

MindLeaps

A Global Educational Model for At-Risk Youth



Dining for Women “Building Our Bodies and Our Lives”

Interim Progress Report

Nouakchott, Mauritania

December 31, 2019

A message to Dining for Women members and donors:

From international coordinators to dance instructors, the staff of MindLeaps is so grateful to Dining for Women for its profound support of women and girls enrolled in our health and educational program in Mauritania. Through your support, we have greatly exceeded our goals in improving learning skills, psychosocial health, nutrition, and access to education for vulnerable girls. In this report, we are excited to share with you the progress we have made and the improvement in these girls' lives which is clearly evident from over 285,000 data points we have collected and analyzed in Tracker, our monitoring and evaluation system demonstrating behavioral change. Moreover, we have exceeded our school enrollment rate, and a ripple effect is already starting in the community of El-Mina: families and leaders are saying, “I see our girls have hopes and plans now.” We look forward to updating you at the program's conclusion and thank you again for your difference-making support.

1. *Please provide the following information:*
 - a. *Organization Name:* **MindLeaps**
 - b. *Project Title:* **Building Our Bodies and Our Lives**
 - c. *Grant Amount:* **\$47,840**
 - d. *Contact Person:* **Rebecca Davis**
 - e. *Address:* **email – davis@mindleaps.org; physical – 315 W. 36th Street, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10018**

2. *Recap briefly what outcomes the project was designed to achieve.*

This project provides a dance-based program to attract 120 of the most vulnerable girls in the capital city of Nouakchott, Mauritania to a safe space. By visibly changing the lives of these girls, a shift in the community will begin that encourages households to support the advancement of girls. Ultimately, over time, the community will see reduced levels of child marriage and increased levels of female literacy as the program continues after the initial one-year project supported by Dining For Women (DFW).

There are three specific outcomes this project was expected to generate:

- 1) the formal education of 50 vulnerable girls;
- 2) documented, quantitative improvement in learning skills and psychosocial health of 120 vulnerable girls; and
- 3) increased nutritional health of 120 girls over 12 months.

3. *Has funding changed for this project? For example, have you received unexpected funding from another source?*

Funding for the project has not changed, though we continue to cultivate future funders to ensure the program's sustainability. MindLeaps has applied for a grant from the US Embassy in Nouakchott to continue and expand the program launched through Dining for Women. We have two meetings set with different branches of the Embassy for January 3 and 6 to determine future funding. Intensive recruitment for school sponsors will start in 2020 after we have received Term 1 school reports. Our partner, SOS Pairs Educateurs, may be able to allocate some funding from a BP grant already received. MindLeaps also intends to partner with SOS Pairs Educateurs to seek funding from UNICEF within Mauritania.

4. *Is your organization or project situation different than presented in the approved proposal? For example, new executive director, significant project staffing changes or NGO affiliation, loss of large funding, or other significant changes?*

MindLeaps has experienced no significant changes in the organization or project from the way it was presented in the approved proposal.

5. *Have the number of beneficiaries changed? To report this please refer to the original numbers in your grant proposal under Number of women and girls Directly Impacted and population Indirectly Impacted.*

According to the approved proposal, we identified 120 women and girls directly impacted and 600 women and children indirectly impacted. The number of these beneficiaries has not changed, though we are pleased to report that the level of services offered to them has deepened. This will be described further below.

6. *What challenges are you facing as you move forward with this project? How are you approaching these challenges?*

In our original proposal, we identified two potential challenges: oversubscription to the program (too many girls would attempt to sign up) and the safety of international colleagues participating in the program. In fact, we have not experienced these challenges thanks to the credibility and strength of our local partner, SOS Pairs Educateurs. We are particularly glad that safety is not an issue because we are anxious to welcome visitors to our program site in El Mina, Nouakchott to see the profound results for themselves.

We did encounter two challenges. Given that the vast majority of Mauritians are Muslim, the holy month of Ramadan created significant disruption in the schedule. In 2019, Ramadan fell just a few weeks after the program launch with the enrolled girls. While we cannot avoid schedule disruption entirely, we can integrate it into our schedule in the future in a way that minimizes postponing or canceling classes.

