

For Immediate Release

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**Building Community – Locally & Globally – at MindLeaps
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Acceptance (DEIA) Statement**

New York, USA, October 31, 2023 - The MindLeaps Board of Directors has adopted a new Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Acceptance statement that was generated through conversations across our communities in Africa, the Balkans and the USA. The broad statement expresses MindLeaps’ commitment to honor all the organization’s differences and to examine its policies, decision making, and practices as it learns to better serve its communities. It also recognizes that there are some essential, global qualities that are important to every part of the organization while other values and traditions are specific to our local communities.

2024 will mark the organization’s 10th Anniversary, and since its establishment, MindLeaps has existed for the sole purpose of facilitating each child’s discovery of their own unique potential. MindLeaps, as a global organization, interprets the concepts of DEIA according to the local communities where we live and work. In some countries, acronyms like “DEIA” are commonplace and embraced. In other MindLeaps’ countries, terminology like this is seen as being “Western” or a forceful application of external terminology on local traditions. At MindLeaps, we’ve come together around a common understanding of what we mean – as 82 staff members in 6 countries – when we talk about diversity and belonging.

Published on MindLeaps website, along with its mission and values, the DEIA statement reads as follows:

MindLeaps proactively seeks to promote diversity, equity, inclusion and acceptance (DEIA) in all of our communities, including participants, volunteers and staff. MindLeaps respects and honors all differences and affirms that all the members of our communities thrive when our differences are valued. We are committed to hearing and considering the diverse thoughts and ideas of our community members. We are stronger when we honor and include many viewpoints and experiences. We approach our programming, operations and interactions with an intentional focus on inclusion. We strive to grow, learn and build continually in our dedication to DEIA, and to have our actions match our intentions, throughout the organization.

Some of the specific ways that MindLeaps has embraced our version of DEIA and set goals for 2024 include:

In *New York City (USA)*, MindLeaps re-constructed its teaching team in the Bronx to ensure our trainers look like our beneficiaries. The entire team has participated in specialized training

sessions focused on building togetherness and social cohesion. In 2024, MindLeaps will engage in learning about the effects of mass incarceration, particularly in New York City.

In *North Macedonia*, the organization has actively shifted from a predominantly male, Albanian staff to a gender-balanced team with Macedonians and Albanians - but it is a constant work in progress. In 2024, the team will involve more Albanians in the senior staff and more Macedonians in the Alumni Network.

In *Mauritania*, MindLeaps works with children and employs staff from the country's diverse ethnic groups: Pulaar, Soninke, Wolof, and Black Moors. In 2024, the team is actively recruiting White Moors.

In *Guinea*, parents of our beneficiaries expressed concern that there might be special opportunities given to Fulani-speaking students. Hearing this, the team actively recruited Susu-speaking and Malinke-speaking mothers to join the Family Strengthening Program so all dominant ethnic groups were better represented. In 2024, the team is striving to include some refugees in permanent staff positions since refugees are a part of our beneficiary groups.

The next step for MindLeaps, which is already underway, is an internal DEI audit to evaluate our strengths and weaknesses and identify next steps. At the same time, we are thrilled to be recognized by others for the strides that we have made. Most recently, MindLeaps was asked by the US Embassy in North Macedonia to participate in the Embassy's Culture & Diversity celebration on November 17th in Skopje.

We are continuing to seek feedback and learn from others in this space. We welcome your thoughts, reflections and questions as we continue our journey to embrace diversity and promote acceptance.

About MindLeaps -

MindLeaps is an international organization headquartered in New York City and currently operating in Rwanda, Uganda, Mauritania, Guinea, North Macedonia and the USA. Working in under-resourced communities, children and youth enter MindLeaps through a Dance & Data program that demonstrably improves social-emotional learning and cognitive development. Children are supported in formal education and skills development programs, and parents and caretakers participate in the Family Strengthening Program on a journey towards economic independence and self-reliance. Since 2014, over 10,000 children have completed the MindLeaps' Dance & Data program and 600-700 children are sponsored annually in school.

Long-term impact is measured by academic performance, 2-8 years after completion of the dance program. In some countries, school drop-out rates have reduced to 1.5% as a result of the dance program. In other countries, 80% of MindLeaps students regularly score in the top 20% of their academic classes. Approximately 75% of youth who attend the MindLeaps program permanently reintegrate into homes and communities.

www.mindleaps.org