Anne Dunning’s consulting work is focused on strategic thinking, organizational development, arts-based assessment and facilitation to support nonprofit arts organizations and improve their capacity to deliver on mission. With fifteen years of experience in nonprofit consulting and ten years in nonprofit management, she brings a strong base of experience and a wide-ranging knowledge of the sector to her work. Her work in assessment and evaluation includes ongoing initiatives with Walnut Street Theatre, Epic Theater Ensemble and The Print Center.

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As I walk into the room, there is a lively energy. The sounds of African music fill the space. Small groups of families and friends are seated together and standing in groups around the auditorium talking animatedly. As new people arrive, they are greeted warmly by friends and join in the conversation. Young people of all ages in colorful costumes walk among the people in the auditorium, their grass skirts swishing around them. They talk with each other and with family and friends, they even confidently smile and greet a stranger to their community like me. On the stage, young people of all ages are running through their final preparations, trying out a sequence of steps, working out a tricky section together. Just off stage two boys pick up the beat on their drums. Volunteers slip in and out, taking care of costumes, providing water to the dancers, communicating back and forth. In the midst of it all, Júlio Leitão calmly navigates all of the action, cueing up music on a laptop, stopping to chat with a parent, encouraging one of the dancers and keeping an eye on the action on stage.

This is Batoto Yetu. This final open house showing of the 2016 – 2017 year makes clear that this is more than a program of dance classes – it is a community, a cultural center and an incubator for a generation of confident, competent and engaged young people. The performance demonstrates not only the skills of the dancers but also their care and commitment to each other and the support of a community that literally sings along to their performance. Also evident is the extraordinary impact of Batoto Yetu as alumni return to cheer on the next generation and toddlers dance in the aisle awaiting their turn to join the dancers on stage.

After twenty-five years of programming, including ongoing dance training, performances on five continents and a growing alumni community (including some who are now parents of “next-generation” Batoto Yetu dancers), Batoto Yetu has commissioned this report to consider the impact of their programs to date and to measure the intended outcomes for young people and their communities in the future. This report serves as both a record of the impact of Batoto Yetu’s work over the past twenty-five years and also a structure for assessing impact in the years to come.

Anne Dunning became principal associate at ARTS Action Research (www.artsaction.com) in 2004 and continues to undertake projects affiliated with AAR. Prior to launching her consulting career, she was administrative director of the Danny Grossman Dance Company in Toronto. Before becoming involved in the arts, Anne studied biology at McGill University in Montreal, where she received a BSc in ecology, evolution and behavior.
ASSessment APPROACH

One of the priorities of this assessment project was to gather existing information on the work of Batoto Yetu to date in order to create a baseline assessment of the impact of the work over the past twenty-five years. While regular records and assessment feedback were not always consistently applied throughout the organization’s history, this record keeping has become increasingly consistent in the past five years with the support of a dedicated volunteer team. As part of this project, we have organized and systematized the record keeping approach to ensure effective ongoing tracking of performance indicators over time.

At the same time, the immersive and intensive nature of the pre-professional training program has made for a sustained community. As a result, gathering anecdotal evidence and feedback is relatively easy as many of those who have participated in this program over the years have remained in contact with Batoto Yetu and its programs.

Given these parameters, the assessment approach included a review of existing attendance data, survey responses, company promotional materials, social media and correspondence. A good deal of the most valuable information came from interviews I conducted with leadership and program participants. Over the course of the research period from January to June, 2017, I also observed the dancers rehearsing and performing and interacting with the broader Batoto Yetu community and was able to have informal conversations with some of the participants and their families.

I have framed the assessment around the intended impacts as articulated by leadership and reflected in practice. Throughout, I have tried to illustrate the impact of these programs and the outcomes that have been achieved through the inclusion of case studies and quotes from my interviews with program participants and surveys of dancers and alumni.

MISSION & PROGRAMS

Batoto Yetu’s mission is to engage inner city youth in African dance, music, and storytelling within a caring community of talented artists and volunteers. Dedicated to fostering self-awareness, self-esteem, and the creative and social development of children through dance, Batoto Yetu introduces African culture through the Africa in the Schools Residency, Pre-Professional Training Program and public performances.

