Get Fit with Geri-Fit

Winterset Public Library

Intergenerational

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$101-250

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Byline

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Geri-Fit® is a 45-minute, evidence-based strength training exercise class for older adults of all physical ability. Most of the bodybuilding exercises are performed seated in chairs with a set of light dumbbell weights with participants following along to a DVD or streamed workout. There’s no dancing, aerobics or choreography to learn, and participants never have to get on the floor.

Winterset Public Library offered the program twice a week for 12 weeks as part of a nationwide study. As with all of our programs, these classes were free to the public and held in our meeting room.

Advanced Planning

The library had previously offered tai chi and yoga sessions, and those were well-received. Our community does have two for-profit fitness centers, but those do not offer programs or services specifically for the needs of seniors. The library has a very supportive and active senior user group, so we thought this series of free wellness classes would find appeal and fit a need in the community.

In late 2018, we agreed to have the library participate in the study with two library staff (one librarian and the library director) trained as Geri-Fit leaders. We completed the online training prior to the sessions starting in mid-January.

Marketing

We did not expend any funds on marketing. Word of mouth was a great way to publicize the program. We host a weekly Community Coffee every Friday morning and took our fliers in and promoted each week. The Coffee attendees are primarily seniors and they were very enthusiastic.

Fliers at the circulation desk got a lot of attention. Our library uses social media successfully, Facebook is a great way for us to reach participants. We posted on the library's Facebook page and shared it to numerous Winterset-area pages to gather more interest.

We also shared with our usual media sources: local newspapers, area magazine, radio stations and "The Winterset Citizen" online community blog of events.

Budgeting

Since the library was participating in the nationwide Geri-Fit study, we received the three DVD workouts, online staff training and public performance licensing at no charge.

Staff was not sure if potential participants would have access to or money for their own light handheld weights, and we did not want that to be a barrier to participation. We used some programming funds from the Friends of Winterset Library to purchase 20 sets of two-pound weights and 20 stretch bands. We stored them on a cart and

wheeled them into the meeting room for Geri-Fit classes.

Halfway through the series, leaders were so proud of the attendance, dedication and improvement in the participants that we purchased plain, reusable water bottles and used the library’s Cricut machine to personalize water bottles for each of them.

Day-of-event Activity

Our meeting room could accommodate approximately 20 people for a workout of this type, so we offered registration to ensure we had enough space and had enough equipment. The afternoon class filled quickly, so we added a morning class, which also filled to capacity. Geri-Fit was a hit.

These workouts are for persons with all abilities. They are completed while seated, although there is a portion of them where participants stand up to do lunges, squats and balance exercises. However, there are modifications for everyone, and safety is stressed.

We set the room up with a chair, set of weights and a stretch band for each participant. The DVD workouts were projected on the big screen and piped through the sound system. We covered all windows so our workout space was private. We required all participants to sign a liability waiver.

Program Execution

The staff did more than just push "play" — we provided encouragement and gentle guidance to help ensure proper form and movement was being done correctly for safety. We worked out alongside the participants and noticed changes in our own abilities — taking the stairs is easier, lifting boxes of mail and stacks of books is easier, and bending down to pick things up isn't such a chore now.

Our attendance waned a bit as some participants decided it wasn't a good fit for them, but others brought a friend or spouse to classes and encouraged them to keep attending! “Misery loves company,” they joked.

Geri-Fit provided attendance trackers and a 2.5-page evaluation to collect data for their study. The two library Geri-Fit leaders reviewed the evaluations and were not surprised to learn that participants felt Geri-Fit was a very worthy program. Most reported feeling better overall at the end of the 12-week program. Strength, balance, posture and energy levels were positively affected.

Less than three weeks into the program, staff observed noticeable changes in the participants: some were able to do more repetitions, some increased from two-pound to three-pound weights, others were demonstrating more flexibility in their stretches. Collectively, we discovered together we had fewer "snaps, crackles and pops" in our joints over time. The group was becoming stronger, more flexible and more mobile.

There were additional benefits to the physical aspects of Geri-Fit. Mental/emotional health improved as we laughed and joked a lot during the workouts, which made them even more enjoyable, and the time passed quickly. Every workout included using left and right directional, and one workout even incorporated counting our repetitions backwards from 100 by 7s, which was a challenge every time. Participants reported feeling better after they did their workouts; their confidence in themselves and their abilities increased.

The social aspect of getting together to work out was significant. Participants made new friends as a result of the workouts and appreciated an opportunity to get out of the house. One participant inquired about the possibility of buying the DVD to use at home, but changed her mind as she realized she wouldn't do the workouts without the support of her workout buddies.

Advice

I would encourage other libraries to offer some sort of group physical activity for all ages, especially seniors. Our group had been asking since halfway through the study if we would continue the series, so we are starting up Geri-Fit and More in early May. Using Friends of the Library funding, we purchased a few more of the Geri-Fit DVDs to add some variety to the workouts. We have encouraged participants to purchase

heavier weights if they want to keep improving. We are also channeling them towards other wellness opportunities, especially the upcoming Wellness Wednesdays in Winterset series.

I would like to encourage one of our Geri-Fit participants to get the online training so they could host and/or fill in for staff leaders when we are not available. We are also looking forward to incorporating some of the other workouts; there is a Golf Fit program and a Back Fit program that would find audiences here.

The physical, emotional and social benefits we have observed have definitely improved fitness and well-being in our community, and many were quite surprised the library was offering workouts. Geri-Fit provided us with an inexpensive and effective means for our library to provide a much-needed program in our community.

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Supporting Materials

Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

Slideshow Images



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Wellness Wednesdays in Winterset: Lunch & Learns and More!

Audiences:

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Audiences:

Intergenerational
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Women Staying Healthy

Audiences:

Adults (21 and up)
Aug 10, 2016
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In Creative Company: Art Classes for Older Adults

Audiences:

Intergenerational