

Live Well – Live Better: AKA Every movement matters! Especially during a pandemic and lockdown

“It would be terribly lonely if it hadn’t been for the classes – it has been a lifesaver I can tell you – a life saver”.

Generation Games, Age UK Oxfordshire’s physical activity service, together with Parkinson’s UK Oxford branch were running five exercise classes called “Big Bold and Balance” for people living with Parkinson’s across Oxfordshire. Once the country went into lockdown classes were abruptly forced to stop. The Chair of Parkinson’s UK Oxford branch decided to try running sessions via Zoom. Sarah, their tutor and long-term conditions exercise specialist from Age UK Oxfordshire was very keen for classes to continue and for participants not to miss out on their specialist exercises.

We joined one of their weekly Zoom exercise sessions to have a chat and find out more.

All participants are visible on the screen within their “Zoom boxes” - almost like taking a peek through a window into people’s homes where we see people’s living rooms, kitchens, bookshelves, paintings on the wall, even an exercise ball.

When the sessions first started people were helped with installing Zoom and taught how to access the sessions, this - coupled with the ongoing incredible support of the group, now enables around 25 people regularly take part in the virtual exercise class every week. Sally, the Oxford Parkinson’s chair said: “And the first meeting was so funny, when everyone recognised each other, ‘oh! oh! Look! Hello (while waving)’, we were all laughing at seeing each other. Now we are really used to it. These classes are a regularity – they provide a structure to our day.”

“I think the regularity is important – every Wednesday signing in for the Wednesday session, every Friday signing in for the Friday session.”

The exercises, as the name implies, are big and bold, to try to counteract that tend to become smaller in people living with Parkinson’s. Sarah, who teaches the class, said: “it’s hard work – it’s the hardest class I teach”. Picture lots of boxes and everyone taking a big stamping movement forward while stretching the arms wide out to the side and saying “Ta-da” (this helps to encourage the movement to be as big as possible” and of course everyone can’t help smiling while doing this. One participant, Stuart said: “One thing I have found is that even if I haven’t felt particularly like I wanted to do it; afterwards I always feel better. I’m always glad I’ve done it.”

Not only do these sessions provide much-needed exercise, but also serve as a social occasion. Being locked down, stripped away just about all social contact, so these online weekly classes and the social chat at the end of a session became even more important. “I live on my own. You can imagine, since the beginning of March until now, it would be have

been terrible. It would be terribly lonely if it hadn't been for the classes – it has been a lifesaver.

The uncertainty of the current situation, means that we are planning for sessions to continue virtually for some time yet. With the social support of the group and the common goal of maintaining their exercise routine, we are sure that these types of online virtual classes will only gain in importance – both in maintaining fitness as well as keeping people socially connected. “We have lots of laughs don't we. It's really good fun, we have a really good time” Pamela in the group said.

Big Bold and Balance Zoom class

