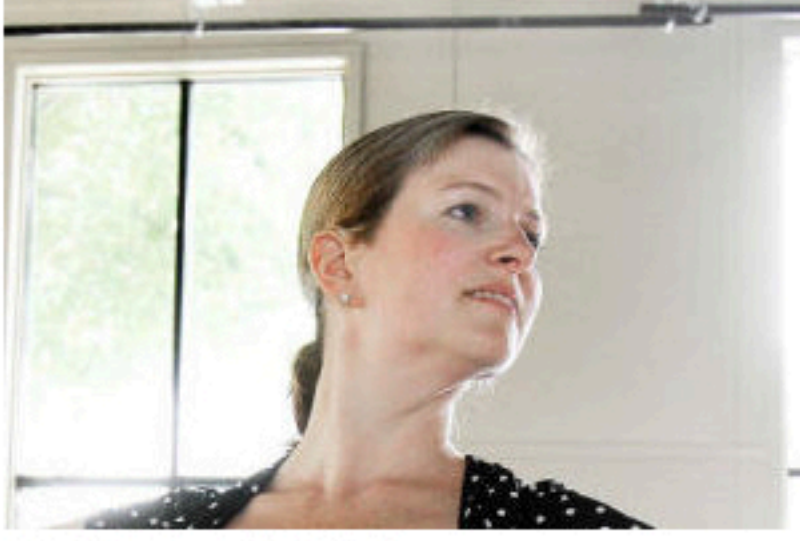


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Keene woman has a passion for dance

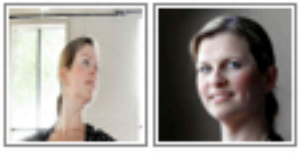


Michael Moore Sentinel Staff

Keene woman has a passion for dance

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Danielle Fitzpatrick at MoCo Arts.



Posted: Saturday, June 21, 2014 8:00 am

By Joan Geary Contributing Writer

Danielle Fitzpatrick has been dancing every day since she took her first ballet lesson at the age of 6.

Today, she's a dance/movement therapist and dance teacher, with students in the Monadnock Region from toddlers to nonagenarians.

Fitzpatrick, now 39, has never looked for a job. She's never even sent out a resume. Instead, organizations have sought her out, and she readily obliges. Often that means working seven days per week.

"I breathe, eat and sleep my work," she said. "It's not work for me. It's my passion and my joy. I'm so lucky. I've been blessed."

For the past 15 years, she's worked at MoCo Arts, a Keene-based nonprofit arts organization. She's director of the young arts department for children 18 months to 2nd grade. Besides teaching creative dance classes, writing and directing children's plays for performance theater, she directs summer and vacation camps. She also teaches ballet for children, teens and adults in the dance department.

Along with that, she's a teaching artist with the New Hampshire Dance Institute. The nonprofit organization offers year-long, summer and in-school programs for young dancers in grades 4 to 8 in schools throughout the Monadnock Region. Fitzpatrick is artist-in-residence at Chesterfield School, with 41 students on her dance team.

She also spends a lot of time in the theater. Between her work for MoCo and the dance institute, she just finished four consecutive weekends of shows. The final was last weekend when she led 135 dancers under the age of 8 in MoCo Arts' creative dance festival based on the "Harold and the Purple Crayon" series of children's books. Eight performances were staged, with four casts doing two shows each.

"It allows the kids to make a mistake during the first show, and go back and fix it for the second, and make it a success," she said. "Some kids chicken out for the first show, but do the second show. I always insist that every program I do has multiple opportunities for success for the children."

"We play to their strengths, encourage their success and find ways for them to shine," she said. "Organizations like MoCo Arts and NHDl are so creative themselves that they allow me the freedom to think outside the box."

But, wait, there's more.

Through MoCo Arts, she does a weekly children's dance/movement class at the Montessori Schoolhouse of Cheshire County. She also does a monthly program at the Cheshire Children's Museum.

