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Shawn Short is a 2012 Individual Artist Grantee from DCCAH for the Dawn 2012 Project

Washington, D.C. – At a time when employment opportunities are scarce, and even fewer for black young men, there is a program emerging that aims to provide mentorship and a space for them to explore their holistic well-being. Inspired by the LIFT project of Atlanta, GA, the Dawn Project--a program created by Shawn Short of Washington D.C.--meets young African-American boys and men where they are, affirms their interests, and builds their artistic and entrepreneurial leadership.

"The art of dance allows one to imagine and execute innovative ways of navigating space and time with the principal resources being oneself and one's cohort. The business of dance forces one to articulate vision in a cogent manner, ever-challenging and developing skills to explore creativity in the face of adversity."

The program provides artistic and practical work experience in dance and arts administration with leadership development and mentorship by responsible Black men. Dawn 2012 affords aspiring Black male dancers, ages 16-26 living in the Washington, DC area, to bridge their interests in dance to the broader business field and civic engagement. By engaging participants in all aspects of the art and business of dance, dance serves as a catalyst to positively impact their personal lives and communities; thus, dance becomes a metaphor for their lives as they rehearse and perform creative solutions for sustainability in a tough economy.

Speaking of the program, Eddie Jeffries, one of its participants said, "I feel I will benefit well from working here. I discovered that I need a lot more work on technique and understanding vocabulary."

Participants are given core elements for success: a set schedule, clear expectations and consistent support from positive role models in achieving wellness and time management. In the process, they build life skills through teamwork that are essential to achieve a great performance, to excel academically, and to earn a living wage.

"We'd like to thank Lionel, Executive Director of DCCAH, along with Ebony Blanks and staff for their belief in the Dawn project, our African American young men's initiative", says Artistic Director Shawn Short.

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Dissonance Dance Theatre (DDT) is a Washington, DC-based contemporary dance company with ballet at its core that challenges what audiences assume about the human experience. For more information on DDT, visit www.ddtdc.com