Africa in the Schools

The Africa in the Schools Residency Program is curriculum set in motion. These year-long classes engage students in African culture and heritage through dance, music, and storytelling while integrating lessons in history, the social sciences, math, and the arts. The program simultaneously develops physical coordination, concentration, and interpersonal skills. The classes recently incorporated African mask making and beadwork because of the useful and easily incorporated links to math curriculum.

As the young people in the pre-professional training program have matured and ‘graduated’ some of these dancers have demonstrated an interest in teaching and have five hours of instruction per week, led by professional and experienced dance instructors and musicians, for the duration of the academic year. This program promotes cultural appreciation and productive work and study habits while celebrating the exhilarating music and choreography of African dance.

Performances

The excellence and high caliber of this singular dance company is evidenced by the performing arts venues in which the children have performed, including Jacob’s Pillow, the Apollo Theatre, and stages around the world. Batoto Yetu has thrilled audiences by opening for Michael Jackson at Madison Square Garden for his 30th anniversary concert and appearing with the cast of Stomp at Carnegie Hall. Batoto Yetu’s participants have also appeared with artist and activist Harry Belafonte, and with the Jim Henson Muppets for Save the Children. In addition to their live performances, Batoto Yetu has made featured television appearances on The Today Show, The Rosie O’Donnell Show, Good Day New York, Sesame Street, CBS This Morning, and PBS’s Celebration of Storytelling.

As young cultural ambassadors traveling the world, Batoto Yetu’s dancers cultivate a strong ethic of international cooperation and social responsibility, representing the future of outstanding, global-minded artists.

Pre-Professional Training

Through its pre-professional dance training, held on Saturdays in Harlem, Batoto Yetu engages approximately 60 young dancers, ages 5-18, in a rigorous program modeled on the training of professional dancers, providing each child with five hours of instruction per week, led by professional and experienced dance instructors and musicians, for the duration of the academic year. This program promotes cultural appreciation and productive work and study habits while celebrating the exhilarating music and choreography of African dance.

INTENDED IMPACT

With an understanding of the organization’s mission and programs, I sought to understand the intended impact of this work through conversations with those who have been and are leading the organization including Board Chair John Peters, volunteer leaders Erica Layne and D’Lynne Plummer and, of course, Founder and Artistic Director Júlio Leitão. It is certainly clear from these conversations that the intention of Batoto Yetu is to impact the children who participate in the programs. Batoto Yetu, after all, is Swahili for “Our Children.” Fundamentally there is a commitment to the social and emotional development of these children as articulated in program goals below, which, in turn tend to impact things like academic success, workforce readiness and personal wellbeing.

There is, however, another layer to intended impact that I want to highlight here because I think it is particularly important in this historical moment. Júlio’s own life experience as a child caught in the Angolan civil war, a refugee in Zambia and Portugal and an immigrant in the US have given him a unique perspective on the societal impacts of war, colonization, slavery and migration. Julio said: “I saw the sense of separateness that African Americans felt, and the struggle to reconcile cultural heritage with identity, which to me was reminiscent of the African diaspora in Europe. In 1990, I founded Batoto Yetu primarily as a way of sharing stories, traditions, and art forms that have great cultural significance. To me, these values are one antidote to the hopelessness and frustration that plagues our society today.”
A Batoto Yetu participant reflected on the impact of Julio’s personal story and how it shaped her experience and perspective. “The number one thing I learned about African American culture is from Julio. Leitido himself, his journey, his struggle, but the patience and willingness to express his culture to all of us is the best lesson thus far. What it did teach me about my own heritage, is accepting the skin you’re in and allowing dance and song to express yourself.”

Julio understands that the allure of African dance, the rhythm of the drums and the appeal of the vibrant costumes are powerful forces to engage the interest of young people in their own history and culture. He saw not only an opportunity to reconnect them with their cultural heritage but also an imperative to change for the next generation the dynamic of otherness and the separation from authentic identity that history has created. Healing the rift between cultural heritage and identity, re-empowering communities with their own deeply held values and creating promising and hopeful futures for all children are among the most pressing issues for America today. This, fundamentally, is what Batoto Yetu is about. As Julio says, “For 25 years, Batoto Yetu’s participants around the world have been given a chance to define themselves, to appreciate and celebrate their roots, and to build lives that are rich in cultural awareness, compassion, and integrity. And in that song, we believe we are changing the world, one child at a time.”

