



**Contemporary dancers from the New York-based Limon Dance Company take the children of KwaXimba Daycare Centre through a set of fundamental contemporary dance techniques yesterday.** PICTURE: MOTSHWARI MOFOKENG

## Visiting US dancers get local kids' feet stamping

**SAMKELO MTSHALI**

THE US Consulate yesterday committed to partner with Durban and Coastal Mental Health in a quest to assist them in building strong ties with prominent dance companies in Durban.

Durban and Coastal Mental Health (DCMH) is an organisation which, among a variety of community-based projects, has an interest in dance, drama, and live arts for people with disabilities.

It boasts seven-day care centres for children with intellectual disabilities, where they are schooled for five days and where their special needs are catered for.

A collaboration between DCMH and Dance Motion USA, a programme of the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, yesterday saw children

with intellectual disabilities from the KwaXimba Happy Hours Daycare Centre and a similar centre in Hammarsdale, benefit from a cultural skills exchange session with the internationally acclaimed, New York-based Limon Dance Company.

Discussions between the US Consulate and Dance Motion USA in a quest to engage with differently abled youth in South Africa last October, resulted in DCMH being selected as the South African partner in a cultural exchange programme.

Mark Carr, the Public Affairs Officer at the US Consulate, said that the role of the Limon Dance Company, under the Dance Motion USA programme, was to do outreach programmes and take their brand of dancing to various partners in KwaZulu-Natal and to share ideas with trained

local dancers.

"We do this because in the past, the traditional cultural exchange programmes used to be only staged in the capital of the country, where there would be formal performances," Carr said.

He added that it was difficult for people in remote rural areas, and people like the children at KwaXimba Happy Hours, to be exposed to the arts, because "it is rare that they might see contemporary dance or visiting dance artists from other countries".

"The reason they are here; and not in a big theatre in Gauteng, is that they want to come out to the people and exchange their culture with them one on one," Carr said.

The executive director of DCMH, Gita Harie, said: "These are children that are not accepted in mainstream

schools, so it is really important that we slowly start lobbying for inclusive education. However, we believe live arts is very important as part of the package of psychosocial rehabilitation and stimulation."

As part of the cultural exchange session, the children of KwaXimba performed traditional Zulu routines which had their American visitors enthralled. The Limon dancers also showed the locals a set of captivating fundamental contemporary dance techniques.

Londiwe Dlamini, the KwaXimba Daycare Co-ordinator, said that when the children performed, they enjoyed stamping their feet, beating to the rhythms of music and clapping their hands.

This, she said, gave them hope to aspire to reach professional dance standards.