



CUSTOMER STORY



# Knocking out Parkinson's disease

How cutting-edge programming and scalable software help **Beat Parkinson's Today** fight a degenerative disease

## CHALLENGE

# A life-altering diagnosis

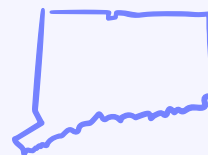
When Lisa Turgeon experienced a tremor in her hand, she knew something wasn't right. "My doctor said it looked like a Parkinson's tremor and that I should have more tests," she says. After seeing a specialist and undergoing a thorough examination, her suspicions were confirmed: She was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in the fall of 2022.

Multiple studies have shown that the [symptoms of Parkinson's are reduced](#) with a combination of aerobic activity, strength training, and stretching. When Lisa's doctor recommended exercise, she obliged. "I thought, Hey! That's something I can do right away," she says.

A retired teacher living in Andover, Connecticut, Lisa had been a runner early in life, but at the time of her diagnosis, she didn't consider herself an exercise aficionado and wasn't sure where to begin. Then she learned about [Beat Parkinson's Today](#), a local nonprofit dedicated to providing exercise, education, and community that empowers those living with the disease.



## Impact at a glance



**350 enrolled members** in Connecticut



**Successful program results** published in Yale University medical journal



**33 classes** provided per week, online and in-person

## What is Parkinson's disease?

Parkinson's is a neurodegenerative disease affecting more than 10 million people worldwide. It's caused by a loss of nerve cells that produce dopamine, a neurotransmitter in the brain, leading to a variety of symptoms that can inhibit daily function. Although there is no cure, treatment to manage symptoms and slow progression range from lifestyle changes to medication.

## Symptoms include:

impaired balance

rigid movement

difficulty with daily tasks

tremors

difficulty with speech

## SOLUTION

# Fighting against a degenerative disease



Michelle Hespeler, executive director

Founded by Michelle Hespeler in 2016, Beat Parkinson's Today, or Beat PD Today, relies on high intensity functional interval training, no-contact boxing, and visualization to "beat" and slow the onset of common symptoms of Parkinson's disease.

Michelle, now the executive director of Beat PD Today, was diagnosed with the illness at 40. As a physical education teacher, she'd been passionate about exercise for decades. When her life intersected with Parkinson's, she made the decision to not only fight it but to arm others with the resources to do the same. The organization employs trainers, yoga teachers, and an administrative team, plus features workshops for caretakers and families of loved ones with Parkinson's disease.

The program's classes consist of movement through several workout stations, focusing on intervals of aerobic activity, strength training, no-contact boxing, and stretching.

"These clients taught me about what it means to have a winning mentality," says Caroline Murray, a volunteer at Beat PD today, who also plays professional soccer abroad. "They are so encouraging to one another, and that's what a team is all about."



“

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—Caroline Murray, volunteer

## SOLUTION

# Investing in software to scale



Emily Hespeler, Michelle’s niece and Beat PD Today’s program director, tackles the organization’s communication, financial assistance, hiring, and donor outreach. Like many nonprofit leaders, Emily wears a lot of hats but is fulfilled by the positivity of the community. “I love working with people on a day-to-day basis,” Emily says. “It’s amazing to see them improve.”

In the fall of 2022, Emily convinced their team to utilize Bonterra’s Fundraising and Engagement offering. The team uses the donation platform as a customer relationship management (CRM) tracker. Emily notes this has streamlined communication and made work more efficient. “Before, it was a little bit more chaotic to track everything,” Emily says. “We were repeating phone calls that shouldn’t have been duplicated. With Bonterra, we can separate people into different groups depending on where we met them, which saves us and our donor’s time.”

Although their team may have been skeptical about new software, the investment paid off quickly: Emily’s team raised \$7,000 on its first GivingTuesday. “I had a feeling that Bonterra was the platform we needed,” Emily says, proud of their organization’s achievement.

In addition to enabling clear and personalized contact with donors, Bonterra’s communication systems allow Emily and their colleagues to update Beat Parkinson’s Today’s program participants through email blasts.



We use this function to tell people when classes are canceled, what events are upcoming, and where new classes are located. This saves us a lot of time. Once they’re in class, it’s the trainer who is communicating with them. But before that, it’s on us to make sure they get where they need to be.”