That said, this societal impact is very difficult to measure and track, particularly for an organization with minimal infrastructure and considerable programmatic reach. For that reason, I have focused here on the more specific measurement of the specific program goals outlined below.

**PROGRAM GOALS & IMPACT**

Batoto Yetu’s fundamental goal is to enhance the lives of young dancers who participate in the programs. Like many enhancement programs for young people, it is challenging for Batoto Yetu to track outcomes like college acceptance, enhanced academic performance or future career potential due to the transitional nature of the participating population. So, instead, we are focusing on developing and understanding our impact in terms of a set of social and emotional traits that we can tangibly link to Batoto Yetu’s programs and that have been shown to enhance wellbeing, workforce readiness and overall success through the research being conducted by organizations like CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social & Emotional Learning) and the Student Success Network. The development of the five traits through the Batoto Yetu programs enhances the lives of the young people who participate and, at least anecdotally, results in their achievement of high school graduation, college acceptance, workforce readiness and academic success.

It is also important to note that, while Batoto Yetu continues to grow, the nature of this impact requires intensive ongoing engagement. This work is not achieved through a one-time or short-term intervention. For this reason, Batoto Yetu’s impact is not effectively conveyed by the number of young people it reaches but by the depth and impact of the experience on those with sustained exposure to these programs.

**Perseverance/resilience**

The cumulative nature of skills development in the program requires students to learn by doing - attempting skills before they can fully physically or conceptually achieve them and repeatedly working on the skill until they achieve success. The goal in this case is to give students the perseverance to pursue repeated effort and the resilience to try again when they fail the first (or second, or third) time.

Perseverance/resilience can be measured through regular attendance and participation (see participation section below) and through the achievement of skills development over time, which requires ongoing commitment from the dancers. Lila, one of the dancers, wrote about her experience of perseverance in the Batoto Yetu dance studio and how it impacts her in other aspects of her life in a grade 8 school essay. “From dance I have learned many life lessons, for instance the value of hard work and perseverance. In African dance class, things were not just handed to me but I had to prove that I deserved everything I got. I learned to never be late, to put effort into everything I do, and that by respecting others, I participated in creating a culture of respect. These discoveries didn’t just apply to dance class, but also to school performances, academics, my home and friendships, and anywhere else that I expect to succeed. Dancing has taught me to both accept help and to always help others, for much of life is learning how to fix things that are not perfect.”

This trait is also something that teachers and parents observe over time as it develops in their children and students. This excerpt from a heartfelt note from a parent about her son and how Batoto Yetu impacted him at a difficult time in his life reflects her observation of his perseverance and eventual success. “My son has been going through a very difficult time, behavior-wise, the past couple of years. He has been diagnosed with ADHD, ODD (Oppositional Defiance Disorder), anxiety, depression and mood disorders.

I remember the first couple of classes he would run off the stage crying and saying “I can’t do it. I can’t dance like this.” I explained to him that most of the teenagers were his age when they started and he will be just as good as them in no time. He’d dance a few steps and quickly run off to play with the younger children. I continuously encouraged him to get back on stage to watch and learn.

I’ve always known my son has true talent when it came to dancing. I didn’t realize the fearlessness he has. He loves dancing. He loves performing. This is his calling. When he’s dancing he is full of radiance and life. He dances at home nonstop. There are times I have to literally tell him “Enough!” What I really love is how you, Julio, talk to the kids about what the dances and songs mean. You’re teaching them their history. Julio and Jerijah, you two do not realize this, but you’ve saved my son. For that I am eternally grateful. Batoto Yetu is priceless. Thank you, Thank You.”

**Photo by John Dodge**
Juan is 22 years old. His mother recently died and he had to drop out of college at SUNY Purchase, where he was studying music, to care for her and to take care of family expenses. He is now starting to look ahead to what he will pursue next in his life—his plans are to return to school at City College in the spring of 2018 and pursue studies in an area of academia that will extend his knowledge and interest beyond the arts world in which he has spent a lot of the past 15-20 years.

