

PORTRAIT

Olivier Bouquiaux

Neurologist for 25 years and creator of the non-profit organization Fit your mind and **Kinesiphilia workshops**

Who is the ASBL Fit your mind?

Our non-profit organization advocates a **therapeutic approach through collective and playful physical exercise**. Each week, we offer Nordic walking classes in nature and dance workshops for people with neurological diseases. Our adage is: *"Treat your body, heal your mind."* We are the pilots of our lives; the body and mind are one and are in constant interaction. Taking care of one is taking care of the other and vice versa.

What does Kinesiphilia mean?

A literal translation would be the love of movement. In Greek philia means passion; Kinesi refers to the programming of movement in the cerebral cortex. **Kinesiphilia is the name of our dance workshops.**

How was the non-profit born?

In the 2000s, I was particularly impacted by a report on children with cancers who were brought to climb the most beautiful peaks of the world. I wanted to propose a similar experience to patients with multiple sclerosis with the idea of communicating about the benefit of physical activity and showing another image of "wheelchair", often associated with this pathology. After six months of preparation, **we reached the summit of Toubkal with 12 patients, at a towering height of 4167 meters culminating on the Atlas of Morocco. It was an extraordinary moment and a world first.**

Then, one morning, I thought to myself: « we also need to do something for **Parkinson's patients**». Scientific studies show that physical activity is even more beneficial for those who have a decrease in dopamine levels and whose ability to move is deteriorating. As part of their rehabilitation, **these patients need external stimuli to develop new strategies of movement**. Dance stimulates at a cognitive level through awareness of movement, at a visual level by reproducing the step that is shown and at an auditory level via the rhythm of the music. Dance is really the ideal therapeutic physical activity for them. In 2015, our team organized a dance show with 60 people with Parkinson's disease from Brussels, Liège and Libramont. It was magical. Afterwards, these patients asked us to continue these courses because they were feeling the



benefits. The nonprofit was born..

And what were the key moments?

Since the show, we organize an annual day of dancers. In 2018, we were welcomed into Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker's Rosas Dance School in Forest. Each group presented a workshop; **Brussels, Walloons and Flemish all together**. The Kinesiphilia community grows and crosses linguistic and geographical boundaries, as it has already reached Luxembourg.

« *Dance is really the ideal therapeutic physical activity* »

A moment etched in my memory remains the day I opened this letter. A notary told me that our oldest dancer, to whom the project was very beneficial, bequeathed part of his inheritance to the association. She had modified her heritage without everyone's knowledge. Even today, it is her that allows the association to operate and offer accessible courses.

Are new projects in sight?

In the same spirit, I would like to set up an event to **encourage physical activity for people with peripheral nerve disease**. These are diseases for which there is few treatments, funding or even interest.

We also want to make a film about our activities.

Do you have a message for teachers and members?

What is done by everyone is unique. **Our mission is to welcome you; it is to take care of you**. In our classes, we move by creating and sharing an artistic moment. Keep enjoying yourself in a simple, healthy and natural way.

What is your message to those who would like to register?

We're here, at your service. We welcome you for free for your first session. The best way to know if it suits you is to taste the risk .

So, dare to take the first step, the dance step!

Interview by Louise Amand