

By Jenifer Halberg, Director of Active Aging Programs

Volunteers bring valuable programs to their community.

From La Crescent to St. James - and in forty-nine communities in-between - a corps of local volunteers have stepped up to coordinate, facilitate and host health and wellness programs in their communities. Now, thanks to a generous grant from the Otto Bremer Trust, we can help you bring programs to your community, too.

We provide the materials, training and on-going support. You provide three or more like-minded community members who want to make it happen. With a common goal and shared responsibilities, the programs flourish. Lives are changed.

Take Eitzen, MN (population 252), for example. After learning about our Stay Active and Independent for Life (SAIL) program from one of our staff members, Grace, a life-long Eitzen resident, drove eleven miles to attend the exercise program in nearby Spring Grove, MN (population 1,283). She experienced first-hand how the program, which has been proven to improve strength, flexibility, and endurance, had a positive influence on her health – and on that of others who attended. She observed the energetic volunteers who greeted and registered class participants, facilitated the program and prepared the materials. She noticed how, as a result of the bi-weekly sessions, they had become quite connected with one another. *That's no coincidence.* While Grace wasn't aware of it, studies have proven that the SAIL program increases social connections and decreases isolation and depression among participants.

"Why couldn't this be available in Eitzen, too?" she thought. It turned out: it could.

With the support of our Active Aging Program, Grace set out to make it happen. She soon rounded up five people who shared her vision and volunteered to help bring the program to Eitzen. Many hands make light work, after all. The program materials, equipment and training provided by Catholic Charities were matched with a healthy dose of energy and passion by the volunteers. In December of 2019, SAIL became available to the Eitzen community— *just in time* to gift the community with health and wellness over the holidays and far beyond!

Two hundred and twenty-one miles to the west, Kathi volunteers her time to help provide the SAIL program in Heron Lake, MN (population 656). "I think that the ladies and gentlemen are enjoying coming, and feel that the exercises do help them with balance and strength. I know that it is helping me a lot with my hip and also my balance. I have enjoyed doing this with them and for some it's a reason to get out this time of the year," she commented. Volunteers who host the program with Kathi cite the positive effects it has on their own health, as well as their community members, as the most rewarding aspects of the program.

Meanwhile, in Mankato, MN (population 42,610) Melissa struggled to manage chronic pain. After being discharged from an outpatient pain rehabilitation program, Melissa felt she needed more support to actively cope and manage her pain. She participated in our Living Well with Chronic Pain program and found that it offered practical strategies which helped her to manage her pain and maintain a better quality of life. Melissa went on to complete our training to become a leader of the program and now volunteers her time co-facilitating the program in the Mankato area, where she is passionate about helping others manage their health conditions and live their best life!

If, like Grace, Kathi or Melissa, you have a passion for health and wellness and would like to share it with your community - no matter the population, we are here to help you make it happen.

In addition to SAIL and the Living Well with Chronic Pain programs, volunteers also offer the Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program, Powerful Tools for Caregivers, Living Well with Chronic Conditions and the Aging Mastery for Caregivers programs. To find a program near you, visit our website at <https://www.ccsomn.org/active-aging-programs/wellness-programs/>.

If the program you are interested in is not available nearby, please let us know. Together, we can bring these valuable programs to your community.

You can reach me directly by email at jhalberg@ccsomn.org or by phone at (507) 454-2270 extension 231.

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