Second, we also underestimated the amount of technical assistance (e.g. follow-up visits) we should plan for from the International Team after launch. We realized our local team in Mauritania needed more support to manage Tracker, our custom-built M&E system. We are addressing that by preparing our new Technical Director to replace the Executive Director on some follow-up visits, adding more capacity on the international side.

7. *Have you revised your original objectives since the program began? If so, why? What are your new objectives?*

While we have not revised our objectives, we have exceeded them significantly – this will be described below.

8. *What progress have you made toward achieving your objectives? Please address each stated objective.*

We are pleased to report that MindLeaps has significantly surpassed targets in each of the three dimensions of this project – education, psychosocial health, and nutrition. This has been achieved on a faster timeline than initially forecast, with most of the goals being reached before the 12-month period concludes. The work has also been accomplished with a gender ratio favoring women. Of the 20 people working on the project, 11 are women who feature primarily in roles that have the most contact with the girls enrolled in the program, including two of the three lead dance instructors and the education coordinator. Our progress in each of the goal areas is described below.

Education

Objective: Enroll 50 girls in formal education by the end of the program.

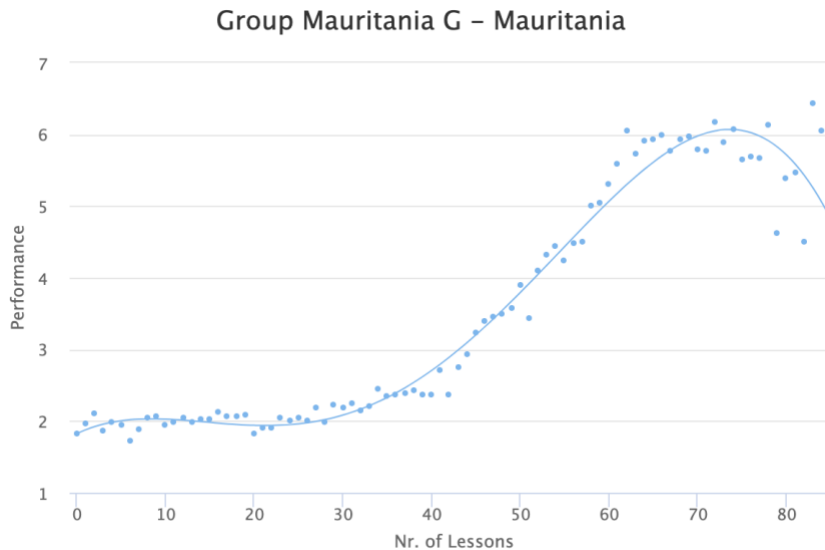
Progress: We will be exceeding the target by 150%, as 75 girls will be enrolled in formal education. This is being accomplished for the same amount of money that was initially budgeted in the grant for school enrollment fees. The additional 25 older girls will be enrolled in vocational education in January 2020 that will equip them with income-generating skills. Their entry into formal education comes at a critical point after their completion of the program, as they would otherwise face hard choices, such as prostitution, in order to survive. Vocational training will unlock opportunities to earn a living with dignity and safety.

Psychosocial Health

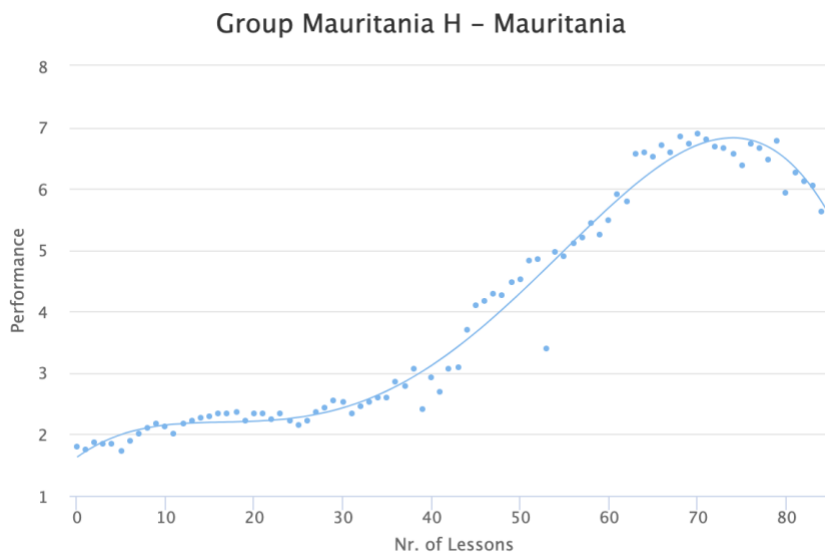
Objective: 120 vulnerable girls will each receive 72 hours of life skills training through the MindLeaps dance program.

