

# Parkinson's class a finalist in Exercise Industry Awards

An innovative exercise class is proving a hit with participants, their careers and the New Zealand Exercise Council. The Parkinson's class at YMCA Upper Hutt has recently been named as a finalist in the New Zealand Exercise Industry Awards (community contribution category).

The YMCA was approached by Parkinson's New Zealand in 2007, after funding costs led to a hospital class being discontinued. That original class was designed by Lesley Wirihihana and Debbie Houston-Tupou around functional exercises, ability and coordination to aide in fundamental everyday movements. The YMCA version tweaked the original design and now includes exercise stations for each participant and their caregiver to exercise together and support each other, as well as opening up the class up to people with limited movement and comorbidities. As a result, the class is convivial, supportive and enjoyable experience for everyone involved.

It's fantastic to see the class recognised after its 12-year history with the YMCA, and a great credit and tribute to the late Lesley Wirihihana and to the members of the class who have lost the battle against Parkinsons over the years. The social aspect of the programme is just as important as the exercise. We play classic hits from the 40s, 50s and 60s; research shows that singing therapy might reduce some of the difficult-to-treat motor and mood symptoms associated with Parkinson's disease. At the end of each class we make community announcements: birthdays announcements, guest speakers at the next Parkinson's meeting, or Hutt Valley community events which may benefit and support participants in the class. The last Friday of the month there's a group morning tea.

"I like the social side," says Russell, who has been coming to the YMCA for over six years. "And keeping active means you come out buzzing – a bit tired but buzzing. I enjoy the laughter and the endorphins created by that laughter."

All this adds up to a strong community feel, a supporting environment and connections that branch out beyond the gym and into the lives of participants. In 2017 the class was accredited by Sport Wellington as an 'approved community strength and balance class', and some of the regulars recently featured in the ACC 'Live Stronger for Longer' campaign.

"It's great to see the class gaining recognition, but that's just the icing on the cake," says Emily Morris, targeted health programmes coordinator. "We love seeing so many people come together in a safe, secure and friendly environment to exercise their minds and their bodies. We hope the class continues for decades to come!"

To find out more on YMCA Upper Hutt's classes and programmes, please visit: [ycentral.nz](http://ycentral.nz)

