

## Jackson County: *Get Some Balance in Your Life*

### *Establishing a Community-Academic Partnership for Falls Prevention*

**Focus Area:** Falls in older adults

**Jackson County Burden:** 3 deaths, 71 hospitalizations, 914 ED visits (2012)

**Target Population:** Older adults and those at risk for falls

**Approach:** Educational and exercise programs

#### Program Overview

The Jackson County Department of Public Health (JCDPH), in partnership with Western Carolina University's Physical Therapy Department, implements an exercise-based, falls-prevention program called *Get Some Balance in Your Life*. The program also screens for preliminary risk factors, including fall history, vision, medications, gait, balance and home safety.

#### Selection and Development

JCDPH has focused on falls prevention in recent years due to an aging population in its service area. Anecdotal, focus group and Community Health Assessment data demonstrates need in the community. Falls prevention programs are implemented as part of a comprehensive healthy aging initiative. When JCDPH began its focus on falls prevention, it chose to implement *Matter of Balance* due to its promotion as an evidence-based, falls-prevention program by the National Council on Aging. When JCDPH began working with Western Carolina University, Lori Schrodt in the Department of Physical Therapy recommended using *Get Some Balance in Your Life* as a supplemental program. JCDPH and Western Carolina University now exclusively offer *Get Some Balance in Your Life* courses because evaluation data indicated better outcomes and community fit.



**Population:** 40,919

**Median Household Income:** \$36,403



**Key Program Partners:** Jackson County Department of Public Health, Western Carolina University, Jackson County Senior Center, physicians

**Funding Source:** Local health department funding

## Implementation

JCDPH staff, along with physical therapy students from Western Carolina University, implement *Get Some Balance in Your Life* predominately at the Jackson County Senior Center. The course runs twice a week for 12 weeks. These partnerships with Western Carolina University and the Jackson County Senior Center are critical to program implementation. The Jackson County Senior Center plays an important role in recruiting seniors and marketing the program. Physicians in the community also refer participants, but JCDPH believes this relationship could be stronger. The busy schedules of physicians, and changes in the medical system that have affected staff stability, have made it difficult to establish relationships. Assistance from Western Carolina University in implementing *Get Some Balance in Your Life*, which has served more than 50 seniors in the community, has helped to ease some of the staff burden required to run these classes.

## Evaluation

With the assistance of Western Carolina University, participants are assessed both before and after they enter *Get Some Balance in Your Life* to measure physical improvements in balance and mobility. Participants are also surveyed at the end of the course on self-evaluation and program satisfaction measures. From these evaluations, JCDPH identified that *Get Some Balance in Your Life* had better outcomes, participant satisfaction and instructor satisfaction in the community than *Matter of Balance*.

## Keys to Success

Jackson County's experience highlights several important lessons for other communities:

- **Assess the impact and acceptability of programs in your community.** While *Matter of Balance* is a reputable, evidence-based program, data indicated that *Get Some Balance in Your Life* was more effective and acceptable to seniors in Jackson County. As JCDPH Director Paula Carden stated, "Always explore what works in your community. I believe in using best practices to build the evidence base."
- **Involve key stakeholders.** Physicians and senior centers have played an important role in recruiting program participants. While physicians have the ability to identify at-risk patients, establishing this partnership can be challenging.
- **Utilize academic resources.** Take advantage of academic resources in the community if they are available. The community-academic partnership between JCDPH and Western Carolina University has expanded capacity and provided intervention selection and evaluation expertise. Partnerships are a critical way to expand capacity, which is an important lesson for local health departments that often have limited resources and staff capacity.

## Resources

National Council on Aging. (2014). A Matter of Balance. <http://www.ncoa.org/improve-health/center-for-healthy-aging/a-matter-of-balance.html>

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