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LifePath
options for independence

Editor, Janis Merrell
GoodLife@LifePathMA.org
(413) 773-5555 x2255

THE GOOD LIFE

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The Power of Peers

By Andi Waisman, M.Ed., Healthy Living Program Manager

If the Healthy Living workshops at LifePath run by any core principle, it is, “We are all in this together.” Healthy Living workshop leaders, men and women with chronic conditions themselves, volunteer many hours facilitating workshops to support community members living with challenging health conditions.



Healthy Living staff and volunteer workshop leaders.

Even though many come with professional backgrounds in nursing, health education, teaching, and social work, they lead the workshops as peers (non-professionals) with chronic conditions. History and evidence shows that peers, with a well-written curriculum, are able to lead health education groups as effectively, if not more effectively, than health professionals. People are more likely to hear and personalize messages, and thus to change their attitudes and behaviors, if they believe the messenger is similar to them and faces the same concerns and pressures. Often, people do better when taught by people like themselves. They see that lifestyle changes are possible, which increases their belief in their own ability to find ways to manage their conditions.

We currently have one staff (me) and ten volunteer workshop leaders in the Healthy Living Department: Lesley Kayan, Dina Stander, Safara Fisher, Rachel Lempert, Rhiannna (Malycha) McLeester, Renee Kampfe-Leacher, Diane Dodds, Dan DiSisto, Jane Perry, and Terry Eaklor. Our leaders are from all over our region and live in Wendell, Shelburne Falls, Conway, Greenfield, Millers Falls, and Sunderland as well as Shutesbury and Florence. One of us is male. One of us speaks Spanish. Two of us are trained as medical providers (one nurse and one nurse practitioner). One of us teaches yoga; one of us is an end-of-life navigator and grief educator; one of us has a certificate in Whole Health Education; one of us teaches technology;

two of us live with persistent pain; one of us lives with diabetes; one with a progressive spine disease; eleven of us live with other chronic conditions (asthma, arthritis, heart disease, fibromyalgia, etc.). One of us is in our thirties; most of us are in our sixties. Five of us learned about the program by being a participant in a workshop; three of us care for our small children or grandchildren; three of us are caregivers for partners or parents who struggle with health conditions; and all eleven of us use the tools we teach on a daily basis and have seen health benefits from learning and setting small, doable goals along with our participants.

When asked why they offer their time to lead others in workshops, our workshop volunteers say it is personal to them. It gives them a chance to participate and “share hope and knowledge on several levels.”

Here are some other reasons our leaders volunteer:

- “*Being a Healthy Living volunteer brings home how important it is to have a safe space to be heard when we are contending with chronic health challenges and pain.*”

- “*I really enjoy watching people grow and help each other in our Healthy Living groups.*”

- “*I teach because I believe we all have the right to information and peer support so we can feel empowered to make our own informed choices.*”

- “*I do this work because I enjoy helping others to improve their lives.*”

Healthy Living workshops are evidence-based, FREE, and open to people with one or more long-term health conditions (like diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, and chronic pain), as well as their caregivers and loved ones.

I want to thank our Healthy Living volunteers from the bottom of my heart, for bringing their passion, skill, and compassion to this work. Our program could not exist without them.

Please join our Healthy Living leaders this winter in learning tools to gain confidence to better manage our health challenges, and in finding ways to get around our many barriers to integrating healthy choices into our daily lives.

Healthy Living workshops are evidence-based, FREE, and open to people with one or more long-term health conditions (like diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, and chronic pain), as well as their caregivers and loved ones. Our workshops offer the information, motivation, and support needed to make lifestyle changes, and to know we have control over our health and that we are not alone. Workshops are accessible in person, on the computer, and by phone.

LifePath’s Healthy Living Winter 2024 Workshops

◇ Living Well with Long-Term Health

Conditions (In Person at Sanderson Place, Sunderland, MA) Techniques to improve symptoms of chronic conditions such as healthy eating, relaxation techniques, communicating, goal-setting, problem solving, and more.

Wednesdays, January 24-February 28, 10:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

◇ **A Matter of Balance—Managing Concerns About Falls (Live Video Conference)** Teaches practical strategies to reduce the fear of falling and explores medical, behavioral, and environmental risk factors for falls, stressing the importance of developing an exercise plan.

Fridays, January 19-March 15, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

◇ **Diabetes Self-Management: (In Person at Community Health Center, Greenfield, MA)** For adults with pre-diabetes or diabetes, or their caregivers, this workshop teaches the basics of balancing medication, diet and exercise, techniques to deal with hyper/hypoglycemia, and meal planning, stress reduction, and more.

Thursdays, January 18-February 22, 9:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

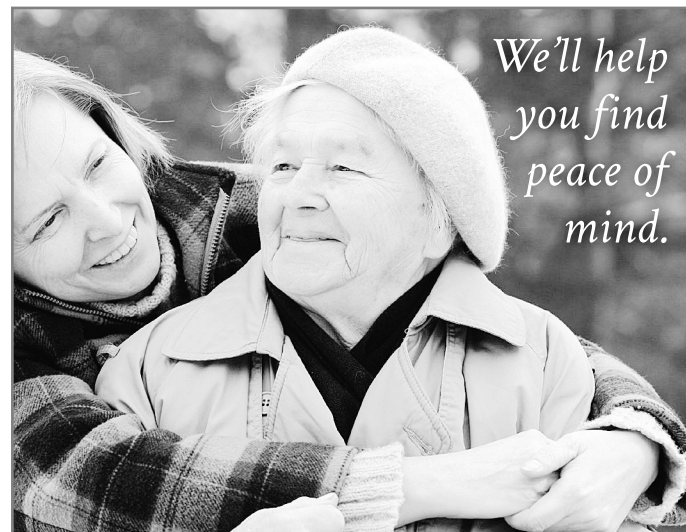
◇ **Healthy Eating for Successful Aging (Live Video Conference)** For adults hoping to improve their nutrition in order to avoid or live well with chronic conditions, this workshop teaches nutrition basics, label-reading, meal planning, and works to overcome barriers to healthy eating for older adults.

Tuesdays, January 23-March 5, 10:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

◇ **UCLA Memory Training (In Person at Athol Senior Center)** For people with mild age-related memory challenges, Memory Training teaches memory-enhancing techniques and practical strategies to boost memory functioning.

Thursdays, February 1-22, 1:30-3:30 p.m.

For more information or to register, contact Andi Waisman, Healthy Living Program Manager, at 413-773-5555 x2297, 978-544-2259 x2297, or awaisman@LifePathMA.org.



You care so wholeheartedly and do so much, but sometimes it's hard to do it all.

413.773.5555 | 978.544.2259 | 800.732.4636
Info@LifePathMA.org | LifePathMA.org



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