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Former OU Pom Leader Opens Free Dance Program for Kids With Special Needs

There are 11 children with special needs who are getting the opportunity to experience something many kids never get the chance to enjoy, and it's all because of a former University of Oklahoma Pom captain.

In fact, it was OU Pom that gave Kristen Privette the opportunity to discover her calling.

"I've always wanted to help people in a direct way," Privette said. "While on OU Pom ... we got to volunteer at the Special Olympics. I think that was the first initial spark when I discovered that I really like the special needs community. They're so open and loving. They're themselves 100 percent, and I love that about them."

A separate appearance with the squad took Privette to Prom Night - an annual event for patients at Children's Hospi-

tal at OU Medical Center.

Today, Privette is a licensed physical therapist, and she now works at Children's Hospital.

As a result of all of her experience with Special Olympics and at Children's Hospital, Privette started a dance class last year that was specifically designed for students with special needs. Fittingly, Privette established the class at the same studio where she learned to dance as a 4-year-old.

"The studio has been so great," Privette said. "I grew up here."

When Privette approached Dancenter about the project, studio director Lori Hays Elder embraced the idea immediately, and she agreed to donate the studio time for the program that Privette has named "A Chance to Dance."

"I've always dreamed of creating a class like this, but I was always a little afraid to do it," Privette said. "And going through school for physical therapy, I realized that these kids don't always get the same opportunities as those that are typically developing.

"Now that I have that skill-set to help them - I see those kids on a daily basis at work - I feel like it's my duty to do that for them."

Privette also has help in her assistant Madi Galier, who she met at OU. When Madi was a freshman at OU, Privette was her OU Pom captain. Galier, a former Westmoore High School graduate, will graduate from OU this month.

"She does this just out of the goodness of her heart," Privette said. "Neither of us get paid for it, and I mean, that's the way I like it."

A Chance to Dance started with its first class in August 2018, and it now has 11 students coming from as far away as

Harrah, Hobart and Lindsey. They also have a waiting list with about 20 other students.

Privette said she is on the lookout for the right person to help her and Galier teach dance to as many children as possible.

The rest of the students at Dancenter by Lori are getting involved, too. They have begun raising money to help provide A Chance to Dance students with costumes and shoes so they will be able to participate in the studio's annual recital.

The recital will take place June 22 at The Nancy O'Brien Performing Arts Center in Norman. It is open to the public, and — like the class — it is free to attend.

For more information about A Chance to Dance, contact Dancenter by Lori at 595-7037 or Kristen Privette at kristin.privette@yahoo.com. Dancenter by Lori is at 1901 N Moore Ave., in Moore. — **19SM**

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