

The development of virtual exercise sessions to help people living with Parkinson's thrive, the Neuro Heroes way!

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Objective

We are two neuro physiotherapists (image 1.) with 22 years' combined experience. During the 2020 lockdowns Neuro Heroes was born, to give people with neurological conditions an opportunity to get active at home, with the expertise of a neuro physio and motivation of a group surrounding them. As online Parkinson's specific resources were scarce and face to face sessions were limited, we were determined to enable people with Parkinson's to meet Parkinson's UK exercise guidelines with confidence, remotely supported by a specialist (image 2.).

Intervention

Using an evidence-based approach, we have created online group exercise sessions to include exercises that help common difficulties in Parkinson's, to try and slow symptom progression. Live sessions allow us to respond to individuals' needs and adapt exercises in real time to different levels.



Image 1. Neuro Physiotherapists Laura and Anna



Image 2. All Neuro Heroes sessions are virtual

What our Heroes say...

"Absolutely fantastic session leaders. Classes are fun and challenging in the best sense of the word."

"Anna and Laura are excellent at encouraging and challenging, all whilst understanding limitations."

"I love the classes, the humour, the energy. They mean a lot to me."

"Love the classes and how creative they are. Plus you are attentive to our individual needs."



Image 3. The views of Neuro Heroes participants following a Parkinson's specific exercise session with Neuro Heroes

We now have five Parkinson's sessions a week and a community of Heroes whose motivation is at the heart of it all, having shaped our unique offering. Being playful is a huge part of the Neuro Heroes ethos, so our fitness section always has a theme - with requests from Heroes as wide-ranging as kung fu and carnival. One participant says:

"Anna has a great sense of humour and each session is filled with laughter and positivity"

building a sense of shared achievement. Making exercising genuinely fun makes the difference to people like Clare, who says:

"Time spent with Neuro Heroes is time well spent as it helps me to be fitter, happier and more productive"

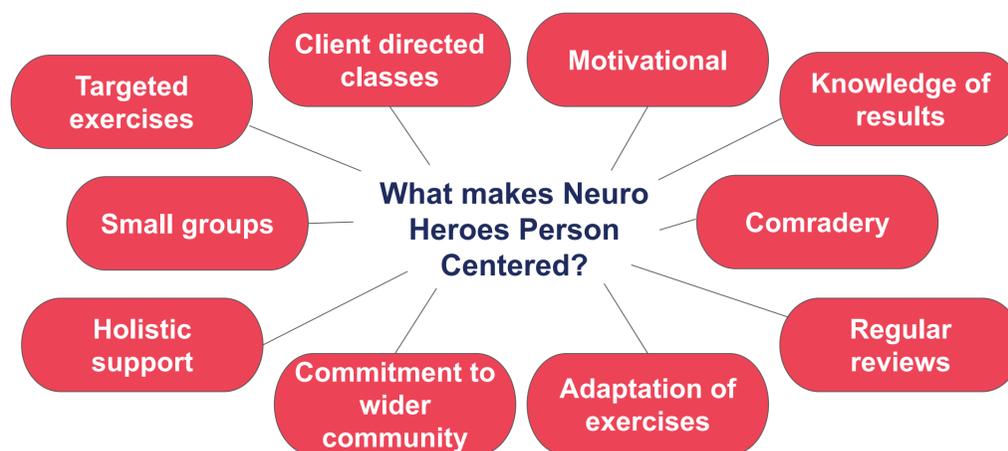
Our PD Power session was our first virtual group, piloted in October 2020, with the input of six people living with Parkinson's. We wanted to include condition-specific exercise alongside strengthening and fitness.

One participant says sessions are:

"Very energetic, lots of movement; I appreciate the Parkinson's-specific balance, facial moves and doing two exercises at once"

Weekly sessions were developed using invaluable service-user feedback, offering something different from the average repetitive physiotherapy sheet. We knew people with Parkinson's who wanted to exercise at the intensity that research recommends, but didn't know how. One client says:

"PD Power in particular delivers everything I need from an exercise class - it challenges and develops my fitness, strength, balance and coordination, and it's great fun!"



Outcomes and next steps

Our virtual sessions attract participants from around the UK, and making sessions accessible means we can group participants to best meet their needs. Participants set six weekly goals and say:

"Neuro Heroes has made a huge difference to my physical fitness and mental wellbeing"

People have increased their one minute sit to stand scores by an average of 30 repetitions (table 1.), and have consistently reduced the number of steps needed to turn, improving functional balance and reducing falls risk. We share our reflections, approach and lessons learned with specialist teams so more people can benefit from remote expertise. Our members' Facebook group ensures regular contact with our community and allows us to continue the valuable feedback loop that has enabled us to truly meet our participants' varied needs.

Table 1. A Chart to show the number of sit to stands completed in one minute by Neuro Heroes participants over an average of 8 months

