



Spotlight on an APDA Community Grant

The *Joy* of Dance

Jen Gillick

IMAGINE A ROOM: MIRRORS ON one wall, a wooden bar running the length of the other wall, soft music in the background, 20 men and women seated in chairs. There is tremor visible in the arms of a few and there is a quiet anticipation of what is to come. The music gets a little louder and the dance instructor, Pam Kuntz, begins class. This is “Dance for People with Parkinson’s Disease and Other Neurological Disorders,” held every Friday at Ballet Bellingham in Whatcom County. The class is free for participant’s thanks in part to a community grant provided by APDA’s Northwest Chapter.

In 2010 Choreographer and teacher Pam Kuntz created a dance/theatre performance piece called “Stories from Jim and Jo,” a moving performance about living with disabilities featuring Jo, a woman living with MS and Jim, a man living with Parkinson’s disease. During a post-performance discussion Pam met Rick Hermann, a Bellingham resident also living with Parkinson’s disease. Their friendship developed and not too long after that first encounter the two decided to create a dance class for people with PD and other neurological disorders.

Pam began by researching how she might go about creating and teaching this class, which included research on PD. And Rick was the promotions guy, in charge of creating the flyer, spreading the word, and finding participants. During her research phase, Pam armed herself with as much information as possible about PD. She found many resources about exercise programs for people with PD and discovered David Leventhal’s “Dance for PD” program. She knew she would be teaching a modern dance class, a technique class that trains dancers to communicate ideas through movement. “I just needed to find out how to be smart about teaching people with neurological disorders, and how to create a successful experience for the participants that both taught the art of dance and brought JOY to their lives.”

Dancing is emerging in scientific literature as an effective approach to managing some of the symptoms of Parkinson’s disease. More research needs to be done and is currently in progress, but the results from a number of preliminary peer-reviewed studies and meta-analyses conclude that this



We just have a hoot,

it's so much fun. We laugh and we just enjoy each other's company more than I can begin to say."

form of activity shows some therapeutic benefit in gait, balance, and increased fluidity of motion. Plus it is socially engaging and fun!

"We just have a hoot, it's so much fun. We laugh and we just enjoy each other's company more than I can begin to say." Each class is an hour in length and is a combination of dance technique done seated, at a ballet barre, and in the center, standing if the participants so choose. It is a whole body workout that incorporates flexibility, strength, balance, coordination, and joy. "We dance hard. Folks are exhausted by the end of the hour."

Additionally, Kuntz says that a unique community has been built as a result of this dance class, "our community is based on the principals of mutual support and that of joy in sharing an hour of movement with those who understand the challenges faced when living with PD or other neurological disorders." This year, that community has

nearly doubled in size thanks in part to an APDA Community Grant.

The goal of the APDA Community Grant program is to help make health and wellness programs more accessible and affordable for people with Parkinson's disease and their care partners by financially supporting these types of beneficial programs. Each grant averages about \$1,000, allowing community partners such as Pam to offer classes at free or reduced cost.

Christine has been participating in the class for six years and loves the opportunity to move—really move. "This class is like a lot of other things in life, you get out of it many things but you don't realize what you are getting until many months have passed and you realize that experience. One of those things is socializing with people from a variety of backgrounds and a variety of skills. That's helped me a lot. This day is my best day."