Progress: We have exceeded the target number of hours by 236%, as 124 vulnerable girls each received 170 hours of life skills training through the MindLeaps dance program. We had initially planned to rotate 30 girls through the program in four cohorts, with each cohort running in consecutive 12-week segments with three lessons per week (for 36 two-hour lessons total). Thanks to the generous in-kind donation of space from our local partner, SOS Pairs Educateurs, we were able to run all four cohorts simultaneously by using the hall morning and afternoon, six days per week. Since we had already reserved the space for several months to run the cohorts consecutively, we decided it was in the best interests of the girls enrolled to stay in the program for as long as possible. Thus, the girls participated in dance training for 28 weeks each over seven months for a total of 85 lessons (170 hours) each. MindLeaps generated the funding to cover the additional cost to pay the African dance instructors for more of their time.

The improvement of the girls in the seven life skills that are part of the dance curriculum – memorization, language, discipline (“respect and tolerance”), grit, self-esteem, teamwork, and creativity – are shown via the graphs below.

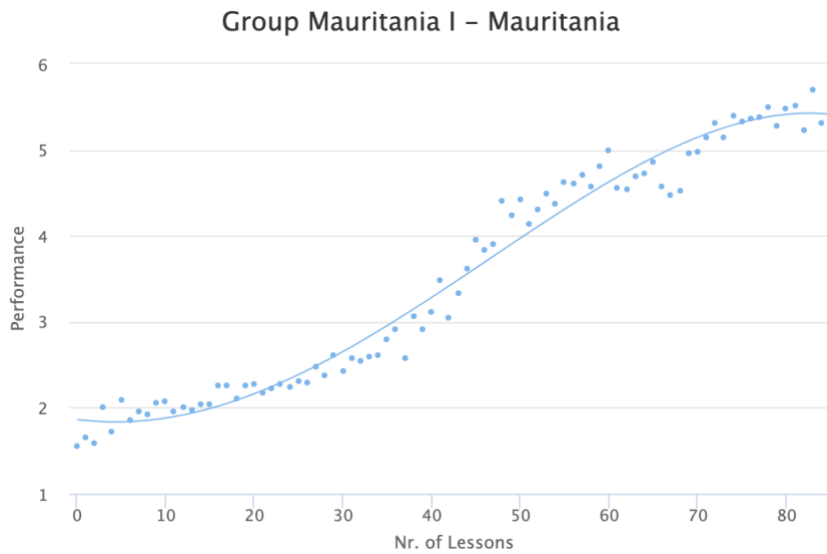


This graph shows that Group G’s averaged composite scores across all seven skills started at 1.82 and peaked at 6.07 on a 7-point scale for an improvement of 4.25 points.