Juan has had an on and off relationship with Batoto Yetu over the years. He first arrived at the age of five because his cousin was participating in the program. He didn’t stay involved right away but had connections both through his cousin and another friend, who was a drummer. At that time he was more involved with music— he is classically trained in music. Then at around age 12 or 13, he came back to Batoto Yetu and he has since performed with the company all around New York and in London, Guyana and Colorado. The experience took him to places he never dreamed of going.

He found the experience of travel to be particularly impactful. He believes that travel “opens you up to new experiences, it makes you humble and it helps you to appreciate what you have”. He particularly valued the opportunity to meet new people from different places, to connect with them and their lives, to take in their energy and share his own and to communicate across language barriers through the language of dance. These experiences boosted his self-confidence and expanded his perspective. He speaks very clearly about the benefits of Batoto Yetu for him. As someone who suffers from asthma, he appreciated the physical strength that he was able to build through dancing. More than that, he talks about the lessons one learns “if you are open to them”– of the effort that is required to succeed, of listening to feedback and humbly responding to it, of taking care and pride in your work, of the importance of inspiring others and of the focus and application needed to fulfill your ambitions.

For a young man who has already accomplished and addressed so many things in his life, perhaps the most impactful anecdote he shared was this one about his time at college at SUNY Purchase. While he was deeply engaged in learning and dedicated to practicing his instrument, he was not interested in the party culture that often goes along with the college life. So, on weekends, instead of sticking around the party scene on campus, he took the train back into New York to take dance classes at Batoto Yetu and, in his words “recharge”.

Leadership/mentorship

The pre-professional training program is built on a model of community mentorship in which the older/more experienced dancers help their younger/less experienced peers to learn and develop by sharing their knowledge and supporting the development of skills they have already learned. Each ‘generation’ teaches the next in this learning community. The goal is not only to develop the skills in each student to the best of his/her ability but also to develop each student’s capacity to share knowledge, experience leadership and empathize with others.

Leadership is often demonstrated in the interactions between participants within the group and through the personal sense of purpose/capacity/authority that is expressed in dancers’ perceptions of their own experiences, as in this statement from a young woman in the program: “Batoto Yetu taught me how to be connected to larger community outside my immediate family, and understand the importance of giving back to the community. It also gave me a sense of pride in who I am. I learned responsibility and what it meant to be held accountable for myself and my Batoto Yetu family. I learned discipline and tolerance. It also allowed me to be more accepting of different cultures and have a greater sense of appreciation for various cultures and practices. Overall Batoto Yetu helped mold me into the person I am today, a strong woman of color with an unshakable sense of dignity that loves art and dance.”
JASMINE

Jasmine grew up in a family who was actively involved in dance and culture. She had been doing African dance since the age of two or three. She was introduced to Batoto Yetu when she was a shy twelve-year-old. She found that Julio and all of the adults in the program were really great in motivating the dancers. They wanted to see the dancers succeed. At the same time, getting to know the community of dancers pushed Jasmine to build her social skills in ways she finds are still important to her today.

Early in her time with Batoto Yetu one of the most impactful experiences was traveling and performing with the company at Jacob’s Pillow. With a whole week together, it really helped her to bond with her peers in the company and brought together her family’s love of dance with her experience at Batoto Yetu as her mother and aunt, both massage therapists, traveled with the company for the performances.

Preparing for performances gives the dancers a real sense of purpose and focus. She learned not just the physicality but the mental discipline that was required to perform. She and her peers knew that they had to come to rehearsal and give it their all just like every rehearsal was a performance. This kind of discipline and focus is something that has continued to be part of Jasmine’s life in everything she pursues including work and school.

As she developed as a dancer, Jasmine naturally took on a role helping others in the company. To her this was not unusual. She had always seen the more experienced dancers encouraged to help out others who were finding the work challenging and she herself had been able to ask for help when she needed it. Over the years, this naturally evolved into her taking on roles supporting the performances, teaching and being a leader in rehearsals. She knew when she left dancing in the company that she would continue to be involved and give back to the program.

