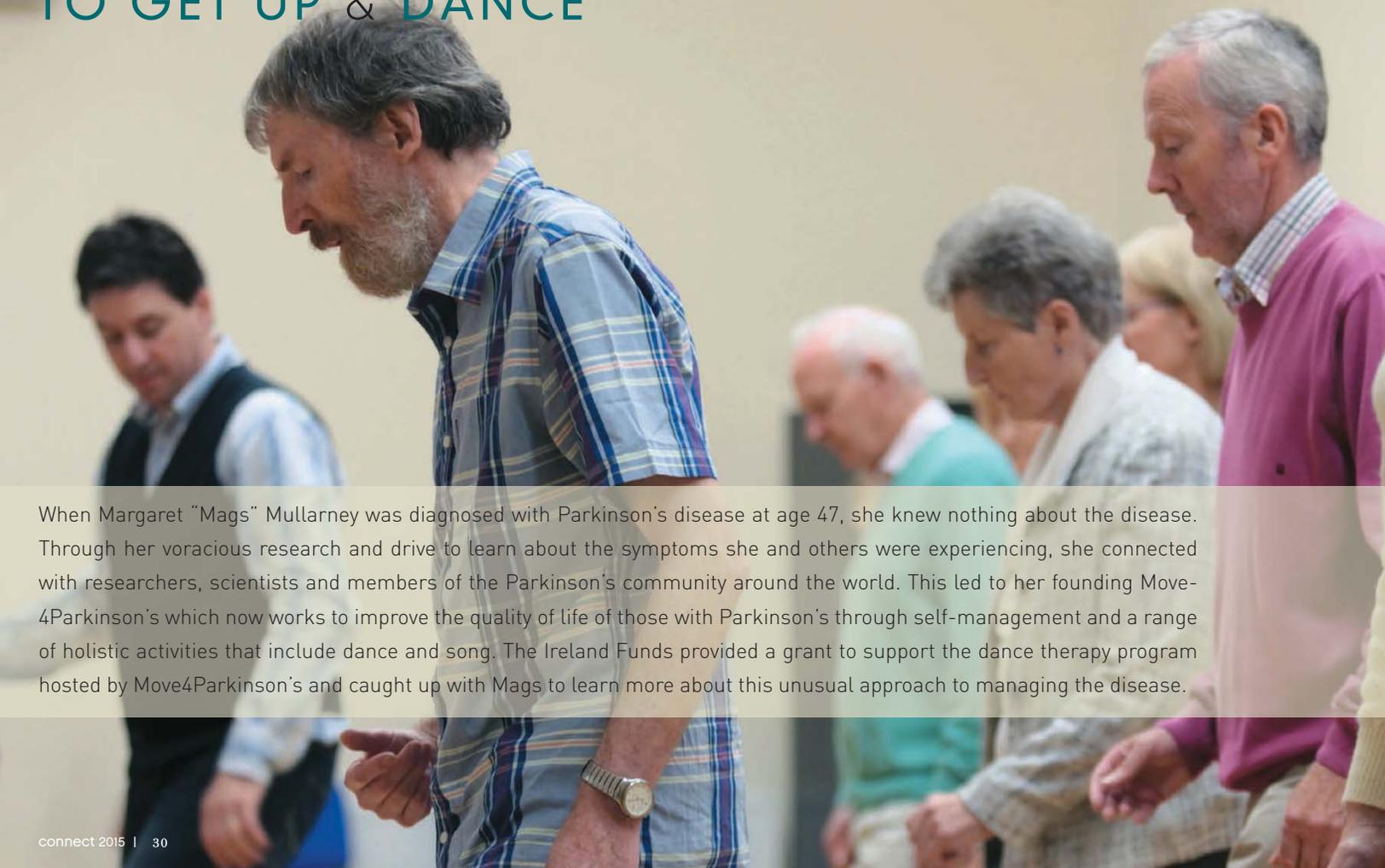




Gone Dancing

# Move4Parkinson's

inspires people with Parkinson's  
**TO GET UP & DANCE**



When Margaret "Mags" Mullarney was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease at age 47, she knew nothing about the disease. Through her voracious research and drive to learn about the symptoms she and others were experiencing, she connected with researchers, scientists and members of the Parkinson's community around the world. This led to her founding Move4Parkinson's which now works to improve the quality of life of those with Parkinson's through self-management and a range of holistic activities that include dance and song. The Ireland Funds provided a grant to support the dance therapy program hosted by Move4Parkinson's and caught up with Mags to learn more about this unusual approach to managing the disease.

