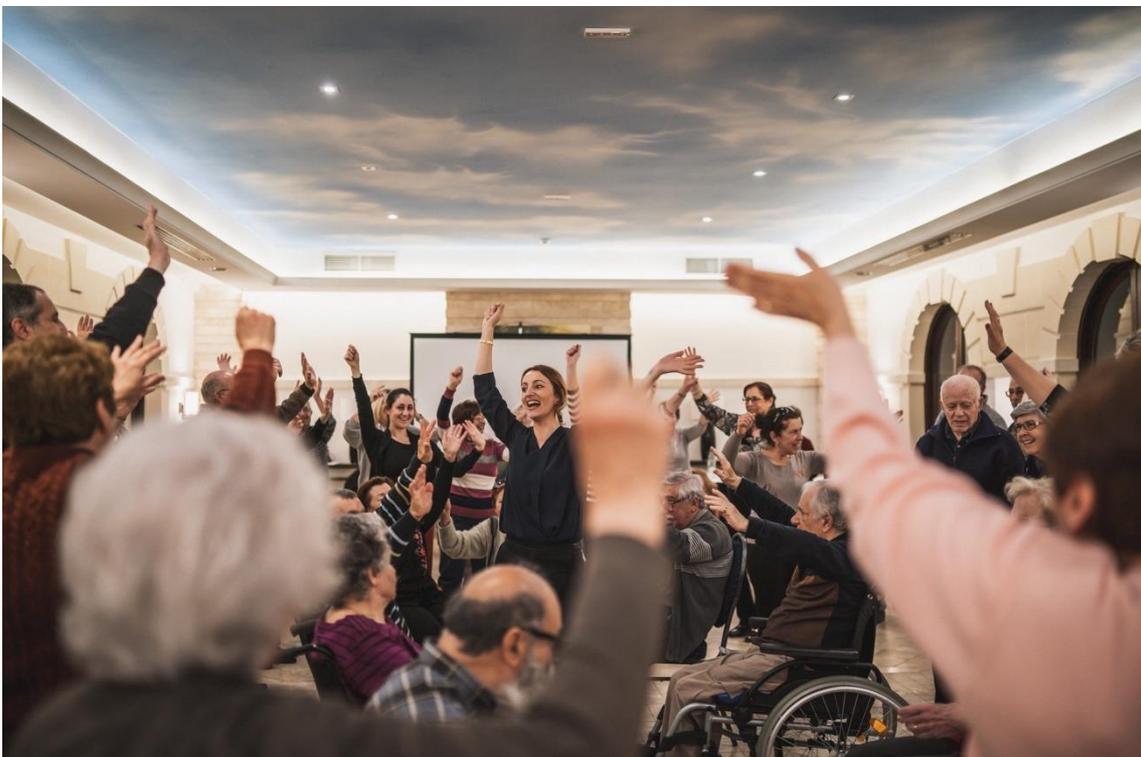


## Helping Parkinson's sufferers through dance: one woman's mission

Natalie Muschamp is a former professional dancer. She now dedicates her time to help Parkinson's sufferers and relatives. She speaks to MARIANNA CALLEJA about her dream to set up a dedicated Parkinson's centre



[TWEET](#) [SHARE](#)

In a dance studio in Swieqi, a group of individuals gather every week, united by their shared experiences and a desire for hope and healing.

Leading them is Natalie Muschamp, a former professional dancer who is dedicating her life to using the power of dance to help people with Parkinson's disease.

Having witnessed the toll, the illness took on her aunt's partner, she felt a deep connection to the cause.

Parkinson's disease is a neurodegenerative disorder that primarily affects the brain and results in involuntary movements, including shaking, stiffness, and challenges with balance and coordination.

These symptoms typically worsen gradually as the condition advances. In later stages of the disease, individuals may experience difficulties with walking and speaking.



Natalie Muschamp, founder of Step Up for Parkinson's

With sparkling eyes and beaming smile Natalie spoke of her passion for dance. It began at a young age.

She studied dance and honed her skills, dreaming of a career on the stage. However, fate had different plans for her when she arrived in Malta.

She chose to utilise dance as a means of treatment for not only people with Parkinson's but also their caregivers.

It was during her time at the University of Malta, that Natalie discovered the remarkable impact dance could have on individuals with Parkinson's disease.

“What really spoke to me is my aunt, and her partner who passed away after suffering of Parkinson's. After his passing, she walked a pilgrimage all the way from Amsterdam to Rome and wrote a book about it,” Natalie told me.

But what started as a personal journey soon evolved into something much greater - a movement that would touch over 200 lives in Malta.

“I looked at my aunt and realised the burden her partner's disease had on her. I realised there is no support for a caregiver, not just Parkinson's, but of any other illness,” she said.

She immersed herself in research, exploring the potential of creative movement in helping those with Parkinson's and their carers.

The journey led her to develop a methodology centred around communication, expression, and connection.

“Dancing like no one is watching, or really letting go... or even screaming, it's kind of a relief. So, I tried to provide a space where individuals could feel a sense of belonging, a respite from being solely identified as patients or caregivers, but instead be husband and wife, father and a daughter.”

Eager to turn her vision into reality, Natalie reached out to the Malta Parkinson's Disease Association. Despite being a student at the time, she secured their support and connected with physiotherapist Amy Dimech.

With the association's assistance, Natalie organised the first pilot course, which, with time, evolved into a free-of-charge service.

She sought guidance from former President Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, who shared insights on applying for funds.

Thanks to the support from the Community Chest Fund Foundation, Step Up for Parkinson's was able to offer two classes free of charge for a year.

The response was overwhelming, with the number of participants growing from 10 to 50 and eventually reaching over 200 just before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Step Up for Parkinson's has since become a beacon of hope for the Parkinson's community in Malta, but the organisation is now looking into establishing their own dedicated Parkinson's centre, while also training local professionals to aid people with Parkinson's.

“In Malta, we only have one person specializing in Parkinson's, and she does not live in Malta either. She has to commute from Gozo when she is needed.”

*To address this, Step Up for Parkinson's is organising a fundraising marathon. This 12-hour event will be broadcasted live ONE, NET Television, and F-living, on Wednesday 7 June.*