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Social Innovation – Driving Social Change
Where innovation and the social sector converge

By Dawn S. Reese, Chief Executive Officer, The Wooden Floor

Today’s social sector challenges in Orange County such as poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, and education opportunity gaps are very complex issues, and require nonprofit executive leaders and board of directors to bring innovative solutions and a discipline to implementing best practices around design-thinking, collaboration, experiential execution, and continual impact evaluation. Where do innovation and the social sector converge? This is what leaders in the field call social innovation. It is the ability to create market-based approaches to benefit society by either creating new solutions to social welfare issues, or to re-engineer a program or organization to remain relevant and meet the needs of the community.

The Wooden Floor has evolved over the last 35 years into one of the nation’s leading social innovators, and is one of the foremost creative youth development nonprofit organizations in the country. Serving over 90,000 young people through year-round and community engagement programs since 1983, we believe our strategic solution for today's greatest social challenges is to transform the lives of young people in low-income communities through the power of dance and access to higher education. In Orange County, and through national licensed partners, we do this by using a long-term approach grounded in exploratory dance education strategically integrated with academic tutoring, college and career readiness, and family support services to foster the confidence and gifts within each child to innovate, communicate, and collaborate – 21st Century skills necessary for success in school and in life. 100 percent of students who graduate from The Wooden Floor immediately enroll in higher education. Our students become change agents and beacons of hope within their own families, their neighborhoods, our community and our world.

For our efforts, The Wooden Floor was honored with the 2015 Leadership Circle Award by YMCA. Then, they asked if we would like to be honored and support organizations poised to drive social change and progress. Recipients of this award are organizations adept at growing their impact and demonstrating ingenuity, while maintaining their quality and increasing their results.*

Due to the holistic and integrated approach of The Wooden Floor’s creative youth development model, we are provided with a unique lens to be a part of county-wide forums and idea exchanges on K-12 education tied to social-emotional-learning, college and career readiness to close the achievement gap, and workforce development trends in the time of burgeoning artificial intelligence. We find the one through-line in all of these forums: to prepare under-served children to achieve social and economic equity in an ever-evolving, automated and creative economy.

It is evident that The Wooden Floor’s specific student development outcomes will align with the Orange County Department of Education’s goal to foster the 5 Cs of: Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Creativity, and Character in order to prepare students for their futures. At The Wooden Floor, we believe we foster a sixth C: Courage. This will be further validated by our own 10-year Longitudinal Study 2014-2024 titled: From here you can see anywhere - Dance as a Developmental Catalyst. Being focused and intentional about how programming advances those traits and skill sets prepares our students for the “Fourth Industrial Revolution” workforce wherein human interests intersect with artificial intelligence.

When dance is used as the means of social change, innovation flourishes into courageous life-changing outcomes for the children we serve, and moves The Wooden Floor’s exciting mission forward, which helps move our community forward.

To learn about the ways you can make a difference in The Wooden Floor’s plans to grow and impact even more young people in Orange County, please contact Dawn S. Reese, Chief Executive Officer at (714) 541-8314 ext. 110 or Info@TheWoodenFloor.org.

Dawn S. Reese
Dawn S. Reese, Chief Executive Officer of The Wooden Floor, which was recently awarded the 2018 Best Places to Work by the Orange County Business Journal, received the 2016 New York Life Foundation AIM High AfterSchool Award for Middle School Programming, and featured in the Stanford Social Innovation Review Magazine, summer 2017. Reese received the 2016 Center for Leadership Award for Innovation from California State University Fullerton and the 2015 Difference Makers Award for Small Nonprofit Person of the Year from the Santa Ana Chamber of Commerce. Reese serves on the Board of Directors for Orange County Music and Dance, and OneOC where she is also the Chairperson for the Nonprofit Advisory Council (2017-2019). She also serves on the Board of Advisors for the Center for Leadership - Mihaylo College of Business at California State University, Fullerton and Advisory Committees for DifferenceMakersOC, Institute for Influential Community Impact, and Orange County Business Council's Latino Education Attainment Committee. Reese is an author, coach/mentor, consultant, and international conference presenter on the topics of strategic planning, board governance, leadership development, and creative youth development. www.TheWoodenFloor.org Twitter: @DawnSReese