

Isabella Kates
Albert Hill Middle School
Richmond

"My passion for dance and culture focuses on serving the community and making our world a better place."

–Ana Ines King

Ana Ines King founded the Latin Ballet of Virginia to educate our community about Latin culture, history, and dance and her company is thriving. She has used her passions for Latin dance and culture to create dance programs for exceptional education and lower income students. Mrs. King is a great role model and mentor. Since learning about her story, it has inspired me to use my passion to influence and improve the lives of people. I volunteered with special needs students in fourth and fifth grade during the school year and during summer school in 2015. I have loved doing it and it has changed my life. When I started middle school, I wanted to continue volunteering. I started working with Mrs. Siddall in 6th grade. She is a special needs teacher who serves in the middle school community by exceling at her job and going way above and beyond the requirements. She opens up opportunities for her students they wouldn't have before. For example, Mrs. Siddall took her kids to Target to learn about prices and shopping. She teaches them real world skills to apply to independent living along with academic subjects, such as math and science. She cares about her students more than any other teacher I've met and she even got into the newspaper for her awesome work. Mrs. Siddall inspired me to create a program that I named "Connections." It pairs her students with general education students to foster relationships and build peer bonding. Mrs. Siddall's students don't have many occasions to socialize with kids in their grade, so this is a great chance to give all students an opportunity to interact and learn from each other. It benefits the mainstream kids by giving them an understanding of those who experience the world in a different way and it benefits the exceptional education students by having fun and learning teenage skills such as painting nails and playing games. I wouldn't have been able to do this without Mrs. Siddall and all of her effort and help. She helped do something that really matters, using my passion like Ana Ines King. These two strong women helped me realize what I am capable of and helped me achieve my goal of starting a program at my school.