

Wealth For Life  
Principle No. 10

I will strengthen my  
community through  
philanthropy.

# Preserving Wealth Through Health

Amiya Alexander  
is helping to save  
her community  
from the costly  
disease of obesity

*By Jennifer Streaks*

**FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD AMIYA ALEXANDER, A 2010 BLACK ENTERPRISE TEENPRENEUR** nominee, is striving to help her community thrive through dance and health education. Her mission: to eradicate the costly disease of childhood obesity through her mobile dance academy. The academy, for Detroit students ages 2 to 12, brings dance lessons in ballet, tap, jazz, salsa, and hip-hop. Alexander also teaches classes on healthy eating and wellness.

Alexander's efforts help keep those in her community from chipping away at their wealth. Annual healthcare costs to treat obesity-related illness are about \$190.2 billion, or nearly 21% of annual medical spending in the U.S., according to a report in the *Journal of Health Economics*. What's more, childhood obesity is responsible for about \$14 billion in direct medical costs. Obese children often remain obese into adulthood. As adults, they are more likely to struggle financially than those who are not obese. Some studies have shown that obesity is associated with more missed time from work and lower wages and household income. ▶

Through her for-profit company, Amiya's Mobile Dance Academy, Alexander teaches students who would not otherwise be able to afford the cost of formal dance instruction, which can cost anywhere from \$30 to \$60 per class. With the help of donations, Alexander is able to offer her students a discounted rate of \$11.50 per class. She has also created a scholarship fund to help students who cannot afford to pay for the classes. Alexander's company receives monetary donations as well as dance equipment such as pointe shoes and leotards. Television personality Dr. Phil also has a section on his foundation website where donations can be made.

Alexander, who has been dancing since she was 2 years old, got the idea for her own dance academy at the age of 9. She discussed it with her mother, Teberah Alexander, who immediately agreed to help with her effort. Teberah, with the help of family donations, made a total investment of about \$20,000 to get the mobile dance studio up and running. This money helped them purchase a 52-passenger school bus, have the seats removed, and have ballet bars and wood flooring installed. (Classes are held inside the pink school bus.)

The decision to create a studio on wheels was a response to high gas prices and parents' busy work schedules. In addition, Alexander says since many of the families may not have cars, she chose to come to them. This way, classes would always be accessible to the students and convenient for the parents. Alexander credits her mother and Dr. Ben Carson with influencing her desire to give back to her community. "Reading Dr. Ben Carson's book *Gifted Hands* (Zondervan; \$6.99) was transformative. He is from the inner city of Detroit and has accomplished so much and has really given back."

Alexander's family has always considered giving back a part of their work ethic. Alexander also volunteers at the Boys & Girls Club and the local children's hospital. Her advice to those interested in philanthropy: "Share your talent with others, don't just focus on yourself." In addition, Alexander's mother runs her own organization, Compassionate Home Care Services, providing home healthcare.

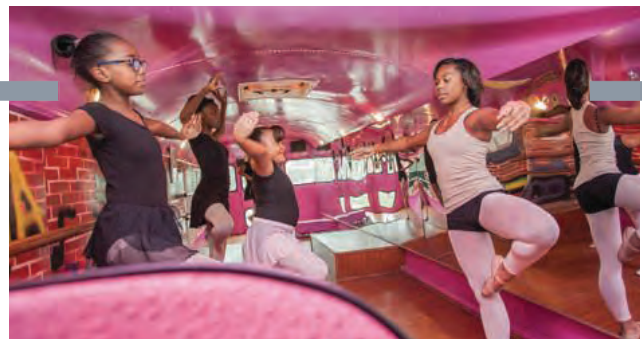
Giving back and helping others is a family affair, but they both realize their businesses must be run properly. Alexander has Gail Perry-Mason, co-author of *Girl, Make Your Money Grow!* (Crown Business; \$15), as her financial planner. She also has an accountant and bookkeeper on her financial team.

Teberah, who advises that if you have a child interested in philanthropy, it is important to be an active listener to gauge interest and to help in the creation process, has always taught her daughter that you are not successful until you share your talent with others. Through her philanthropy, Alexander helps those in her community and plants a seed, signaling others to do the same. Alexander's future plans include continuing to dance and becoming a physician. One of her goals is to save some of the profits from her business so that she can attend Harvard Medical School to become an OB-GYN.

## “HOW SHE DID IT”

■ **Take care of business.** Even though it's philanthropy, make sure you have the business end taken care of. Alexander has a financial team in place to handle the money matters. Don't take the rules and regulations for granted. Teberah states, "We definitely have the right people around her because Amiya is still a minor and we want to be sure she is protected." Take time to complete the proper paperwork or put the right team in place to get it done right!

■ **Conduct a talent assessment.** Assess what your talents are and which you can expand on to offer to your community. Alexander believes it is incumbent upon us to share our talents with others. Take stock of the needs around you and determine how you can help. What comes naturally is typically what will work best.



■ **Don't say "can't."** Alexander says she is not allowed to say the word "can't." She believes that all things can be done through faith in God. She says she realizes that there will be some bumps along the way, but don't give up. The creation stage will often be the toughest stage, but the feeling of accomplishment will be worth it. **BE** —Additional reporting by Sheiresa Ngo

## The 10 Wealth for Life Principles

- 1 I will live within my means.
- 2 I will maximize my income potential through education and training.
- 3 I will effectively manage my budget, credit, debt, and tax obligations.
- 4 I will save at least 10% of my income.
- 5 I will use homeownership as a foundation for building wealth.
- 6 I will devise an investment plan for my retirement needs and children's education.
- 7 I will ensure that my entire family adheres to sensible money management principles.
- 8 I will support the creation and growth of minority-owned businesses.
- 9 I will guarantee my wealth is passed on to future generations through proper insurance and estate planning.
- 10 I will strengthen my community through philanthropy.

Do you live by the Wealth for Life Principles? We would love to print your story.  
Nominate yourself or someone you know at [wealth@blackenterprise.com](mailto:wealth@blackenterprise.com).