



## *Fun with Food and Fitness*

**WHAT:** *Fun with Food and Fitness* is a program that educates low-income older adults about nutrition and uses social support to increase their level of physical activity.

**WHY:** *Fun with Food and Fitness* was started in response to focus groups that were conducted to find out how Waldo County seniors would like to learn about nutrition and physical activity.

**WHO:** Initially the program increased the physical activity of 17 low-income seniors in the town of Monroe. Since the initial group's success, interventions at two additional sites have started with more sites planned for the near future.

**HOW:** The University of Southern Maine Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service conducted the focus groups. Using the focus group information, a collaboration of the University of Maine Cooperative Extension (UMCE), Resource Connections, and the Healthy Living Project selected one group of focus groups participants with which to initiate a nutrition and physical activity program. The first group was made up of ten members of the Monroe Community Extension group. These were people who had been coming together monthly for 15-45 years as a social group to do fund-raising activities, listen to various speakers, and cook different potluck meals. Because the town is small and rural, many of these same participants were also involved in the church and other local organizations. They were a group involved in a number of social activities, but none of them were physical activity-focused.

At this point, a leader surfaced from the Monroe Community Extension Group. She invited Community Extension Group members to attend a weekly walking group. Participants were welcome to bring friends to the group. The group members used pedometers and walking logs to track steps. The participants also came together once per week for physical activity demonstrations from the Healthy Maine Partnership (HMP) and a nutrition presentation from the peer leader—a former UMCE nutrition aide. This model was successful and half of the original participants continued to be physically active after the intervention was completed. Seeing this as a good model for other low-income seniors, the collaboration expanded the project to new sites and renamed it *Fun with Food and Fitness*.

Since the initial group met, this program has been held in two low-income senior housing facilities in Waldo County (in the towns of Searsport and Belfast). At these facilities, a UMCE nutrition aide from the *Eat Well* Program has taught 12 weekly nutrition education lessons. An instructor from the local HMP, who meets with the group weekly to lead the physical activity, has coordinated the physical activity portion of this initiative. Sessions have included information and instruction on different exercises using the exercise pyramid as a guide, Tai Chi, exercise videos, walking demonstrations, and also stretching and strength-building exercises. Between the weekly sessions, getting older adults to be physically active has been successful by having the



participants work together. During the series, the instructors watched to determine the natural leaders in the sessions. After the staff had completed sessions, two peer leaders were selected at each site to use supplied resources to continue a peer-led physical activity program. These peer leaders were offered a small stipend for organizing and leading physical activity times at the senior housing sites. Since then, leading the physical activity portion of the program has transitioned from the HMP to the peer leader. The role of the peer leader is to determine what types of activities the group would like to do and then organize times and places to do those activities.

**WHEN:** The Monroe group met for 10 weeks from April to June 2004, with its core members continuing to be physically active. The Belfast and Searsport groups met from January 2005 until June 2005 and just resumed in the fall.

**RESOURCES:** The resources for this project included staff time from UMCE and the HMP and pedometers from the Maine Nutrition Network. The peer leader's time was an invaluable resource. Small monetary stipends were offered to the peer leaders for their time, but in some cases were refused. Other resources included exercise videos, informational handouts, therabands, dowels for stretching exercises, stress balls, bags of rice for weights, and water bottles.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Participants of the groups have stayed physically active and many have lost weight and increased their strength. In particular, using a peer leader has worked extremely well to keep participants coming back to the groups and staying active. Keeping the groups together during the summer has been the main challenge because many of the participants are busy with visitors and other events.

#### **KEY CONTACTS:**

Amy Wagner  
Healthy Living Project  
P.O. Box 287  
Belfast, ME 04915  
(207) 930-2650  
hlp@wcgh.org  
www.healthylivingproject.org

**FUTURE PLANS:** These groups will continue to be active with organization from the peer leaders. Two more housing sites in different communities will be introduced to the program in 2006.

**SOCIAL SUPPORT (NETWORK):** Social support drives these physical activity groups in two main ways. First, living in the same facilities and being part of the same community organizations has created an informal social contract between the participants. One participant noted that she didn't care to get up early in the morning, but since her walking partner (who kept the same pace) could only walk at that time, she felt that she had to get up. Secondly, using peer leaders to organize the physical activity sessions establishes a sustainable social network where participation is less likely to fall off when the outside facilitators stop leading the programming.



## Gardiner Area Field Hockey Club

**WHAT:** The Gardiner Area Field Hockey Club is a group of adults who play field hockey for about an hour once or twice a week. In the summer and fall, the club plays pickup games amongst themselves and scrimmages with other local teams including high schools. In the winter, the club plays pickup games at a local indoor facility.

**WHY:** Field hockey is a popular sport in Maine and a great form of exercise, but there are limited opportunities for adults to play beyond high school or college.

**WHO:** Adult players from Gardiner and the surrounding area meet weekly to play field hockey. They range in age from early 20s to 50s and include professionals, stay-at-home moms, current and former coaches, and people who just love to play! The club is mostly women, but occasionally men play as well.

**HOW:** At a Gardiner High School alumni field hockey game in the fall of 2003, a former field hockey player brought a sign-up sheet for alumni interested in playing together. They began pickup games at a local field and recruited more players through word-of-mouth.

With permission, the club uses the Gardiner High School field hockey field for free in the spring and summer. When the high school team returns at the end of the summer, the club plays at a private local field through the fall. In the winter, they play at an indoor facility. They continue recruiting new players, and staff at the indoor facility also spread the word.

