



## Gyms closed? Stay safe, in-shape, and inspired – while helping people in need

By Janet Reineck, Executive Director,  
World Dance for Humanity. Photos courtesy of WDFH

When the COVID-19 lockdown began last March, World Dance for Humanity (WDFH), a Santa Barbara nonprofit organization, wasted no time in organizing free daily classes on Zoom to help people cope with the isolation and inertia that was creeping into everyone's lives. We've offered the class every day since then – that's 300 classes in a row, all for free, as a benefit to our community.

The class is designed for people of all ages and abilities - from those with limited mobility who take the class sitting down, to those who make it their own low-impact dance party, to experienced dancers getting a full-body workout. Whatever their background or agility level, they depend on this daily dose of exercise, fun, and community to help them stay sane and in-shape, passionate and purposeful.

Part of what keeps them motivated is the great music. Each day is a new musical journey: from Mambo to Motown, Ragtime to Rock n' Roll, music from Africa to Ireland, Salsa to Swing.

The classes are free, but most dancers make donations in appreciation of their daily dance adventure. WDFH has used every penny to help people here at home - and halfway around the world.

Locally, the class contributions have gone to Food Bank of Santa Barbara County and 805UndocuFund, which serves undocumented workers and their families.

Donations also support humanitarian aid in Rwanda, where the nonprofit is helping 12,000 people in 28 rural cooperatives lift themselves out of poverty. Last summer, the funds were used to bring emergency food relief to 6,000 Rwandans facing starvation in the wake of COVID shutdowns and failed crops. Now they're being used for education, giving 300 Rwandan high school and college students the chance to go to school.

Prior to founding WDFH, Ms. Reineck led rural development projects for Oxfam and International Rescue Committee in Kosovo (former Yugoslavia) and directed fundraising for Santa Barbara's Direct Relief International and the National Disaster Search Dog Foundation in Santa Paula. She began teaching World Dance classes in 2010, offering dancers and non-dancers alike a chance to experience other cultures while helping communities in need. In 2013, World Dance became World Dance for Humanity, supporting Rwandan communities through donations of livestock, education, training and business development. The program is very personal, direct and highly successful. Thanks to an annual grant that covers the organization's minimal operational costs, 100% of all designated donations go to the people they serve in Rwanda – not a penny to overhead.

Ms. Reineck says, "When I started the Zoom classes, I never imagined they would become so much more than a daily workout. They're a wake-up call to gratitude, a chance to experience our shared humanity during these challenging times. The music, movement, and message have helped us all cope with everything going on in our country and our world. We come together each day to celebrate life, feel compassion for the world, and be of service to people struggling to survive." Lorian Mastromarino, a Santa Barbara teacher involved with WDFH shares that, "Moving into teaching at home was a big undertaking that came with a lot of stress. Knowing I could dance each day and escape the stress for a while helped me to get through those days of having to create a new way of teaching. I have SO enjoyed being able to move my body, participate in a bit of beauty, listen to great music, and be a part of a live community of dancers, inspiring me to live in joy and gratitude each day!"

To learn more about WDFH, visit the website at [world-danceforhumanity.org](http://world-danceforhumanity.org).