Dance also provided an outlet for her as she started to explore what she wanted to do in life. Weekly dance class allowed her to express her creativity and decompress. She felt that she had the freedom to figure out what she wanted to do with dance as her “anchor”. Recently she has started along a path to become a teacher. She credits her Batoto Yetu experience with giving her the strength to discover and pursue an unexpected path and the social skills, confidence and discipline to pursue a high-impact job that will bring her into contact with a wide variety of different people.

Community/teamwork

Because the program involves intensive periods of shared learning and collaborative effort, it fosters a unique sense of community and teamwork amongst participants. Like a sports team, the participants in the program work toward not just personal goals but a shared goal of performance which requires concerted effort. This is to foster a shared sense of purpose and the collaborative skills necessary to achieve this and to bring community together in celebration.

Community/teamwork traits are in evidence both in the studio and in performance. The company working together demonstrates their capacity for community building and creates a stronger whole than they could individually achieve. While we do not currently have audience statistics, anecdotal there is not only a community feeling within the network of dancers and alumni but the audience adds another layer of that community, with many supporters, family and friends returning to attend performances again and again.

One of the Batoto Yetu dancers observed of her experience in the Batoto Yetu community: “It put a physical application to what it meant to be part of a larger culture through the African diaspora. The other dancers and children that danced with the Batoto Yetu family weren’t all African, but we shared a common love, which was dance. Through our love for dance we learned that we were in fact a family regardless of our immediate heritage or culture. As Batoto Yetu dancers, we had however learnt about the history of various countries like Angola, Brazil, Portugal, and the influence these cultures have had on various cultures connected to them. We learned songs and words that were foreign to us. We learned about the history of slavery and the plight many people of color experienced throughout history until recently. We also learnt about the resilience and strength of our people. All of this was possible because Julio infused these lessons into our performances, in order for it to translate through dance and song.”

SYDNEY

Sydney is eighteen years old. She started dancing with Batoto Yetu when she was two years old after her aunt saw a performance by the company. Over the sixteen years that she has been involved, she has had many opportunities, including performing on some of the most celebrated stages at home – the Apollo, Carnegie Hall – and with the company on tour to Hong Kong, Houston, Portugal and Aspen.

When she started dancing with Batoto Yetu, from ages 2-6, she was also taking ballet and Modern dance classes. Those experiences gave her a more formal dance structure but her African dance allowed her to push boundaries and explore a different movement quality that was more liberating. Her learning at Batoto Yetu has been her own movement. She learned about African history and culture in ways that she was not learning in school. She particularly identified with understanding culture and history from someone like Julio who shares directly from his personal experience in a way that makes the material much more immediate and relatable than reading it from a book.

Recalling her own experience joining the program at an early age and the introduction of dancing with so many older and more experienced dancers, Sydney has tried over the years to be a positive voice and supportive presence for the youngest kids in the program. She has regularly invited young people to become part of Batoto Yetu and encouraged those who come out to participate and learn the movement.

Having the Batoto Yetu experience throughout her childhood has strengthened Sydney’s love for herself as a woman of color and given her a foundation of understanding and a desire to pursue further learning. She has been accepted to St. Bonaventure University and will be attending in the fall and joining the Division III Women’s Rugby Team – a parallel passion for her that has both fed and been fed by her dance experience. She believes that her experience with Batoto Yetu has given her the self-confidence to try new things and extend beyond her comfort zone that will serve her well as she faces the new opportunities that await in her college experience.
SELAMAWIT

Selamawit is seventeen. Her family is Ethiopian. She joined Batoto Yetu two years ago. She was taking Ballet classes at the time but felt that she needed more than just dance. She didn’t have a feeling of community or connection. She started to ask around about what other opportunities might be available. A friend of her mother’s directed her to Batoto Yetu.

Pride/self-confidence

Pride and self-confidence certainly come, in part, from the ability to master skills. However, the program goes further, recognizing that many of the participants do not have a positive and meaningful connection to their cultural roots. The celebration of culture and history through the work is the outcome of the performances. By sharing history, culture and language through dance and music, the program seeks to impart to participants and their audiences the value of their tradition and heritage (see also Impact Intent above). One program participant shared this insight about her experience:

“Batoto Yetu has helped me understand that the emotion behind the various traumatic and/or happier moments in history. Batoto Yetu has helped me open up emotionally and effectively express myself. From learning how to embody the emotion behind the dances that we do, I was able to properly identify different emotions within myself.”

