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Angie Yeowell, Michelle Ellsworth, and Erika Randall, in Ellsworth's *The Wheels of Blame*

broaden the project to include other conflict-ridden areas like Uganda and Manila. "I get a lot out of teaching these girls because they respond so quickly," she says. "They are joyful and excited, and that's so rewarding."

New Jersey dance studio owner **Kathleen Cirioli** is a tap dancer and cancer survivor. She's also the founder of Dance for the Cure, which promotes cancer awareness at corporate events. Her lyrical "dance of hope" is performed by four young dancers and the show ends with the audience singing and dancing "Go and Get Your Mammogram" to the tune of "Button Up Your Overcoat." "If I can educate people to know that cancer doesn't have to be a death sentence, and inspire them to get mammograms and not be afraid," she says, "I will have fulfilled my dream."

Many of the moms at her studio, Cirioli says, are surprised to hear she's overcome so many obstacles. She believes her passion for dance has fueled her mission. "Having dance to look forward to helped me recover," says Cirioli, who had both breast and ovarian cancer. "In order to get through my surgeries and treatments, I thought about how I missed teaching, choreographing, and moving." And she sees a benefit for the students who have gotten involved. "The young girls who participate in Dance for a Cure learn so much. If they have to address these issues in the future, they'll be more prepared to help themselves and others."

Since last February **Ashley Hilton** has taught ballet to kindergarteners and first and second graders in the outreach program at The Patel Performing Arts Conservatory, the education arm of Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center and the Orlando Ballet School in Florida. The conservatory recently developed a dance program in conjunction with

Metropolitan Ministries School, a charter institution for homeless and disadvantaged children in grades K through 5.

Hilton has already noticed an improvement. "The kids can be creative and physical here, and they are learning an artistic discipline," she says. "Dance shows them that they can do something they're proud of, and they learn to concentrate—which is also good for schoolwork and sports." Inspired by the children's progress, Metropolitan Ministries has added more classes and is bringing in guest artists like Bill T. Jones and Ballet Hispanico.

Since the children don't have dance gear, they take class in jeans and skirts—but they give it their all. Patel Conservatory organized a drive to give the children ballet slippers. "Many of the kids have told me they love their ballet shoes and want to sleep in them," says Hilton. "And they're so excited to have a real dance studio with ballet barres."

"As the children's home lives improve," Hilton adds, "they leave the school. But they get to take their shoes with them, in the hopes that they'll pursue dance elsewhere."

Our daily lives bombard us with reminders of hardship, from the front page of the morning paper to the roundup on the nightly news. Buckling under an information overload, we find it hard to take action, easier to turn away. But dance can speak to people in ways that other language can't. Whether making a statement about the state of the world, creating common ground between clashing cultures, or teaching just one child the rewards of hard work, as dancers we can move toward making a difference.

Nancy Alfaro is a former dancer who lives and writes in NYC.

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