**Integration of People with Disability in Dance work field: An Innovative Creative Dance Educational Program that promotes work inclusion**

Low employment rates for people with disabilities are a worldwide phenomenon.  People with disabilities are only as half likely to be in employment as others of working age. Despite international awareness that people with disability have the right to work even the most advanced economies can't find a way to successfully integrate them into the work place. In Greece, the state of employment for people with disabilities is discouraging compared to EU average, reflecting their poor integration into the labor market. Considering the fact that Greece has been a long time in huge economic crisis and the demographic image has changed due to numerous refugee entrance in the country, work inclusion for people with disability is impossible.

Working as psychotherapist and as a Creative movement teacher at a rehabilitation center gave me the opportunity to teach Creative Dance to a wide spectrum of disabilities and to gain experience in the field of Inclusive Creative movement. My teaching experience led me to the conclusion that people with disabilities are capable of employment if training is modified and designed to meet their needs. By integrating people with disabilities in inclusive dance labor market, my goal is to support diversity and bridge the gap between people without and with disability, in an effort to eliminate interpersonal borders as well as the borders of society. By building a Dance working community for people with disability, a new perspective might arise that can impact political and civic engagement, connect societies through dance despite the shifts in politics, economic and demographics.

In my presentation I will present a Creative Dance Training of a 24 year old dancer with Down Syndrome who wants to become a dance teacher for people with disabilities. We started working together four years ago when she enrolled in my dance class at the rehabilitation center where I work.  Since she was little, dance was her passion but could not find a dance setting that will fit her needs.  Dance classes in private studios were very advanced for her and she could not follow the class.  Her participation in an inclusive Creative Dance class at the rehabilitation center, made her feel for the first time that she can actually dance.  After two years as a student, she became teacher’s assistant and this year she started her training to become a Creative Dance teacher for people with disabilities.

Creative Therapeutic Dance group is a mixed ability team with educators and students with and without disability. Creative dance classes started in 2013 under the supervision of Ms.Natassa Damaskou, psychologist, DanceAbilityInstructor and Sherborne Movement practitioner. Classes take place everyday at Center of Social support and rehabilitation SOTIR of Thessaloniki Greece and the team gives performances at dance festivals throughout the country.

Sincerely,

Natassa Damaskou

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