

Prevention of Falls Beneficial to Senior Population

By Jane Barry, The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

Taking a tumble is not usually a pleasant experience unless you are a football player or involved in serious sports. As we all get older it becomes less and less easy to shake off a spill. Further along the spectrum of falling comes the possibility of injuries and the accompanying aggravation of needing medical care, possible support from family or friends while recuperating and needing support services of the health care system. In recognition of all the negatives associated with falling, the Saint Joseph's Community Health Centre (SJCHC) applied for financial help from Service Canada and the New Brunswick Department of Wellness, Culture and Sport to minimize the problem through prevention. Now senior citizens in Greater Saint John are stepping into action.



Saint Joseph's Community Health Centre and volunteers are making it possible for seniors to prevent some of the risks associated with falling and become more fit with special exercise programs across the community. Pictured at a session at the H.O.P.E. Centre on Loch Lomond road are some participants. From the left are Darlene Losier, Gail Dacey, Irene Bigney, Catherine Boisvert, Pauline Hughes and Elvina Brighton. Photo: Kâté Braydon/Telegraph-Journal

The (SJCHC) is part of the Horizon Health Network. It works in partnership with the community, offering skills and resources to help individuals improve their health practices and building a healthier community. An interdisciplinary team of health professionals works together to provide primary health care as well as educational programs, services and health information to address local priority health issues such as chronic disease, poverty, domestic violence, healthy youth development, obesity and injury prevention.

Last fall, senior volunteers signed on to become Seniors Fitness Instructors by enrolling in a free

course (SFIC). and then to share their expertise with others. It's part of an overall falls prevention initiative with several key partners: St. Joseph's Community Health Centre, Go Ahead Seniors, Saint John Leisure Services, St Joseph's Physiotherapy Department and the Seniors' Loyalist Zone. Funding for this project comes from the New Horizons for Seniors Program.

The two-part project first involves an assessment at a clinic by health care professionals which can take place at various locations at the request of an organization or community agency. The second segment involves active participation in exercise programs led by the trained volunteers (SFIC).

The free "On the Go Mobile Fall Risk Clinics" the first part of the program, aim to raise public awareness and measure the risk of falls in our increasingly aging population. Data contained in five successive Vital Signs reports, produced annually by the Greater Saint John Community Foundation, point out that our community is rapidly growing older and services are needed. The falls risk standardized assessment takes about 20 minutes and is completed by health care professionals. By checking a person's history of previous falls, medication use, vision, balance, sensation, strength, balance and reaction time, they produce a personalized falls risk score and an action plan to assist in improving areas of difficulty. Organizations such as senior clubs or tenants associations are encouraged to request this clinic for their group's members.

The second element of the project offers seniors the opportunity to participate in free, senior led, 45 min exercise programs directed by those who have completed the training course. They provide cardio, balance, strength training and falls prevention education. Seniors get an opportunity to participate in exercise, learn about injury prevention and interact socially. Participants receive educational booklets filled with key information and opportunities to track their progress. One such program is currently being offered at the new community H.O.P.E. Centre, adjacent to St. Joseph's Church in the Loch Lomond area. Participants like Irene Bigney, Catherine Boisvert, Elvina Brighton and Gail Dacey are keen on the activities and love getting together at the newly opened facility to socialize. Phyllis and Donald Hanlon are both staying active as they recuperate from significant health challenges. "It gets you loosened up" says Donald. SJCHC Physiotherapist Pam Wallace is very supportive of the program, as is Helen Bridgeo, of Saint John Leisure Services. They want to see the program available in all parts of Greater Saint John. Darlene Losier lives in the Carleton Kirk Complex on the West Side and plans to bring her SFIC training in the program to her neighbours there. "It will get them stronger and moving more, particularly the very elderly" she adds.

The Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging offers certification, a goal toward which many of the volunteers who have completed the course (SFIC). are aiming. The next fitness instructors' course will be coming up in early June, free for those over 50. The Community Health Centre is looking for volunteers interested in taking the course and leading classes in their neighbourhoods in greater Saint John. Lori Patterson, an occupational therapist at CHC, is the contact for more information on the clinics, exercise sessions and course at 632-5537. "This is an exciting endeavor as we move into action, to prevent injury and promote wellness in the 50 plus population in greater Saint John" concludes Patterson.



Community Profile is a weekly column highlighting community causes and work done by non-profit organizations in the Greater Saint John area. It is contributed by Jane Barry, executive director of The Greater Saint John Community Foundation. Contact the foundation at 506-672-8880, sjfoundation@nb.aibn.com.

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