

By Diana Madsen, Associate Director of Active Aging Programs

Active Aging Programs are Changing Lives

The *Active Aging Programs* of Catholic Charities of Southern MN (CCSOMN) are providing health and wellness opportunities and experiences that are changing lives. The programs are evidence-based, which means that they have been researched, studied and have proven outcomes to help build peoples' confidence in managing their health conditions, increase physical activity levels and reduce health care costs. Programs serve all people, regardless of faith tradition, and are free of charge. The overall goal of these programs is to improve the quality of life and help people live independently longer. The programs are offered in thirty-five communities throughout the Diocese of Winona-Rochester; quickly expanding to additional communities and on track to serve nearly 1,800 participants in 2018.

Exercise programs are some of the most popular classes available. Trained leaders are providing *SAIL* (Staying Active & Independent for Life), *Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program*, *A Matter of Balance* and *Fit & Strong!*. Each program provides exercises to improve strength, flexibility and endurance, while providing social connections and some also help problem-solve and provide education. One SAIL participant said, "The class is fun to socialize. I enjoy laughing with the leaders and the group. It is a positive experience in every way and helps me maintain my strength." Others found they are stronger and able to do more daily activities that used to be hard for them. Another SAIL participant said, "SAIL has made a huge difference in my life! I am strong and have better balance. I can do household projects with more ease; cleaning and painting are not a problem for me now. SAIL has made a positive impact on my mental and physical wellbeing." Participants of these programs are encouraged to work at their own pace by increasing activity and modifying exercises to meet their ability.



For those who want to learn ways to better manage their own health, Active Aging Programs include health and wellness classes that support caregivers and those managing ongoing health conditions. These interactive classes provide tools to better care for yourself and the complex symptoms and issues people face, whether managing their own health or caring for someone else. Melissa has struggled to manage chronic pain, and recently became a trained leader in *Living Well with Chronic Conditions* and *Living Well with Chronic Pain*. After being discharged from an outpatient pain rehabilitation program, Melissa felt she needed more support to actively cope and manage her pain at home. She was introduced to the Living Well programs and found that the programs offered a toolkit of strategies that she could use to manage her pain at home. This was a remarkable discovery and has helped Melissa better manage her pain and maintain a better quality of life. Melissa is leading classes in her community and is passionate to share the toolkit with others to help manage their conditions.

The *Powerful Tools for Caregiver* classes have been transforming for many participants. Leaders have reported that participants have discovered better communication techniques to use with the loved ones that they are caring for. By using “I” messages, rather than the more accusing “you” messages and the Aikido style of communication, participants are finding it easier to talk with their loved ones and express themselves. The classes have helped participants understand that caring for a spouse or loved one, with a chronic condition, often changes what has been normal in a relationship. By realizing new normal patterns, they can increase patience in caring for and improve communication with loved ones.

Active Aging Programs offers opportunities for adults to improve their health and remain independent in their homes longer. Many programs are already scheduled in local communities, but if you are interested in hosting a program in your community, please contact our staff. Volunteers are the key to the success of our programs, and volunteerism promotes positive well-being. If you enjoy helping others and you are comfortable being in front of a group, or you have an interest in health and wellness, then you might be a candidate to become a program leader. CCSOMN provides free training, supports volunteers, and recognizes volunteers in their role serving others. As an added incentive, mileage reimbursement and supplemental insurance is also available.

The Active Aging Programs are funded, in part, by a **Live Well at Home** Grant provided by the MN Department of Human Services, as well as the Corporation for National & Community Service, MN Board on Aging and Greater Mankato Area United Way.

For questions about these programs, to find a program near you and request one in your community, or to volunteer, please see our website at <https://www.ccsomn.org/active-aging-programs/wellness-programs/> or contact Diana Madsen, Associate Director of Active Aging Programs at 507-459-0426 or email dmadsen@ccsomn.org.

(Alternate photo options)