## Research has shown

that set dancing can be more beneficial than standard physiotherapy, particularly in dealing with symptoms such as Freezing Gait, Balance & Motor Disability. Irish set dancing was discovered to be beneficial for people with Parkinson's, following a chance discovery by Dr. Daniele Volpe, an Italian neurologist, while on holidays in Ireland in 2010. On his return to Italy, he undertook research which proved the physical benefits. In 2014, Move4Parkinson's commenced pilot classes with 30 participants, taught by Irish set dancing teacher Pat O'Dea, who has been trained in Dr. Volpe's methodology.



Margaret "Mags" Mullarney,  
Founder of Move4Parkinson's



*I come for the music and the rhythm. Connecting with the music reactivates the memory of the week before."*

— Move4Parkinson's participant  
in set dancing

## Q Mags, why did you found Move4Parkinson's?

When I was first diagnosed I knew nothing about it. I thought it was an older person's disease. People even told me not to research too much because I would be terrified at what I would find. But as I moved forward I realized there was a gap in Ireland between how the disease was being treated and the use of a holistic approach. So we developed the 5 elements framework which is about medication awareness, exercise, nutrition, emotional wellbeing, and other treatments. And it was important to state that we're not the disease and we're not the symptoms.

## Q How many people have Parkinson's in Ireland?

There are some rough estimates. Some figures say there are between 10,500 and 12,000. And it looks like that's nearly going to double in the next couple decades. So it's very concerning and needs to be managed properly. The disease has a huge effect on families. If 12,000 people have Parkinson's in Ireland, and at least another 60,000 family members, that's 72,000 touched by the disease. That's the size of the city of Galway.

## Q So you offer set dance and you have a choir that has been nationally recognized. Other than a great community experience, what does this do for those with Parkinson's?

What's important about the work that we do with set dancing and choir is that it is all backed by evidence-based research. These are not just for fun singing and dancing. The purpose of the choir is to help the voice, because your physical voice goes with the progression of Parkinson's.

The research into set dancing for people with Parkinson's was carried out by Italian Professor, Daniel Volpe. He proved that it has the potential to improve mobility, reduce disability and enhance health related quality of life. For us, it's also about making a change and taking a step out into the world to do exercise, which an awful lot of people don't do.

## Q How have The Ireland Funds helped this work?

The Ireland Funds are hugely important and have helped us transform scientific research into real world applications. As we have no government funding, without the Ireland funds we couldn't have progressed from our pilot last January to two permanent set dancing classes for people with Parkinson's. Grants like yours are invaluable and have a direct impact on the lives of those with Parkinson's.

## Q Tell us about the classes.

There's a real energy and vitality at the classes. They're led by Pat O'Dea, a fantastic set dancing teacher specializing in Parkinson's programs. It's so essential to have someone like Pat, who is not only trained to teach people with Parkinson's, but is also able to relate to and gain the trust of participants.

We kick-off with seated exercises, doing various different routines to feel the rhythm of the music and warm our often disconnected bodies. We then get on our feet to do individual Sean-Nós (old-style) steps. As the class moves on, Pat gets us dancing proper Irish Sets in groups, with people with Parkinson's paired with those who don't have it. It's an unbelievable feeling seeing everyone up dancing together by the end of the class, whether they have Parkinson's or not, everyone just comes alive with it.

## Q Mags, what's next for Move4Parkinson's?

This organization is so important. We would see this as a platform for all chronic illnesses, not just Parkinson's. We see the importance of community. And the understanding of disability in Ireland is really important. So people understanding that we are not the problem, we're still in society and that we have a huge amount to give and we really want to create that world that understands Parkinson's. It's not just Ireland that's going to benefit from the work we're doing. We believe it is a benefit that can be shared worldwide.