

HELPERS Aid Seniors In Leading Healthy, Safe Lives

By: Karen Carpenter

Adopting healthy habits is a lifetime goal. Even when aches and pains slow one down, it is important to stay active, take meds properly and eat healthy.

For HELPERS it is a priority to encourage people age 65 and older to maintain, or begin, a healthy lifestyle.

The acronym HELPERS means Helping Elders Live Proudly Enjoyably Responsibly Safely. Leaders of the program take those words to heart.

Katharine Montgomery Hagen is the program director. She has been working with HELPERS in Barnesville for seven years.

She lives on Tamarac Lake with her husband, Spencer. Montgomery Hagen has two step-sons, two grandchildren and lots of animals.

Her education is in Family Science. Montgomery Hagen has worked in various areas of family service for many years.

Six months ago a new position was added to the program. Keli Cox began as health and wellness coordinator/volunteer coordinator.

Keli and her husband, Dan, have three children, Jaida, 12, Elias, 10 and Brant, seven. Keli has an educational background in health care administration and business administration.

“Creating that position was the smartest thing we could have done,” said Katharine. “It allowed us to expand our services and offer more to seniors.”

The goal of HELPERS is to make it possible for senior citizens to remain in their homes as long as feasible. Education is a huge piece of the strategy to keep seniors independent.

Montgomery Hagen writes a news article each week in the Barnesville Record-Review. The articles give instruction on healthful living.

HELPERS sponsors a Senior Health Fair in September. Last fall the event was very successful with 19 booths and five speakers.

Dr. Thompson from the Barnesville Clinic spoke as did Pete Larson, physical therapist at Valley Care and Rehab.

Speakers joined them talking about hearing loss and keeping a sense of humor as one ages.

“It is important for seniors to remain social, so we do a lot of activities,” commented Montgomery Hagen.

Those include bus trips to theatres and the Hjemkomst Center.

Some of the educational forums have included teaching cooking for one. There have been speakers on pain relief and depression in the golden years.

During the winter months, importance is given to fall prevention. Falling is a significant cause of injury among older adults.

One third of people over the age of 65 years fall every year, statistics show. Six percent of these falls are serious enough to require hospitalization, some lead to premature death.

Educating people is the first step to fall prevention. HELPERS personal can assess a persons home to see if there are areas likely to cause a fall. Steps can then be taken to eliminate that peril.

Balance exercises are another way to prevent falling by seniors. Keeping the body’s core muscles strong will go a long way toward helping people keep their balance, preventing a fall.

HELPERS offers many opportunities for seniors to exercise. Mondays and Wednesdays from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m., Keli Cox leads Tai Ji Quan exercise class at the senior citizen center. This exercise is a simplified version of traditional Chinese martial arts style of movement.

Tai ji quan is particularly helpful for people at risk of falling or those with balance issues. About 19 seniors are in the class.

On Mondays and Thursdays at 1:00 p.m. at the senior citizen center, people can join in to exercise. The Matter of Balance class is led by Montgomery Hagen and Marlys Winkels, Rothsay HELPERS program director.

An area of concern for HELPERS is the affordability of food for seniors. “About 11 or 12 of our seniors use the food pantry,” stated Montgomery Hagen. “Others are eligible for Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program.”

Once seniors have the food there is the matter of preparing it. Of course many of the seniors are wonderful cooks. But cooking for



Rothsay and Barnesville HELPERS organizations join forces to provide exercises to sustain balance. Katharine Montgomery Hagen Barnesville Program Director, left, and Marlys Winkels Rothsay HELPERS Program Director, right, lead the exercise classes at the Senior Citizen Center. Exercise is open to any area seniors, those who reside at Valley Care and Rehab and those living in their own homes.

one presents challenges for cooks of all ages.

Being aware of healthy foods to eat and performing the work it takes to prepare can be difficult.

“We have offered cooking classes,” said Montgomery Hagen. “We have 22 people in some classes. We share healthy recipes.

“We have also had nutritionists come to us from the University of Minnesota. They shared with the seniors how to get good nutrients into food and snacks. It was a great opportunity.”

HELPERS services about 80 seniors in the Barnesville community. Over 35 volunteers help in a variety of ways to assure the health and wellbeing of seniors in the community.

“We can always use more volunteers,” said Montgomery Hagen. “Some of our volunteers have moved into the age group where they need services themselves.”

