needs including cerebral palsy, spinal bifida and various forms of autism. The classes last about 45 minutes and include circle time, free movement and choreographed dance lesson.

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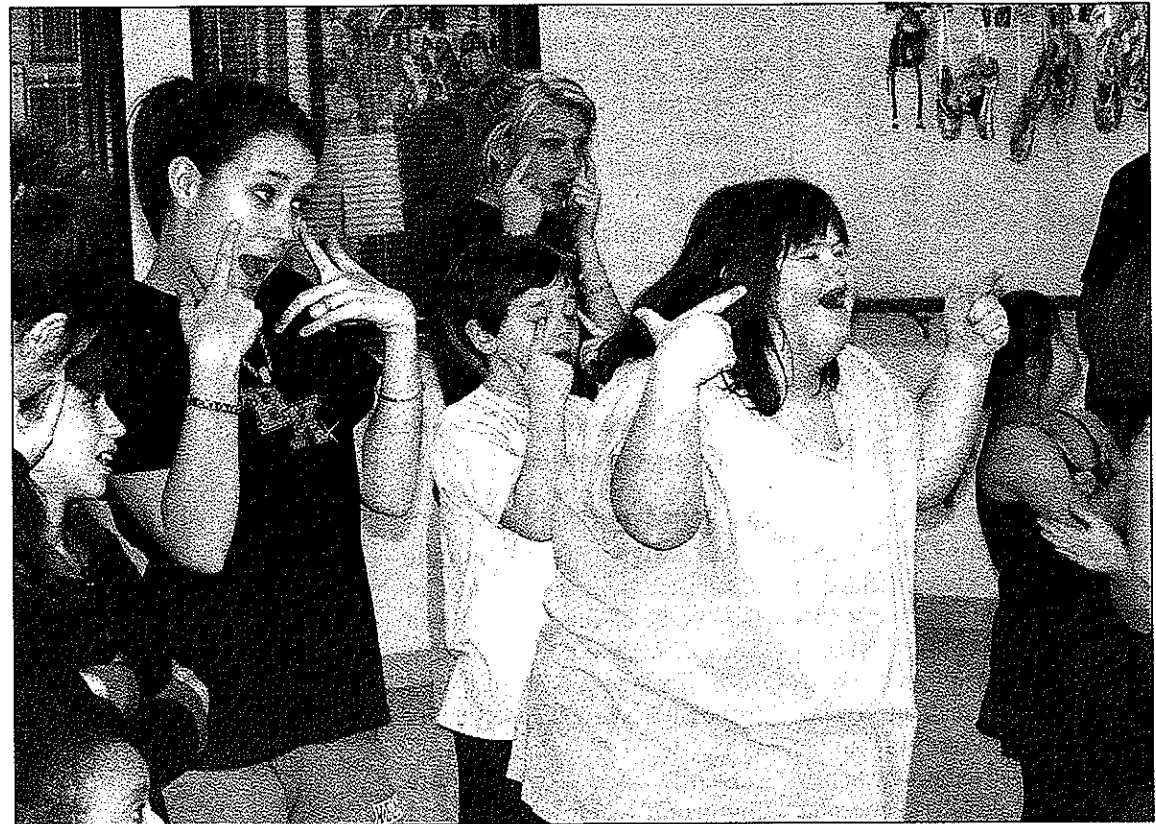
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