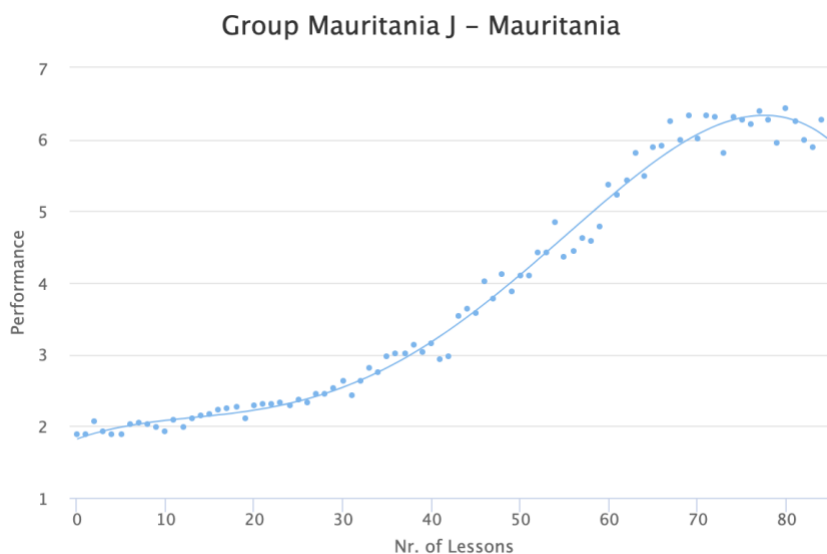


This graph shows that Group H’s averaged composite scores across all seven skills started at 1.62 and peaked at 6.83 on a 7-point scale for an improvement of 5.21 points.

One can observe that the regression for these two groups drops somewhat between lessons 70 and 80. That point in the graph coincides with the moment in October 2019 that the girls were informed they would be starting school the next month – many for the first time in their lives. The resulting excitement and anxieties (that any of us would have in such a situation) correlates with the dip in performance toward the end of their time in the program. No such drop in the regression is evident for Groups I and J because they have not yet been informed that they will be enrolled in vocational education in January.



This graph shows that Group I's averaged composite scores across all seven skills started at 1.86 and peaked at 5.42 on a 7-point scale for an improvement of 3.56 points.



This graph shows that Group J's averaged composite scores across all seven skills started at 1.82 and peaked at 6.34 on a 7-point scale for an improvement of 4.52 points.

The life-skills improvement evident in these girls is as profound as any we have seen across our other programs in Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, and Guinea. Another noteworthy observation is that in most of our programs, the participants peak around 12 weeks. The girls in our Mauritania program peaked much later, which affirms the decision to keep them in the program for longer, even at considerable extra cost to MindLeaps.

Nutrition

Objective: 120 girls will be fed with a full meal program, 3 days per week for 3 months; 120 girls will receive nutritional supplements and clean water daily for 12 months.

Progress: All 124 girls enrolled in the dance program received the full meal program and access to clean water for the entire 7 months they were enrolled. This significantly surpassed the target, which would have provided meals for 3 months before shifting to a nutritional supplement for the remainder of the program timeline. The decision to provide the full meal program was made in correlation with the decision to keep the girls enrolled in the dance curriculum for 7 months instead of 3. The access to quality nutrition and calories was essential, given their physical activity in the program.

9. *Do you anticipate any difficulties in completing your project in the timeframe outlined in your proposal?*

We do not anticipate any difficulties in completing the project in the timeframe outlined in the proposal. Rather, we have by now completed most of the program activities and achieved the objectives. The remaining programmatic activities are to follow the girls through school and evaluate the program. Below is an outline of the timeline we have followed:

March 18, 2019 – Train The Trainers started

- 21 youth trainers participated
- We selected 10 to receive stipends and continue with us after 1 month of training – 5 females, 5 males
- Trainers completed 284 hours of training by June (average of 28 hours per week)

April 15, 2019 – Enrolled girls in the program

- 4 groups of 30 girls each – all four cohorts ran at once

November/December 2019 – 50 girls enrolled in formal education

- School year changeover is in October in Mauritania

January 2020 – 25 more girls will be enrolled in vocational training

Additional Notes

**A detailed list of expenses is provided via the attached spreadsheet which shows the budgeted figures versus actual spending thus far.

**Several photos are embedded in the report on the subsequent pages. High-resolution versions will be uploaded to the Dropbox. MindLeaps has secured the right and consent from each of the program participants for public use of the photos.



Above: Our program is set in El Mina, one of the poorest areas of Nouakchott – the capital city of Mauritania.



Above: We conducted home visits to raise awareness of the program and build trust with families of the girls who would enroll in the program.



Above: Any initial apprehensions gave way to smiles and the joy of dancing thanks to the work of our talented trainers and dance instructors.



Above: Our kinesthetic curriculum was designed by professional educators and dancers to improve cognitive skills and social and emotional learning. We saw a dramatic improvement in the girls enrolled in the program.