

Ways and Means Dance Company

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Dear

We are writing to ask your help in identifying adult, female and male survivors of childhood sexual abuse who might be potential group members for a project entitled Dance Project for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse. A full description accompanies this cover letter. The project has been funded by grants from The North Carolina Arts Council, the Durham Arts Council, and the Duke University Institute of the Arts Professional Development Fund. This funding makes it possible for survivors to participate in the group at no cost.

As the project group co-leaders, we have decided to limit the group to survivors who are in the later stages of their work. We think that it is important that participants be well-grounded in the present and have connected with and worked through most of their childhood trauma experiences.

If you have present or former clients who you think might want to be a part of the project, please pass along this information and/or contact Callie Justice at 286-7500. Potential group members will be screened and the decision about their joining the group will need to involve their current individual psychotherapist where there is one. We would like to begin the screening process this December with a view to beginning the group sessions by mid-January.

We are very excited about this project. We think it promises to be both rewarding for the participants and important for those who view the final product.

Sincerely,

Callie Justice

Barbara Dickinson

**DANCE PROJECT FOR SURVIVORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

The Dance Project for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse will offer men and women survivors an opportunity to have their stories translated into movement by professional dancers. A group of about eight survivors and three dancers (one of the dancers will be male), will meet for an hour-and-45-minutes for 14 weekly sessions. The group will be co-led by Barbara Dickinson, artistic director of the Ways and Means Dance Company and Director of the Dance Department at Duke University; and Callie Justice, M.S.W., a North Carolina Certified Clinical Social Worker with extensive experience as a psychotherapist working with survivors both individually and in groups.

As the survivors talk with each other about their experiences, the dancers will express, in movement, their understanding of what is being shared. The survivors will give feedback to the dancers as to how well the movement does or does not reflect what the survivors intended to communicate. (It is important to note that the group members are not expected to have dance experience or be familiar with dance in any form.) The dancers will work with Barbara Dickinson between sessions to develop the movement, and will bring their work back to the group for further feedback.

Although they will not necessarily attend the group sessions, a composer and a writer will be brought into the creative process as the work progresses to add music and text to the final work. The group sessions will be audiotaped to allow the writer to use some of the content in composing text to accompany the movement. However, survivors will have complete control over what text is allowed to be used in the finished work.

At the end of the first 12 weeks, the group will stop meeting while the dancers continue to rehearse and refine the final theater piece. The work will be performed for the public by the Ways & Means Dance Company. We are in conversation with Manbites Dog Theater about the possibility of their co-sponsoring the event. This performance will be publicized through the local media and by mailing list. After the performance, the group will meet for two final sessions to process and share responses to the performance and to reflect on the entire group experience.

## RATIONALE FOR THE PROJECT

Incest survivors who have worked through their abuse experiences are possessed of what Peter Marin, in describing Vietnam Vets, called "a terrible and demanding wisdom." At a horrific cost they have learned things about humanity that need to be heard. They know the atrocious depths to which we can descend, and they know the heights of courage and of redemption of which we are capable. The communication of this knowledge is important both for the survivors and for those who listen.

In her book *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman recognizes that some form of public activism can be a useful part of the last stage of abuse recovery work. She explains that survivors who feel the need for social engagement:

Survivors may discover they can transform the meaning of their personal tragedy by making it the basis for social action. While there is no way to compensate for an atrocity, there is a way to transcend it, by making it a gift to others.

The primary purpose of this project is to give the survivors who participate, a chance to communicate with the larger society. It is expected that this experience will be both empowering and nurturing of a sense of positive reconnection.

Additionally, this project intends to increase public awareness of the experience of childhood sexual abuse and its long term effects. Our hope is that members of the audience, through the experience of the performance, will become stronger allies for survivors of childhood sexual abuse and stronger advocates for child abuse prevention.

#### WHO IS THE PROJECT FOR

The Dance Project for Survivors is intended for survivors who have been aware of and working on their experiences of childhood trauma for some time. To benefit from this group, survivors will need to have the ability to attend to their own emotional safety and to have already connected with and worked through much of the previously disconnected traumatic events of their pasts.

Efforts will be made for the group composition to reflect the diversity of the local community. Attention will be given, in particular, to diversity in the areas of race and sexual preference orientation. The group is open to both men and women.

#### A WORD ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY

Because the purpose of this project is to create a public theatre piece, confidentiality will be defined differently than it would be for a psychotherapy group. There will, however, be important boundaries with regard to confidentiality.

- \* All participants in the project group sessions will agree not to discuss any of the content of the sessions with people who are not involved in the project or to reveal in any way any information that might identify survivors who are participating in the project.

- \* Publicity for the performance will not include any information that could be used to identify survivors unless particular survivors decide that they want their names to be used.

- \* Survivors will have the right to decline to have anything they say in the course of the group used in the performance.

## NATURE OF THE GROUP

The group will function similarly to a psychotherapy group in that it will be co-led by a psychotherapist, boundaries will be well defined and maintained, and group members will be invited to share experiences in a supportive context with the goal of understanding what is said.

However the group will be quite different from a psychotherapy group in some important ways. People other than the survivors and the psychotherapist will be at the group sessions; and material shared in the group will be shared outside of the group as described in the section on Confidentiality.

The roles of the three dancers, (and later, outside of the group process, the writer and the composer) will be to interpret and express their understanding of the stories and feelings spoken by the survivors. They will use their professional skills to communicate in theatrical terms the stories of the group. While they will not initiate or directly participate in the group discussion about the survivors' experiences, the dancers will discuss with the group the movement they have created as it relates to those experiences.

The task goal of this project is to create a theatre piece for performance that expresses the experiences of survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The process goal of this project is to accomplish the task in a safe, respectful and supportive manner.

## PROJECT FUNDING

The Dance Project for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse is being funded by grants from The North Carolina Arts Council, the Durham Arts Council, and the Duke University Institute of the Arts Professional Development Fund. Survivors will, therefore, be able to participate in the group at no charge.

For more information, or to schedule a screening interview, contact Callie Justice at 286-7500.

for Callie Justice and Barbara Dickinson