

THE VICTORIA PROJECT

DULCINEA LANGFELDER & CO.

An exceptional dance-theatre piece becomes a focal point,
gathering major players in the struggle for quality of life in sickness and/or aging.

THE GENESIS:

Ever since the launch of this work (1999) we've tried to develop partnerships with the geriatric health milieu in order to reach the audience who needed to see *Victoria* the most. Results were largely unsuccessful because none of us had the financial means or the wherewithal to make a substantial impact. My company was stuck in the traditional formula for presenting stage productions, and community organizations were stuck in their own formulas. Of course, we offered outreach activities to our presenters. Some of them managed to partner with the health community, but it was sporadic and small scale.

Through perseverance, and the determination and creativity of my staff, we've developed what we now call **THE VICTORIA PROJECT**.

THE VICTORIA PROJECT IN MONTREAL:

In a pilot project, we toured performances of *Victoria* to 6 Montreal Cultural Centres as part of the 'CAM on Tour' circuit (sponsored by the Montreal Arts Council or CAM), while weaving throughout the tour 3 distinct workshops which we designed in close collaboration with several community organizations. We presented these 3 workshops a total of **34** times during the tour. The key to our success was in these workshops offered, not by artists (who are not taken very seriously in this milieu), but by **experts in the field of non-verbal communication** (artists!). This allowed us to qualify for funding from **APPUI pour les proches aidants** (*SUPPORT for family caregivers*), the organization that funds the Alzheimer's Society and many other community organizations. We were able to reach our target audience, which grew – as word-of-mouth and a team of interns at our office created a 'Buzz' – until the culmination of this tour on May 12th, 2016, which we called "Elders and Caregivers Day". This was an all day event, including the annual meeting of APPUI (!), informational kiosks representing 53 organizations, a round table discussion with doctors (DOCTORS!) and several influential people in the fields of geriatric health and culture... and two performances of *Victoria* for 800 spectators.¹

The energy and enthusiasm on this day was truly inspiring. Our 'little play' (the artistic merit of *Victoria* has been proven many times over.²) is now seen as a **focal point: strengthening the presence of the arts in conversations about the future of our society**, within a milieu that *used to* consider us mere entertainers.

Because these types of community organizations, as well as the organizations who fund them, are everywhere... and because **the need for this project is so acute**, we seek to develop it further.

¹ 2m20 excerpts from "Elders and Caregivers Day" can be viewed on our website:

<http://www.dulcinee.org/bubbling-news/news>

² See our website to see our very thick press book and the laudatory praise from people of all walks of life:

http://www.dulci-langfelder.org/images/Victoria/Outils_promo/DossierVictoriaEN.pdf

What we seek to do is to establish a new formula that *succeeds* in building solid partnerships between two very disparate worlds (the art and the health sectors). The audience we are targeting: elders, professional and family caregivers as well as other players who influence healthcare, is growing exponentially. These are people who have neither the time nor the inkling to go see a play about the very thing they struggle with every day. We know, however, that when they actually see *Victoria*, it often *changes their lives* for the better.

HOW TO BUILD THE VICTORIA PROJECT IN ANY COMMUNITY: Organization and Financing

It's taken us 16 years to figure out how to get this demographic to the theatre, and we now know how to go about it. ***We begin by going to them***, directly addressing their immediate needs. Non-verbal communication is complex, and extremely important when you are dealing with people who can no longer speak, or speak rationally. In these workshops and seminars (described below) we are able to persuade people that as interesting as they are, no workshop or video can ever replace the experience of *Victoria* on stage. And the many who came agreed.

But the first thing that has to happen is for our company to partner with theatres. Together with each theatre, we determine how to divide the work in building this very large new audience. We do not expect theatres to take it on themselves. We plan the project according to what each theatre already has in place in terms of community outreach.

We can provide a list of the types of organizations (listed below) to be contacted (as well as any necessary documentation). Every locality has an Alzheimer's Society or the equivalent. The major organization in town helping families will be happy to facilitate networking with smaller organizations. *These organizations need help in reaching their clientele* (believe it or not). Many 'family caregivers' don't even know that they have that title and that there is help out there for them!

The services these organizations can offer a presenter, in general, are support groups and *workshops*. A theatre can offer the organization our pertinent and well-developed workshops, and also perhaps the opportunity to set up informational booths in the foyer of the theatre on the day of the performance. In exchange, the organizations help promote the performance. If they can't pay for the workshops, they might refer us to the funding agencies that they work with, and we (the presenting theatre or with our company's help) can apply for funding directly. We also approach assisted living institutions with our activities, that, in turn, organize transport to the theatre. Our workshops can be of interest to professional caregivers, but we have yet to succeed in reaching them before a performance. They do come to see the show, however (when they hear about it properly) and the performance itself is extremely inspiring and instructive for this demographic.

Through the work we have already done, we've created strong alliances with influential partners whose references will be taken seriously by people in the health sector of any city. Letters from these partners can be shared upon request.

NB - It should be mentioned that although in this project we are developing this 'added value audience', *Victoria* is truly a show for the general public (of all ages) and should always be promoted as such.

At a minimum, the Project gathers elders and caregivers (ideally in an intergenerational context), offering them an unforgettable performance, a platform to express themselves in the Talk-Back (which should include representatives from the health milieu) and a chance to learn about the support that is available to them. Gathering in a theatre reminds people that they are not alone...which in and of itself is tremendously encouraging when you are dealing with sickness and aging.

At best, the PROJECT can be more ambitious, gathering major players in the health sector, the government and the arts...and thus take us all forward towards a better quality of life as we age.

The pertinence of art – especially live art – in helping people cope with life’s challenges is what drives us to persevere in a difficult field. Our arms are sore from swimming upstream...but they are strong, and continually revitalized by the gratifying encouragement we get whenever we present our work.

THE 3 ACTIVITIES OFFERED BY THE COMPANY

- **Improving Communication: *non-verbal and para-verbal communication***
(Dulcinea Langfelder and/or Anne Sabourin)
The look in the eye, the tone of voice...so many unconscious signals betray our best intentions when we are dealing with delicate situations. This theoretical and practical workshop gives participants tools to better master the messages we send and receive, beyond words.
Designed for family and/or professional caregivers.

- **Corporeal Expression: *reconnect with your body at any age***
(Anne Sabourin or Dulcinea Langfelder)
'User friendly' movement, to take back your body, to bring energy, pleasure and self-assurance in a convivial atmosphere...making everything else a bit easier.
Designed for elders.

- **The Making of VICTORIA: *a seminar on creativity, humour and dementia***
(Dulcinea Langfelder).
The piece was 4 years in the making, and for 16 years nourished by being shared with people from around the world. How the artist struggled, learned and succeeded in applying her training and her desire to uplift the world with this most difficult subject matter. Delivered with Dulcinea’s charm, grace and humour, and designed for all audiences.

TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS TO APPROACH TO OFFER OUR 3 ACTIVITIES

The 3 workshops were offered, and the following types of institutions took one, two or all three (for a total of 34 workshops presented).

- Alzheimer’s Society
- Alzheimer’s support groups under other names
- Organizations that support family caregivers
- Community Centers
- Day Centers for Elders
- Libraries
- Assisted Living Homes
- Nursing Homes