One mother and two young daughters volunteer duo help a client purchase groceries. “It isn’t about the groceries,” said Montgomery Hagen. “It is about the inter generational socializing and relationship.”

Younger volunteers are welcome and needed. The United Way contends that the younger generation still wants to volunteer but they want to do it in their own way. Perhaps

that involves using technology in ways that are unfamiliar to seniors.

Boys and Girl Scout troops volunteer and Montgomery Hagen is thrilled to get them involved and comfortable with older folks.

Once a year HELPERS hosts

a sit down dinner at Hildebrand Hall entitled Taste Of Italy. It is a fundraiser for HELPERS. The Boy Scouts set tables for that event which will happen on April 27 this year.

HELPERS also has a loan closet for all citizens. They have all sorts of

medical equipment from walkers to wheelchairs which can be borrowed by individuals.

Local Volunteers willing to provide transportation is a huge service to the older population. Many appointments require a trip to a bigger city and many older folks aren’t comfortable driving in heavier traffic.

“We are the only transportation that some people have in and around Barnesville,” said Montgomery Hagen.

Other areas where HELPERS can be of assistance to seniors is making home checks. Visiting homes allows personnel to make sure the senior is comfortable and safe in their home.

Just offering companionship to others who may not be able to leave their home easily is of enormous assistance.

“The best thing you can do for your family is to remain in good health,” concluded Montgomery Hagen. “We want to help people find fun, easy ways to take care of themselves.”

HELPERS exists to serve others in their golden years. They encourage seniors to exercise, socialize, eat healthy and take medicines properly.

A Stop At Barnesville Drug Can Lead To Better Health

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one is ill or unable to get to the drug store.

The pharmacy does not provide flu shots but Hoppe says they do encourage customers to get one from their doctor.

Winter months can be especially difficult for people of any age to maintain good health. The elderly are especially susceptible during the frosty time of year.

It can be difficult to get out because of snow and ice. People are more at risk of falling during winter. It is cold and flu season which can hit the elderly and children particularly hard.

“To stay healthy during the winter it is good to eat right, get plenty of sleep, avoid smoking,” Hoppe reminds. “It is important to keep stress levels down and also practice good hand washing with hot water and soap.”



Barnesville Drug and Hardware clerk Danielle Lee, left, checks out a customer purchasing hardware supplies. The Barnesville business carries a variety of products from greeting cards to appliances and paint. They carry a wide range of medical supplies and remedies for most ailments.

When one needs health equipment due to a fall or medical procedure, it is convenient to purchase those items right in the community.

“People can buy most health equipment at the drug store. If we don’t have something, we can usually order it,” commented Hoppe. “We also rent crutches and walkers.”

Many people battle weight gain, especially in winter when it is easy to become a couch potato. Barnesville Drug and Hardware does offer prescription weight loss aids when needed.

When dealing with medicines or a ailment of any kind, getting information is key.

“We have a couple diabetic magazines that we give out throughout the year,” stated Hoppe. “We can also provide medication

guides on any drug that people want more information on.”

Hoppe rates the community as relatively healthy from her standpoint as a pharmacist.

“There are always things that need improving such as eating healthier and exercising more. Smoking can be harmful to health so people that smoke should consider stopping.

“Stress can also be very harmful to health. People should find ways to reduce stress such as exercising, meditation, thinking positive, spending fun times with friends and family and not worrying about things that can’t be controlled. “

Barnesville Drug has two pharmacists. Along with Michelle Hoppe former owner Greg Sletten works part time. Janet Kempf is a pharmacy technician with the drug

store.

Many sales clerks are there to assist customers with the many items available for purchase at the drug store. The clerks include Aaron Rehder, Marianne Wagner, Danielle Lee, Chuck Johnson, Josh Tweeton, Lizzy Ellefson and Gabrielle Armstrong.

One hears the same advice over and over as to what a healthy lifestyle looks like. Choices one makes don’t always lead us to the good health we need and deserve.

Pharmacist Michelle Hoppe says, “to live a healthy lifestyle it is good to eat right, exercise, avoid tobacco and alcohol, get plenty of sleep, reduce stress and see a doctor on a regular basis.”

Get on the road to better health.



Keli Cox, far right, Health and Wellness Coordinator/Volunteer Coordinator for HELPERS leads a class in Tai Ji Quan. The exercise program, originating from China, for seniors is designed to help with balance. The class is held at the senior center.



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