—Emily Hespeler, program director

Emily’s team raised

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## IMPACT

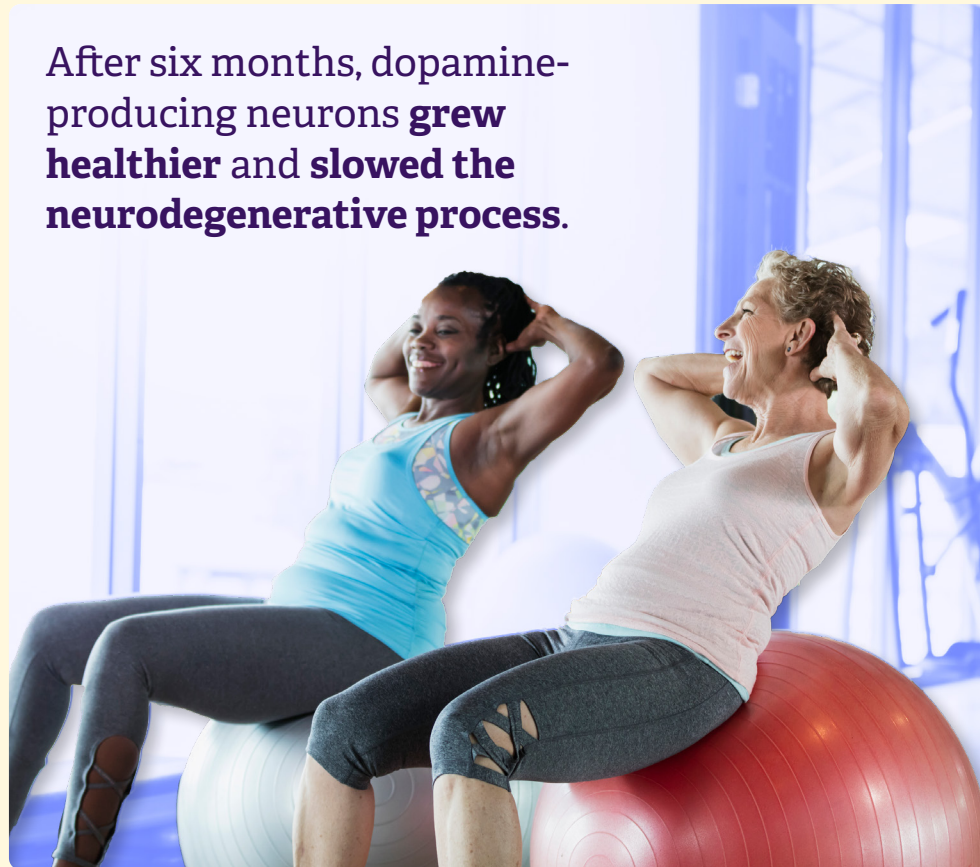
# A method that works

Lisa embodies Beat PD Today's winning attitude and growth mindset. She now participates in classes between three-to-five days a week. Her family even surprised her with a home gym so that she can box at any time. She went from being an intimidated new patient to a seasoned pro, even completing virtual classes when the weather is bad. "The classes get your heart rate up, which is another thing that's supposed to help us," she says. "It's all very scientific and it's all very planned — but really fun."

Others have taken note of Lisa's progress. "I've seen her gait improve," says Pete, Lisa's husband, who has also benefited from the resources Beat PD Today offers caretakers. "I'm grateful for the seminars. They cover lots of topics: legal issues, medical issues, wellness. They keep everybody on the same page and give you an outlet if you have questions or just want to share stories. It makes me happy that we have a place to go and that there are people who are supportive. We're all in the same boat and Lisa is making progress. It's a great thing."

Beat PD Today's success hasn't gone unnoticed by health experts. Yale University consulted the nonprofit for a [micro-study](#) in 2020, following 10 participants from the program. The study concluded that after six months in the Beat PD Today program, dopamine-producing neurons grew healthier and slowed the neurodegenerative process. Put simply, the effects of the disease were stalled, improving both physical and mental health and decreasing a loss of function (compared to those who didn't participate in the program).

After six months, dopamine-producing neurons **grew healthier** and **slowed the neurodegenerative process**.





With a dedicated team, committed clientele, and the technology to reach and do more, Beat PD Today continues to expand its services across multiple states, and countries abroad. But even as the organization's scale increases, its community focus doesn't waver.

For years, every workout has ended with the same, powerful motto, one Lisa knows by heart: Think strong. Move strong. Be Strong. Beat Parkinson's disease today.



Bonterra is technology for the greatest good. Learn more about Bonterra Fundraising and Engagement [here](#).