



Empower-U Program with instructor Paola, shadow boxing combinations, Winnipeg Manitoba. In-person and live online Parkinson's-specific program.

## U-Turn Parkinson's offers sport programming beyond Winnipeg

**F**OR SUZANNE RITCHOT, U-TURN PARKINSON'S Zoom classes have sparked a love for fitness.

The Ste-Anne resident, who has Parkinson's disease and lives about 50km east of Winnipeg, used to have a hard time accessing these programs in-person because of the distance. But in 2023, in the comfort of her home, she was able to log onto Zoom and get physically fit during her Power Stretch, Music Therapy, and Empower-U classes held every week.

Additionally, she was able to access these online classes with others in Steinbach — which is much closer to where she lives.

"I am thankful that I now have more opportunities to participate in these great programs with others living with Parkinson's in my area," says Ritchot.



U-TURN PARKINSON,  
MANITOBA

**Canada**

This project is funded by  
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Power-Stretch with instructor Jordyn, Stretching with straps, Winnipeg Manitoba. Live online Parkinson's-specific program.



Close up of Empower-U program

Ritchot, and many others, were able to participate in U-Turn Parkinson's sport activities more accessibly, thanks to funding from the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association's Reaching Each and Every One: A Community Sport Intervention program. This program, which was funded by Sport Canada's Community Sport for All Initiative, seeks to remove barriers and increase sport participation rates for equity deserving groups across Canada.

U-Turn Parkinson's is a charitable organization that offers wellness and exercise programs for people with Parkinson's disease. The Winnipeg-based organization, which offers online and in-person sport and recreation opportunities to people with Parkinson's disease free of charge, launched the project to expand its reach to communities throughout Manitoba.

"We know that we're doing a really good job of reaching people in Winnipeg, and people who can travel to our programs," says Taylor Devlin, executive director of U-Turn Parkinson's. "But there was a lot more engagement during COVID-19 and our online services. We knew that we were still only reaching a portion of Manitobans with Parkinson's disease, so we really wanted to expand our reach in the province."

Devlin says that the funding helped support phase one of their project, Increasing Engagement and Accessibility with U-Turn Parkinson's.

In this initial phase, U-Turn Parkinson's continued its online sport and recreation programming and was also able to purchase the equipment needed to run it. In addition, the funding helped support a marketing campaign to help people with Parkinson's learn more about the program.

Devlin says as part of the project, the organization partnered with a group in the Steinbach community that brought together volunteers and participants to enjoy U-Turn Parkinson's online recreational programming at the town's Pat Porter Active Living Centre.

"We've been able to work with this group to make sure they have the training, and get all set up and are able to facilitate and arrange a space for us to provide our programming," Devlin explains. "It's kind of a cool, low resource option instead of having to send our instructors across Manitoba or expand our

services physically. We now have a community space where people can come and just participate in our online programs, like they would at home."

She adds that the online programs help participants with Parkinson's disease get active, and helps them manage their symptoms. One of the online classes, Power Stretch, incorporates yoga and tai chi to help participants focus on balance and gait. Another program, called Empower-U, incorporates dance and boxing to give them a full body exercise.

"The boxing combinations are really good for hand-eye coordination, and really good for motor skills," Devlin says.

She adds that this project has helped many participants from Steinbach and surrounding communities overcome transportation barriers, which prevents them from traveling to Winnipeg for in-person classes.

"It's a very accessible location, and everybody's already familiar with it in the community," Devlin says, adding that the project also helps participants overcome financial barriers to accessing sport opportunities. "The nice thing about U-Turn Parkinson's is all of our programs are free of charge. We know that people with Parkinson's are very high users of the health care system, and that includes programs that are covered by the province and services that aren't. They have a lot of other things they have to think about in terms of finances."

Devlin says the funding was "really beneficial" and that it helped the organization reach a population that needed access to its programming.

"This funding has been huge for allowing us to continue our online services for people who can't travel," she says. "Without the program, we don't know what we would have been able to expand to the same extent for rural populations."

Ritchot says she is happy to have better access to this programming both in-person and Zoom, and that it has made an impact on her health and wellbeing.

"All the activities have been very helpful regarding my health," she says. "I have been feeling good! I used to hate to exercise, but now I've found some motivation and some support!" 🍁