

AUSSIES' ROLE IN JERUSALEM GROUP

A punch against Parkinson's

PETER KOHN

TWO Australians – one from Sydney and one from Melbourne – have helped establish the first support group for people with Parkinson's in Jerusalem.

Karyn Spilberg of Melbourne, who has had Parkinson's for 15 years and is on the board of Parkinson's Victoria was visiting American-born Debbie Shapiro, a Facebook friend in Jerusalem who has Parkinson's, in 2016. Shapiro was concerned at the lack of any Parkinson's support group in Jerusalem, with the nearest ones located in Tel Aviv and Haifa.

Spilberg persuaded Shapiro to accompany her to the World Parkinson's Congress (WPC) in the US that year. The WPC is the premier world event for the disorder in which nerve cells in the brain malfunction over time, resulting in tremor, rigidity and loss of balance.

On her return from WPC, Shapiro set up Tikvah for Parkinson's to aid more than 10,000 People Living With Parkinson's (PLWP) in greater Jerusalem, with exercise, advice and education.

Organisers were overwhelmed by the response to an information evening, and soon Tikvah was up and running. "Our biggest success has been our rehabilitation program, which includes dance, art therapy, boxing, Tai Chi, Nordic walking and physical and speech



Robert Kohn (left) in a workout with a Parkinson's sufferer in Jerusalem.

therapy," said Shapiro.

Tikvah caught the eye of Robert Kohn, a Sydney grandfather who regularly visits family in Israel. He had become an assistant trainer for Punching Parkos, a Sydney PLWP initiative started by a friend, Adrian Unger, who has Parkinson's. Unger has received an OAM for his communal efforts in combating the disease.

Kohn volunteered for Shapiro's organisation during his latest stay in Jerusalem, describing her as "the driving force behind the program here and very passionate about its success".

"Robert came into our lives, into the program," recalled Shapiro. "He walked in and right away he knew who needed help and how to help them."

Shapiro said the Parkinson's

sufferers in the group have bonded through their face-to-face contact and on social media. "We've become a close group of friends. There's a feeling of optimism and achdut [unity]."

Meanwhile, a Melbourne PWLP support group has been formed. The Parkinson's Boxing Group convenes every Thursday in Elsternwick. The group's spokesperson Menashe Kaltmann said, "Physiotherapists and neurologists speak openly about the benefit of Parkinson's sufferers doing regular exercise and experience has shown that it may slow the progress of the Parkinson's by doing regular exercise like boxing."

**For more information on Tikvah
For Parkinson's, contact
Robert Kohn on 0413 676 963.**