Jerijah’s mother was taking African Studies in college when her professor gave her tickets to see Batoto Yetu at the Apollo Theater. She took her six year old son, Jerijah, with her to see the performance. He was “in awe”. Every aspect of the performance — the commitment of the dancers, the colorful costumes, seeing people who looked just like him performing on stage — made him gravitate immediately to it. He knew he wanted to get involved. It was about two years before he got the opportunity. At that time, without the internet to easily access information on how to get involved, he and his mother were not able to figure out how to connect him with the Batoto Yetu programs. By chance, two years later when he was eight years old, he was at home sick one day watching a daytime TV show when he saw the company again and called his mother in. At the end of the show, there was contact information for Julio and Batoto Yetu and it was Jerijah’s chance to get involved.

Jerijah always struggled in school. He had a learning disability and many other cards in the educational deck stacked against him. It caused him to doubt himself and believe that he was not good at school and would never excel. But once he got into Batoto Yetu, where maintaining grades was essential to sustaining the opportunity to dance, he knew he had to commit to keeping his grades up to be involved with the dance that he was passionate about. It also taught him how to focus, apply himself and put in the effort necessary to succeed. He not only maintained the grades necessary to stay in the program but also graduated as an honor student, was accepted into a Public Communications program at Syracuse University and maintained a GPA above 3.0 throughout his college years.

Like many others, he appreciated the welcoming environment, genuine acceptance and family dynamic of the Batoto Yetu community. He remains connected to many of the friends and colleagues he met through the program. The program welcomes everyone who wants to join, with no audition to enter and minimal cost to participate. Jerijah remarks on the incredible opportunities he experienced through Batoto Yetu from skill development, to knowledge about culture and history, to performing and traveling and how much richer these have been than those offered by other programs that are often a lot more expensive.

It is clear that Batoto Yetu had a pivotal impact on Jerijah’s own life. At college he took on the coordination of an African dance organization on campus and started his own dance organization with peers. His Batoto Yetu experience helped him to see these projects through. Since graduating, he has continued to maintain his commitment to dance. He worked with Batoto Yetu as Rehearsal Assistant and Rehearsal Director and has pursued work as a teaching artist to empower kids through the arts. For the past five years he has been dancing with a professional dance company, Forces of Nature and has been working as a choreographer with independent emerging artists and for commercial projects.
Imani is 18 years old. She has always been interested in performing. Four or five years ago, her father mentioned to her that there were free African dance classes happening in a local park. She has never done African dance and had only a little knowledge but was interested and went to see what it was about. She discovered when she got there that one of her friends was dancing with the group and the group was Batoto Yetu. Her friend told her about the program and encouraged her to come out and participate. She immediately found the environment at Batoto Yetu better than her other experiences of dance where people showed up for class and didn’t interact with each other. At Batoto Yetu she found a comfortable environment, which felt like an extended family.

She has had opportunities to perform in New York with the company and would love to travel to perform elsewhere. She really enjoys the engagement with a crowd who are eager to experience the dance. Performing is not something she would have been able to do without the self-confidence and comfort in her own body that she has gained through training with Batoto Yetu. That confidence has translated into other aspects of her life as well. She is more comfortable speaking up and sharing in class and in conversations with others, often sharing the things she has learned about African history and culture at Batoto Yetu that are not taught in schools.

Most recently, her self-confidence and the lessons she has learned at Batoto Yetu about commitment, dedication, effort and passion helped her to apply herself to the audition process to achieve her dream of being accepted at NYU to the Tisch School to study acting. She knows that patience, focus and effort pay off and she intends to continue to apply these lessons to the challenges ahead as a college student while continuing to pursue her love of dance at Batoto Yetu.

