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Leap Studios is the first area dance studio to earn industry safety certification

Leap Studios is the first dance studio in the region to achieve Youth Protection Advocates in Dance certification. The certification marks its commitment to keeping kids happy, healthy and safe in dance.

YPAD is the only dance certification program focusing on both safety and wellness for dance students. To earn the designation, studios must complete two training tracks. The first track centers on dance safety and educational best practices. It focuses on background checks, CPR and First Aid, abuse awareness and prevention, injury prevention and response, and safety and emergency preparedness. The second focuses on the wellness and development of youth dancers and covers social media, social media safety, today's dance culture, developmentally appropriate artistry, body image, nutrition, disordered eating, bullying, and conflict resolution. Only studios that complete both tracks are eligible for certification.

"We want to do more than just teach great dance at Leap Studios," said studio owner Jill Williams. "We want to help develop healthy, happy dancers in an environment that focuses on the well-being of kids. Of course, this also helps us contribute to a sustainable, safe future for dance overall."

"One of the many great qualities we are recognizing about this generation of youth is their compassion for self and others, and their desire to learn, express and accept themselves and others for who they are. They have a greater awareness and appreciation of the diversity of social constructs given their connectivity to the world, largely through social media," Jill adds. "We owe them the opportunity to learn in a creative field that honors their age and ideals, and considers that they are wise and savvy, and they wish to be their age. There is no need to mature at any accelerated pace, particularly through the storytelling concepts that dance choreography produces. When a chosen song, costume or dance choreography is suggestive or too mature for their age experience, children are being undermined and disrespected, frankly. As a parent and dance educator, I am proud to hold up Leap Studios' practices to a third-party evaluation - YPAD - to ensure we are consistent, and that parents and students can count on us to do what we say we are going to do."

Leap Studios was created in 2013 to provide an unparalleled dance education experience that elevated the practice of physical, emotional and social safety. Recognizing that dance studios operate in an unregulated industry without an overseeing governing entity to monitor conduct, studio owner Jill Williams sought to find the most current evidence-backed and knowledge-based practices on which to build Leap Studios' mandate. In August 2017, Jill and her faculty team certified with YPAD, and shortly after, Jill joined the YPAD organization as a volunteer Board Member. Since YPAD's transition to new leadership in 2019, Jill remains as a volunteer Advisory Panel Member of the organization.

Leap Studios provides dance education to youth using proven methods in the specialties of Ballet, Jazz, Tap, Acrobatic Dance, and more. Leap Studios is home to over 300 dancers and operates in the community of the Summit of Montreux in south west Calgary. Leap Studios offers recreational dance and performance opportunities to all levels of ability, with a healthy quality of life balance so that students still have ample time for family and school activities. While the studio is still young, Leap Studios students will grow to become whatever they want to be in life, with their experience in learning at Leap Studios about dance, self and the greater world providing a solid foundation for a healthy body and mind for life.

YPAD was founded in Los Angeles in 2012 by hip hop professional Leslie Scott Zanovitch and her husband Joseph Zanovitch as a response to negative trends toward commodifying and exploiting youth and adults in performing arts. In 2014, industry professional Misty Lown became its visionary sponsor, and her More Than Just Great Dancing affiliation program became YPAD's first certified organization. Lown's studio, Misty's Dance Unlimited, also became YPAD's first certified dance studio. YPAD leadership transitioned to Lown in 2019. The Zanovitches today continue to serve on YPAD's advisory panel.

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