

Opinion

# Alleviating social isolation for seniors through dance

Dancing with Parkinson's is committed to providing accessible opportunities for seniors to stay connected, engaged and moving

BY LAUREN HARRISON NORTH YORK MIRROR OCT 30, 2022

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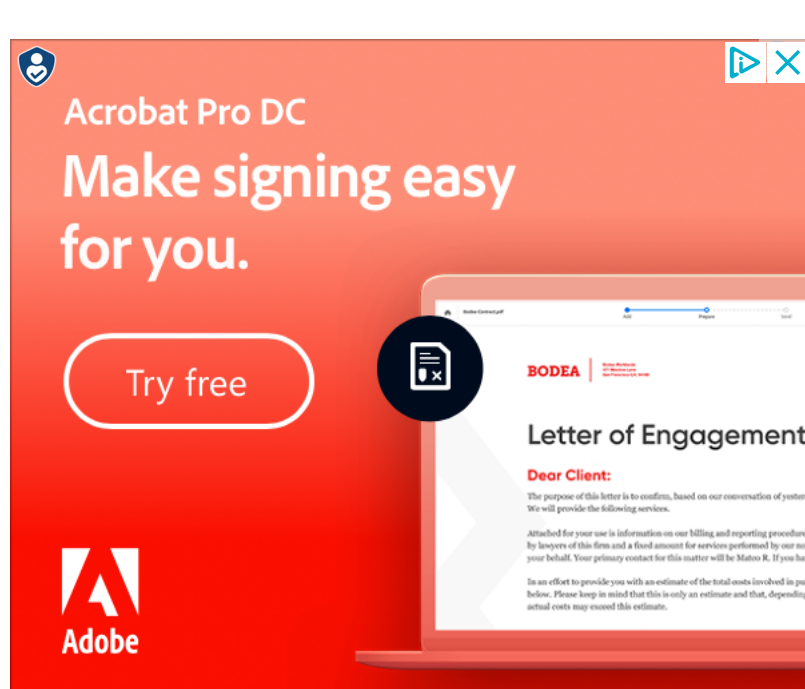
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Torontonian, mother, fitness expert, dancer, author. These are just a few of the ways you could describe Sarah Robichaud, who also happens to be the founder and executive director of a registered Canadian charity called Dancing with Parkinson's (DWP).

After a successful career as a professional dancer, Sarah Robichaud was looking for ways to give back to the community through dance - an art form that had given her meaningful connections and a profound love for movement and music.

In 2007, Sarah began working as a personal trainer with Andy Barrie (former radio host of CBC's Metro Morning), with an aim to help him better manage his Parkinson's disease by incorporating functional fitness with his exercise regime.



While researching ways to provide Andy with the most effective ways to help increase his strength, flexibility, coordination and joy of movement, Sarah discovered the Mark Morris Dance Group's internationally acclaimed Dance for PD program. To learn more about this groundbreaking program specifically designed to help those living with Parkinson's disease, Sarah flew to New York City to train with the Mark Morris Dance Group.

There, she witnessed and was inspired by the remarkable transformation experienced by the participants during these classes. Shortly thereafter, Sarah founded Dancing With Parkinson's (DWP), and 15 years later, what started as a grassroots movement to help one client living with Parkinson's manage their disease through dance is now on the cusp of a national expansion.

Prior to COVID-19, DWP offered over 15 weekly in-person dance classes throughout the GTA to those living with Parkinson's disease, their families and care partners. In March 2020, when Sarah was forced to close the studio doors due to lockdown protocols, like many, she shifted the program online and began offering free, daily dance classes via Zoom.

During this scary and unpredictable time of mandated social isolation, we all globally experienced the detrimental effects of being alone. But seniors, particularly those living in rural settings and long-term care homes, were disproportionately affected by lockdown measures, so DWP invited all seniors - not just those living with Parkinson's - into the free, daily dance classes and the results have been truly incredible.

Every single day, approximately 100 seniors tune in at 11 a.m. EST to engage with their dance family and laugh, exercise and make connections with this inclusive community, from wherever and however they are.

As some of us start to go back to a new normal, the reality is that social isolation will continue to be a pervasive issue for seniors, especially those with health and mobility issues. For this reason, DWP is committed to increasing access to our evidence-based program for seniors most at risk, specifically those who are marginalized due to race, income, ability and/or other barriers.

And although the classes are specifically designed for people living with Parkinson's disease, through extensive evaluation, DWP discovered that these classes are beneficial for all who participate. It's a proven form of accessible exercise that provides cognitive, physical and emotional benefits, combating alienation and the disproportionate mental health impacts of social isolation.

With the colder months ahead of us, seniors and people living with Parkinson's disease will likely continue to experience challenges to meet with others in person and thousands may find it difficult to leave their homes to access much-needed health and wellness resources. DWP is committed to continuing to build and expand this inclusive community through dance, providing accessible opportunities for seniors to stay connected, engaged and moving.