Curiosity/desire for knowledge

The connection between the practice of dance and music and the cultural and historical context of the material is one of the unique aspects of Batoto Yetu’s programs. Engaging students and audiences through the energy of the movement and music, the program is able to connect them to information they might not otherwise access or seek out. Igniting their curiosity through practice encourages them to pursue knowledge and understanding that will support their personal growth and development. The goal is to develop each student’s desire to learn and curiosity about the world.

Curiosity/desire for knowledge appears through inquiry and active engagement with the material but is also evident through more formal choices like the pursuit of academic opportunities (see academics below), travel and engagement with new ideas. The travel component of the Batoto Yetu program plays a pivotal role in developing curiosity. As a Batoto Yetu participant on a trip to Africa observed: “Just having the opportunity to visit Angola was one of those experiences that you wish will never end. Once I came off the plane I felt well connected to the culture, the people and the country because over time as a Batoto Yetu dancer I was constantly taught about the Angolan heritage and history through song, dance and storytelling. So, with that I was able to understand and enjoy where it all started.”
Ashinique followed her brother to Batoto Yetu when she was six years old and he was a drummer in the company. From the outset, she was engaged in the community feeling and Batoto Yetu became her “home away from home” every Saturday from then on.

Ashinique states that she was never the “leadership type” but that being part of the Batoto Yetu family encouraged her to help younger dancers, to welcome and help new dancers integrate into the group and to share the cultural knowledge that Julio has shared with her and her peers. She sees how much she has developed as a leader through this experience and talks about how the Batoto Yetu company are “strong together”.

Perhaps what has influenced her most, though, is the opportunity to travel and the curiosity it has generated in her to learn more about other cultures. As a result, she decided to pursue a Global Studies and Anthropology joint Bachelors/Masters degree program at the New School in New York. She continues to pursue her passion for dance while she studies and finds the support of her Batoto Yetu community invaluable as she pursues her education and looks forward to a career that will allow her to continue to travel and understand other cultures.

A key construct of the Batoto Yetu program is sustained participation. In order to develop the social and emotional traits that will support a successful future for these young people, they need to experience and participate in the community of Batoto Yetu and not simply master dance skills. At current capacity, Batoto Yetu can work with 65-75 participants a year in the pre-professional training and performance program.

Regular participation over the course of the year and consistent participation for several years appears, anecdotally to have greater impact on social emotional learning. For this reason, Batoto Yetu has started to track attendance rates, with records for 2013-14 through 2016-17 documented. Based on the approximately 55-60% average attendance and 35-45% ‘super’ participation per year (participating in more than 75% of activities per year), Batoto Yetu can start to grow capacity strategically to ensure a continued high level of sustained participation.

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<th>ASHINIQUE</th>
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### PARTICIPATION

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<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # Attended</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>16.69</td>
<td>15.43</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average % Attendance</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>57.55%</td>
<td>57.15%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Active Participants*</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Super Participants</td>
<td>43.54%</td>
<td>37.31%</td>
<td>34.37%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Attended at least 2 sessions in the year
** Attended more than 75% of activities

Batoto Yetu has also been able to track specific participants over time to understand engagement from year to year. Based on these records, more than 75% of Batoto Yetu’s participants remain within its programs until graduation.
DEMOGRAPHICS

While Batoto Yetu has a policy of open invitation – opening its programs to all young people regardless of skill or economic capacity – there is certainly a desire to serve children from the African American and Hispanic communities and to provide support to those children who don’t otherwise get these opportunities or develop the social emotional traits that Batoto Yetu nurtures. It is clear that Batoto Yetu is succeeding in reaching this target population as 98% of Batoto Yetu’s participants are of African-American and Hispanic descent.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Academic achievement is, of course, one of the key indicators of success for school-aged children and provides a good predictor of future wellbeing and success. Academic achievement can be argued to be an outcome of a number of the same social emotional traits that Batoto Yetu seeks to nurture and develop (perseverance, curiosity, self-confidence).

Batoto Yetu requires all participants to maintain their grades throughout the school year in order to maintain their activity in the company. Dancers are asked to provide academic reports to verify their status and ensure their ongoing commitment to academic achievement. We know, therefore, that those participating in the Batoto Yetu work are maintaining an acceptable level of academic achievement through the elementary, middle school and high school education as long as they are involved in the program.

