



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**NORTH SUBURBAN
YMCA**
2705 Techny Road
Northbrook, IL 60062
www.nsymca.org

For More Information Contact:

Carolyn Gessner
Creative Marketing Associates, Inc.
carolyn@cmacreative.com
www.cmacreative.com
847 858-4203 (direct)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Teen Dancer Launches Inclusive “Dance from the Heart” Program at YMCA

Northbrook, IL: June 8, 2016 – When the North Suburban YMCA’s School of Dance presents its annual recital on June 12, it will include a performance by a new and remarkable class of dancers. The *Dance from the Heart* program, an inclusive class that brings together teens of all abilities, will perform a contemporary routine to Adele’s ballad “When We Were Young” on the main stage at Glenbrook North’s Center for the Performing Arts. It will be the debut recital for a Y class devoted to including students with special needs. Even more impressive, the class was created and led by a high school sophomore who was determined to share the love of dance with all of her peers.

Grace Schwandner is a young woman with deep roots in the community and organizations she loves. A lifelong Northbrook resident, she has studied dance at the Y since the age of three and has been a Girl Scout since kindergarten. These experiences inspired a passion for dance as well as community service, especially helping individuals with special needs. When she decided to pursue a Gold Award for Leadership, the highest achievement in Girl Scouts, it was a natural choice to combine those passions. The YMCA became her partner in reaching that goal.

“I had the opportunity to earn the Girl Scouts Silver Award in junior high when I worked as an assistant instructor in the Y’s H.A.W.K.S [Helping All Wonderful Kids Succeed] dance class,” notes Grace. “When I started to work on the Gold Award in June of 2015, I knew that I wanted to make an even bigger difference within the community for this project. I had just performed in the YMCA Annual Dance Recital, one of my favorite times of the year. My goal was to create the first-ever inclusive dance class in our community, providing my high school classmates with and without disabilities the opportunity to dance together in class. And, my dream was to have the class learn a routine that would be presented to the Northbrook community at the North Suburban YMCA Annual Dance Recital.”

Grace’s personal experiences gave her confidence that the project could be a success. “I was inspired by my relationship with a friend and cheerleading teammate, who happens to have Down syndrome. She has such a positive, can-do attitude, and she added so much good energy to our squads in junior high and high school,” she says. “I also feel strongly that teens with special needs should dance right

alongside their peers without special needs -- not just in class, but in a big-stage performance if they wish.”

After receiving approval of her project from the Girl Scouts organization, Grace turned to the Y to make it a reality. She found a project mentor in Shannon Mundorf, NSYMCA Performing Arts Director, and launched Saturday afternoon classes with Mundorf’s guidance. The students practiced a variety of different dance genres throughout the year, culminating in the recital routine that will include six high school-aged dancers. The girls enjoyed choosing their costumes, practicing together, and building friendships that have extended beyond the dance class.

“Grace has shown great passion and leadership throughout the process of developing, planning, and bringing *Dance from the Heart* to life,” says Mundorf. “It has been a pleasure to watch her develop as a teacher, as the dancers in class have formed new friendships and found new passions. I am proud of all the dancers have been able to accomplish this year, from learning new styles of dance to preparing a performance-ready piece.”

The *Dance from the Heart* class will perform at the 11:00am recital on June 12 at Glenbrook North High School, 2300 Shermer Road in Northbrook. (An additional, all-different recital will be presented at 4:00pm.) For information about all performing arts classes at the North Suburban YMCA, contact Shannon Parry Mundorf at sparry@nsymca.org or 847 272 7250.

About the North Suburban YMCA

The YMCA is a charitable organization and relies on donations to make services available for all families and individuals in its 15-city region. All board members are volunteers, who donate their time, talents and financial resources. Located at 2705 Techny Road in Northbrook, the YMCA has served the northern suburbs of Chicago for over 45 years. The Y is about youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility, providing programs and services that address the needs of our diverse community and are accessible to all. For more information or to make a donation, contact Kim Nyren at 847-272-7250 or knyren@nsymca.org, or visit www.nsymca.org.



Photo Caption: Glenbrook North High School student Grace Schwandner, second from right, created an inclusive dance class at the North Suburban YMCA. Her students will participate in the YMCA's annual dance recital on June 12.