

## *Older adults stay strong and healthy*

### The Situation

Despite compelling research about the benefits of muscle strengthening, most older adults - particularly women - do not currently perform these exercises. Reasons include: fear of injuring themselves, no experience with lifting weights, lack of access to a professional experienced with older populations, expense of fitness centers, and few community programs. The first baby boomers turned 65 in 2011, 60 percent of whom will manage more than one chronic condition by 2030. Unfortunately, less than 20 percent of older adults engage in adequate physical activity, and fewer perform strength training and flexibility exercises. Underserved populations often have even lower rates of physical activity.

In 2015, the total medical costs for falls totaled more than \$50 billion. Medicare and Medicaid shouldered 75% of these costs. In 2014, the total cost of falls among adults age 65 and older in Kansas was reported to be \$338 million with \$274 million being covered by Medicare or Medicaid.

### What We Did

Stay Strong Stay Healthy (SSSH) provides older adults with access to a safe, structured and effective exercise program. Participants who regularly attend are capable of building muscle and increasing bone density, thus decreasing frailty, osteoporosis and the risk of falls. SSSH is available in 37 local extension units with 48 certified instructors. The eight-week, 16-hour course includes pre, post, and follow up participant surveys and pre and post assessments. Course availability and participation was reduced due to Covid 19. In 2020, Extension agents who are certified instructors, provided 7 SSSH courses totaling more than 112 classes and enrolling 56 participants.

### Outcomes

Very limited data was available in 2020. A representative sample of 2019 program completers who responded to a 3 month follow up survey reported the following:

- 60.8% met strength training recommendations and continuing strength training routine
- 65.7% met recommendations for stretching and continuing stretching routine
- Greater than 80% reported strength and flexibility improved
- 74.6% indicated they sleep better
- 95.8% feel overall health improved

Participants also reported having a positive change in perceived ability to engage in physical activity; a significantly reduced fear of falling and a significant increase in social engagement.

## Success Stories

One person conducts the exercise with her elderly mother; another has face-timed her grand-daughter and they have completed the exercises together; another participant reported “I am still doing all of our SSSH exercises 3 times a week and I am really feeling the benefits.” – *Wyandotte County participant*

“I can start the pull lawnmower now, when before I could not, I just feel better. I am physically and mentally more comfortable in all activities, including walking with more confidence. I have greater confidence and general feeling of well-being. Posture has improved and balance is better. “– *Wyandotte County participant*

“I can tie my shoes, which I couldn't do before.” - *Frontier District- Anderson County participant*

“It gave me much needed social interaction.” – *Cherokee County participant*

A returning participant to the Stay Strong Stay Healthy program shared with new participants the importance of learning the deep breathing exercises that is a part of SSSH. She stated the program and the exercises taught her how to breathe more deeply. Due to Covid-19 guidance, the new series of classes that are face-to-face will not be able to participate in the breathing exercises. Participants were encouraged to practice those breathing exercises in their own homes. - *Submitted by Southwind District FCS Agent*

One of the participants is 86 years old and has trouble with her flexibility and her right arm. After the program she was able to tie her shoe without having to prop it on a stool and her right arm did not hurt so bad. She also said that she had more energy and slept better. She was going to continue to be physically active. - *Submitted by FCS Agent in West Plains District - Finney County*

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## References

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