If you know a person living with Parkinson's disease or a senior who would benefit from a daily dose of fun, exercise and engagement, please visit [www.dancingwithparkinsons.com](http://www.dancingwithparkinsons.com) to learn more about DWP and the free online and in-person programs available.

Lauren Harrison is communications director for Dancing with Parkinson's.



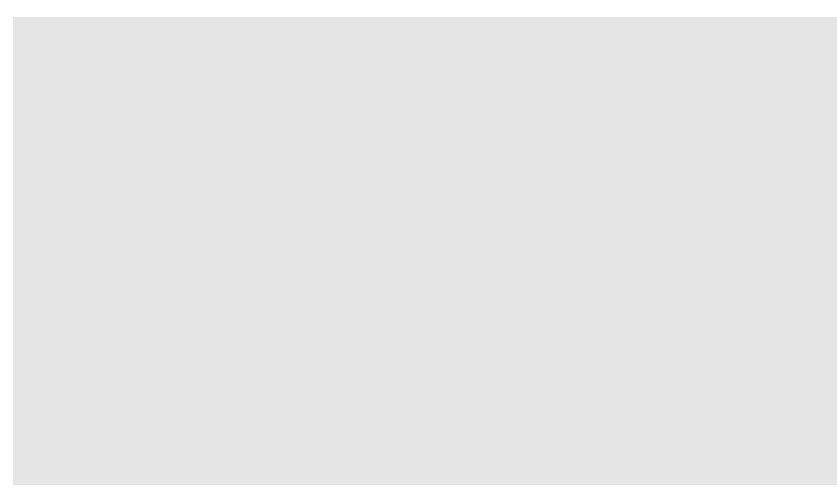
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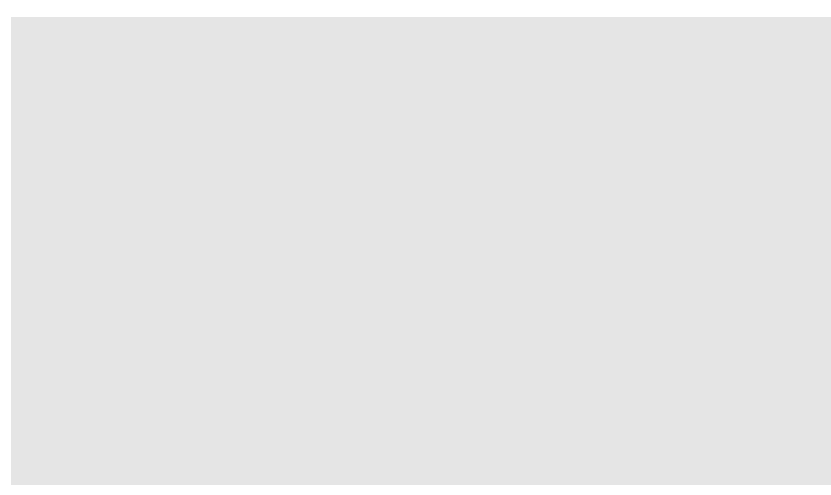
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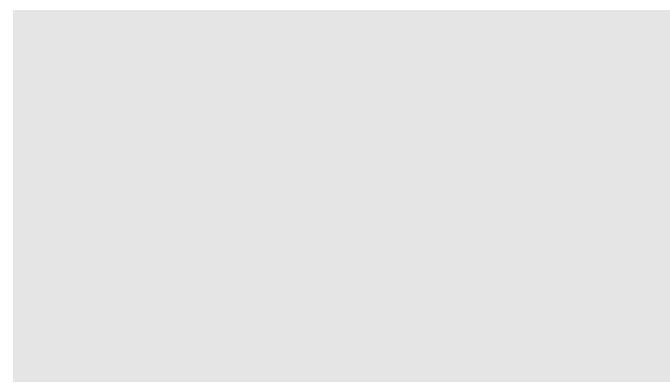


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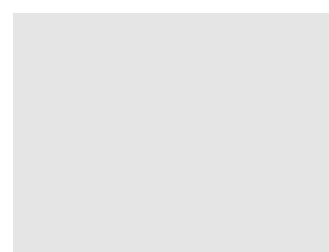
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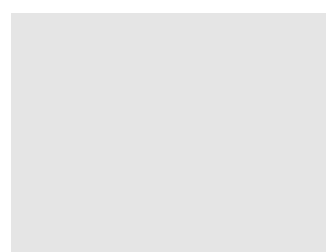


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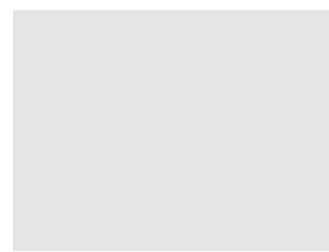
Beginning Monday, the TTC will shut down a portion of Line 1 early every night for several days for track maintenance.



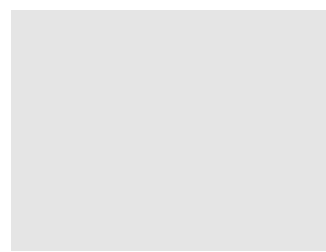
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