

Joel Kioko: from Kenyan slum to the world stage!

Sixteen-year-old **Joel Kioko** comes from Kenya, East Africa. He was born in Kuwinda, a slum in the capital, Nairobi. He says, 'It's dirty, obviously, but it's a good place. It's home.' But Joel is very different from the other teenagers in Kawinda – he's going to leave home because he's won a dance scholarship. He is going to train to be a ballet dancer at the English National Ballet School in London.



How did this happen?

Amazingly, Joel took up dancing only three years ago. He went with a female cousin to her ballet class. 'I thought, what is this strange dance? It's not like Kenyan dancing.'

But then when he saw the men dancing, and they were leaping and jumping, he thought 'I knew this is what I wanted to do with my life.'

Luck was on his side. An American dance teacher, **Cooper Rust**, from the School of American Ballet in New York, saw him dance. She comes to Kenya every year to teach ballet classes to poor children, and when she saw Joel she couldn't believe how beautifully he moved, and with no training at all. She invited him to train with her, and he began working in her studio three or four times a week. He was shy at first, but Rust liked the way he learnt so quickly and worked so hard. He even started teaching children just a few years younger than himself. That was three years ago, and now Joel is moving to London.

Joel says his dream is to become a principal dancer, but he'd also like to run a dance studio in Nairobi, 'and just take kids from the street, like they found me.' He wants to show them that dance can be a way to a better future.



He would also like to move his family out of Kuwinda. There was a terrible fire there last year – 2,000 people lost their homes, including his family.