There is a main contact person who coordinates the group; she arranges the playing locations and times, sets up scrimmages, maintains an e-mail list through which information is disseminated, and collects payment of facility fees. When the contact person is unavailable, another player takes on those responsibilities. Decisions are made based on input from all club players.

Players are responsible for supplying their own mouthguards, shinguards, and sticks. The contact person does bring extra shin guards, sticks, and balls, which were donated by Gardiner High School. Also, some players bring extra sticks for others to borrow. Players contribute items to a first aid kit, as needed, and the contact person brings that as well.

**WHEN:** In the fall of 2003, when the club started, an average of 10 people played each week. Later, membership expanded to include alumni from other local areas and turnout increased. As of July 2005, there were approximately 100 people on the e-mail contact list, of which about 30 played regularly. Typically, 10-20 players play each week.

**RESOURCES:** Participation is free in the summer, spring, and fall. During the winter, players commit to play eight-week sessions by contributing to the cost of the rental of a full-size indoor field. Typically, the cost per person is \$45 per eight-week session (\$5.50/week), when about 20 players commit. Walk-on players are welcome and pay \$8 per game.



**LESSONS LEARNED:** Simply asking people to play, starting with a sign-up sheet and getting the word out worked well. A suggestion is to contact local high schools at an alumni or homecoming game and ask interested people to sign up, or simply call some people you know in the area to see if they want to play.

2005 was the first summer that the club had scrimmages and response was great! It was fun to play another team in addition to playing pickup games amongst each other.

In the summer of 2004, the club asked players to pay \$1 per week to build up a little money to purchase pinnies, balls, or first aid supplies, etc. The fee did not work well; some players didn't want to pay because the space was free to the club.

Keeping good records of who participates and what they pay each week is necessary to assure that each player is covering their share of the costs.

Finally, realizing that everyone cannot always be accommodated or pleased by every decision was an important lesson learned.

#### **KEY CONTACTS:**

Tracy Johnson

Main Contact

Gardiner Area Field Hockey Club

(207)588-0567

tracyandkcj@aol.com

**FUTURE PLANS:** Future plans for the club include more games against other teams and participation in a tournament. The club would like another local club to form, especially for the indoor season so there would be another team to play against. Some players may branch off to develop a second club to play in winter 2005.

**SOCIAL SUPPORT (NETWORK):** Each player is accountable to and encouraged by the others. Field hockey cannot be played with just a few people, so if too few people show up, a game cannot be played. Also, the club would not continue if players were not willing to assist with the financial cost associated with facility rental, and/or facilitate the group when the leader is unavailable. In addition, by being on the e-mail contact list, players become part of an information network for opportunities outside of the club. This includes job opportunities for coaching or officiating, clinics for youth players or officials, and other playing opportunities, such as tournaments, alumni games, all-state games, and Maine Field Hockey Day. This club provides an opportunity for players to socialize and continue to play a sport they love as well as interact with the community.



## Village View Walking Crew

**WHAT:** The Village View Walking Crew is a group of older adults that live in Village View Apartments in Sanford. They attend activity and educational classes and participate in a variety of formal and informal activities for health promotion.

**WHY:** This group originated from collaborative programming among the Sanford Housing Authority, Partners for Healthier Communities, and the Sanford/Springvale YMCA. The three collaborators recognized a need and interest in physical activity, good nutrition, and socialization among the residents of Village View. The residents responded favorably.

**WHO:** Initially, participants came from Village View. As time passed, the “Crew” grew to include residents of Sunset Towers in Springvale and other community members.

**HOW:** In the beginning, much of the programming and education was formal. The residents of Village View wanted more physical activity and developed a walking program where participants walked inside on bad weather days and outside on good weather days. This expanded to include walking trips to select *Farm Share* produce, evening stretching exercises, and even barbeques. Participation in the “Crew” has motivated participants from Sunset Towers to request more physical activity opportunities in their housing facility. Consequently, they were offered the program *A Matter of Balance* (see Resources section for more information). The residents of Sunset Towers also practice physical activity with a weekly peer-led exercise routine in the community room.

**WHEN:** *A Matter of Balance* is offered in the spring and fall. The *Senior Farm Share* program is offered during the farming season. Informal activities, such as group exercise, are offered year-round on specific days. Special events are scheduled as interest or need develops.

**RESOURCES:** Partners for Healthier Communities provided mini grants to run the initial *A Matter of Balance* program. Southern Maine Agency on Aging provided volunteer support. Residents contributed \$10 for the *A Matter of Balance* class and the YMCA provided in-kind support. Curves, McDougal’s Farm, and York Cooperative Extension each contributed resources.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Let the communities get involved. Physical activity can be increased in many ways. Partnerships take time to develop.

### KEY CONTACTS:

Patricia Gulnac  
Resident Service Coordinator  
Sanford Housing Authority  
(207) 324-2783



**FUTURE PLANS:** The YMCA, Sanford Housing Authority, and Partners for Healthier Communities will collaborate to maintain and expand the program to include two additional housing facilities. The group will continue to use proven programs such as *A Matter of Balance* and *Farm Share* to generate participation and enthusiasm. More events to include the community will be explored.

**SOCIAL SUPPORT (NETWORK):** This “Crew” of residents from the Sanford Housing Authority and others have invested in good health. They use the expertise of community organizations for education and safety, but they have sustained their physical activity by developing their own agenda and events.