

Elizabeth Wellbrock-Our Lady of Lourdes-Mother of Mercy High School

“No, I will only stand by Miss Liz.” said Elena. Elena has had my heart from the beginning. Just the way she acted towards me, she really tugged my heart. I can not even begin how lucky I am to be able to interact with these amazing children.

“Dancing with the feet is one thing, but dancing with the heart is another.” ~Author Unknown. Dancing comes from the mind, soul, and heart. At my dance studio, I help children with Autism learn Ballet, Tap, and Jazz dances and terms. This program is called “Kids on the Spectrum”. These children always make my day with their big smiles and willingness to learn about the art of dance. Although these children might be tiny they have the biggest hearts around. In this program, each child is paired with a junior high student called a shadow. As shadows, we encourage them to be their best but we also help them with a dance we perform together in our annual recital. I can not even begin to explain how happy I go home every Sunday afternoon knowing that I helped a little one’s dancing dreams come true.

Some days when I arrive at the dance studio sad or upset, the feeling disappears instantly as I see them calling my name and running towards me with open arms. Over the past weeks I have seen some of them slowly but surely popping out of their shells and becoming more comfortable with all of us shadows and the studio. Also just recently I have also been chosen for another program at my studio called “WOW” which stands for “Wonders on Wheels”. In this program there are Junior High through High School students assisting girls in wheelchairs, ages six through twenty-seven, helping them also fulfill their dancing dreams. In this program there are also shadows but this time these shadows are acting as the WOW girls’ arms and legs. We dress in all black and do arm and leg motions behind them. The WOW girls dress in colorful costumes so they are the ones shining in the spotlight. This program competes at local competitions and also our annual recital. All of these kids and teens continue to inspire me more and more with their positive attitude. They are so open with us even if they are shy or scared to be in a new place with new people.

Recently the WOW girls along with their shadows competed in a local competition at Seton High School. My dance instructor happened to be taking a video with some past members on our dance team. One of the girls posted it on Facebook and now it is trending around North America and the world. We have been on the news a couple of times too. It has over forty million views in all. Since this has happened we have doubled in the amount of shadows and WOW dancers and have inspired other studios around the world to start programs like this.

One of the girls on the WOW team passed away recently and loved Celine Dion. Her sister who is also on the WOW dance team asked if this year they could dance to “My Heart Will Go On” in her honor. I am so glad I have the opportunity to continue to see, dance, and know these beautiful girls. They truly are my inspiration and they have all worked so hard and I am so proud of them.