



By Kim Tarnopolski



Debbie Smith

# Learning to Live

## with Parkinson's Disease

Debbie Smith is a profile in courage and positivity. Five years ago, Debbie was looking forward to her 52nd birthday when she noticed changes in her left hand.

At the urging of her husband, Debbie went to see a neurologist. After a thorough neurological examination, Debbie and her husband received the unsettling news that Debbie had Parkinson's Disease (PD). There is no objective test to make a definitive diagnosis of PD. Instead, a doctor looks for two or more of the cardinal signs to be present. These include bradykinesia (moving extremely slow), tremor, rigidity, and postural instability also referred to as parkinsonism. Tremor is the most apparent and well-known symptom.

Now, five years later, Debbie laughs and tells people, "God needed someone loud and energetic in the Parkinson's Community." She takes every opportunity to share her story, participate in trial studies and show her family that she's part of the "cure." In November, Debbie was able to share her journey with members of 100+ Women Who Care Valley of the Sun. This philanthropic group of women meet quarterly to support a local nonprofit. Debbie presented Banner Neuro Wellness and was successful in gaining the group's support. Debbie, on behalf of the Ahwatukee group, delivered \$11,300 to Banner Neuro Wellness.

Banner Neuro Wellness (BNW) is under the umbrella of the Banner Health Foundation and serves individuals and families



Participants and staff from Banner Neuro Wellness

affected by PD. Studies show exercises that specifically address the symptoms of PD can enhance a person's mobility and quality of life. BNW has separate support groups for men, women, and care partners. BNW offers Exercise4BrainChange, which applies principles to optimize brain repair, brain recognition, and skill acquisition. BNW also offers music, yoga, speech therapy, art, boxing, and Friday Coffee Talk to keep the person with PD engaged and hopefully avoid depression.

Debbie made the decision to retire this year, so she could focus full-time on her health. She regularly attends BNW three times a



week. She's on a mission to help newly diagnosed people understand that Parkinson's Disease is not a death sentence. Debbie shares, "I know that I have this disease for a reason. I want to make sure I use the opportunity to impact those fighting the disease who may not be as strong as I am."



To learn more about these organizations, visit <https://www.bannerhealth.com/services/neurosciences-stroke/support/banner-neuro-wellness> and [www.100wvvalleyofthesun.org](http://www.100wvvalleyofthesun.org).

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