More than that, by looking at records from the past several years, Batoto Yetu is succeeding in reaching this target population as 98% of Batoto Yetu’s participants are of African American and Hispanic descent. Tracking the trajectories of every dancer in the program to reflect on both their personal wellbeing and long-term measures of success like graduation, continued education, career success and personal and mental health is not possible for an organization like Batoto Yetu. However, the stories we do have and the change that can be observed in the studio and in performance are indicators of the kind of growth and development Batoto Yetu’s programs create.

SUMMARY

The Batoto Yetu approach and program has been embraced by the community as a vital force for their children. It is, by intention, an intensive intervention into the lives of these children at a pivotal moment for their personal development. Numbers alone cannot adequately tell the story of the impact that this organization has achieved over the past twenty-five years and continues to strive to achieve with new generations of young dancers. Tracking the trajectories of every dancer in the program to reflect on both their personal wellbeing and long-term measures of success like graduation, continued education, career success and personal and mental health is not possible for an organization like Batoto Yetu. However, the stories we do have and the change that can be observed in the studio and in performance are indicators of the kind of growth and development Batoto Yetu’s programs create.

Much of what is documented in this report relates to the pre-professional training and company performance programs as these are the aspects of the work around which Batoto Yetu has the most access to information. Many of the positive impacts of the pre-professional training – from building curiosity through learning about culture and history in an engaging way, to building self-confidence and pride to teaching young people the lessons of perseverance and resilience – would certainly apply to the school residencies as the approach and material are very similar. The school residencies offer an opportunity to not only reach a broader group of participants, they also provide leadership opportunities for program alumni who take on teaching roles and further act as a conduit to connect new dancers to the pre-professional training – from building curiosity through learning about culture and history in an engaging way, to building self-confidence and pride to teaching young people the lessons of perseverance and resilience – would certainly apply to the school residencies as the approach and material are very similar. The school residencies offer an opportunity to not only reach a broader group of participants, they also provide leadership opportunities for program alumni who take on teaching roles and further act as a conduit to connect new dancers to the pre-professional training and performance programs. Working with the schools, Batoto Yetu hopes to be able to apply a new evaluation framework (see below) to tracking and articulating the impact of these programs on students in New York’s public schools.

In the years to come, there is the potential to meaningfully impact more young people through all of the programs at Batoto Yetu as these program participants share in their feedback to the question “How has Batoto Yetu made you a better person?”

“I really had no idea what I was doing or what I was capable of until I came to Batoto at a very pivotal age where I was still discovering not only myself but the world and environment around me. For the first time in my life I knew what it meant to be passionate and dedicated to something. So, while all my friends were spending their weekends doing their own thing, I was watching the trains from Brooklyn to the City to do something that I grew to love very, very much and that was DANCE!”

“In the years to come, there is the potential to meaningfully impact more young people through all of the programs at Batoto Yetu as these program participants share in their feedback to the question “How has Batoto Yetu made you a better person?”

“Julio and Batoto Yetu taught me to be confident and how to channel all my energy into something positive. I came to Batoto at a very pivotal age where I was still discovering not only myself but the world and environment around me. For the first time in my life I knew what it meant to be passionate and dedicated to something. So, while all my friends were spending their weekends doing their own thing, I was watching the trains from Brooklyn to the City to do something that I grew to love very, very much and that was DANCE!”

“Batoto Yetu has helped me feel very positive about myself not only as a person but as a dancer. Growing up I was an extremely shy individual who really didn’t say or do much. But, once I started dancing with the company it helped me develop character and a higher self-esteem through dance, song and interacting with other kids - some that might face the same challenges as myself. It also gave me a chance to become better aware of the African culture that was limited through public school system in New York.”

“I have become the person I want to be because of all the people who have supported me in my journey while dancing at Batoto Yetu. We are not just a dance company, we are a family filled with love and happiness.”

“It has made me a better person because I’ve learned to be patient, thankful, and to strive to do better if I’m not picked or don’t have an opportunity to go to a show. I’ve also learned to help others and take critiques and apply them to my dancing in order to make me better.”
"I love this family and can’t wait to see the many more amazing things we are going to do!"