A registered dance therapist, she specializes in geriatric care. She conducts regular sessions at area nursing facilities including The Woodward Home in Keene and Maplewood Nursing Home in Westmoreland. She's worked at the nursing home for 15 years, leading five weekly groups, including Alzheimer's and dementia therapy.

"It's incredibly rewarding," she said. "A resident may not remember their own name, but they remember the words to a song."

"I've learned so much," she said. "You learn what's important in life. What's going to matter in the long run. What it's all going to boil down to."

Longtime friend Cheryl Greeley of Dublin says Fitzpatrick makes a difference in the lives of everyone she meets.

"Danielle is a confidence-builder in both the young and the mature alike," she said. "She really brings out the best in others. She always goes above and beyond what is expected of her. She's the most positive, sincere and confident person I've ever met. She just radiates positivity. She loves what she does and it shows."

Fitzpatrick's a longtime Keene resident, but grew up in Granby, Mass., a small town near Springfield. She was the youngest of seven children, and painfully shy. Her parents, both teachers, enrolled her in dance class when she was in 1st grade to help her gain self-confidence.

"I never stopped," she said. "I never took a year off since I was 6. But, I never truly loved the stage. I never had a passion to perform. I wanted to find another way to use my talent."

In 10th grade, she found her answer when she read a newspaper article about a woman using dance/movement therapy to help breast cancer patients. It was a "eureka" moment.

She showed up unannounced at a local conference of professional dance therapists to find out about the career.

"I asked just about everyone there, 'How do I become a dance therapist and do what you do?' It was just so right for me," she said. "I met a rep from (Antioch University New England in Keene), and said, 'OK, that's where I'll go to grad school.'"

After high school, she enrolled in the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, the academic honor society. She graduated in 1996 with a 4.0 grade point average, and a degree in psychology. While there, she met fellow student Joel Fitzpatrick. They relocated to Keene so she could attend grad school at Antioch.

In 1999, they married, and later had two daughters, Fiona and Lily, now in elementary school. Joel Fitzpatrick is director of finance at Monadnock Developmental Services, the social services agency.

In 2000, she graduated from Antioch with a master's degree in dance/movement therapy and counseling. Dance/movement therapy is a type of psychotherapy that mainly uses movement to promote the healing and well-being of the individual. It's a relatively new but rapidly growing field.

"It takes someone who's not afraid of forming their own journey. I wasn't fearful of 'Oh my god, will I get a job?' I just knew. The places I started working straight out of grad school, I'm still working there now."

Fitzpatrick started at MoCo Arts as a grad student. She took an adult ballet class, and was invited to substitute-teach, and subsequently teach, classes for both adults and children. That was 15 years ago. In 2010, she was named director of the young arts department, and teaches 15 classes per week. She's now been at MoCo Arts longer than any other staff member.

"My goal is to help families with young children, 2nd grade and younger, find a welcoming place at MoCo Arts," she said. "I have a real strong desire for families to feel part of MoCo Arts. I love working with the young children here."

Reagan Messer, MoCo's artistic director for dance, says Fitzpatrick brings a lot to the organization.

"Danielle is incredible," he said. "The energy she brings into the studio, the rapport she has with the children — it's something you just don't see very often. She has the patience and understanding for kids that age. They start with her at 18 months, and the next thing we know we're saying goodbye to them as graduating high school seniors. They stay with us because she ignites in them the love of the arts."

If that's not enough, Fitzpatrick still found the time to teach a dance therapy/movement course at Springfield (Mass.) College as adjunct faculty member during the past academic year. She's also advancing her own education by working toward advanced credentials as a board certified dance therapist. It's a lengthy process that requires both a thesis and board review. She hopes to complete it by January 2015.

"I'll have plenty of time to nap and watch TV later when I'm living at the nursing home," she said. "Right now I'll fill my life with the things I'm passionate about. I'll catch up on my rest later."