

Edinburgh Leisure's innovative programme secures additional funding

Edinburgh falls prevention programme, Steady Steps will continue with more funding from the council and NHS Lothian.

With Falls Awareness Week happening from 18-22 September 2023, Steady Steps, a community-based falls prevention programme which supports local people in Edinburgh to improve their strength and balance and maintain their independence through physical activity, is celebrating its 5,000th referral.

Delivered by the Active Communities team at Edinburgh Leisure and supported by the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board (EIJB), Steady Steps is a 16-week physical activity referral programme which has been going since 2014 and supports those who take part in reducing their risk of falling.

The programme has recently received additional funding from the EIJB which is the body made up of councillors and representatives from NHS Lothian, as well as appointed members from the third sector and other stakeholders. Its primary role is to plan and coordinate health and social care services within the Edinburgh area.

Physical activity can contribute to a reduction in the number of falls, fractures, hospital admissions and bed days because of a fall. This reduces the cost to NHS Lothian, and offers vulnerable, older adults an opportunity to engage in physical and social activities, sustaining and improving confidence and ability to live independently.

Edinburgh Leisure delivers 32 Steady Steps classes each week in Edinburgh Leisure and community venues in the city. Participants attend weekly physical activity sessions, which

last one and a half hours each week and are followed by a coffee and chat. Participants are also encouraged to complete home-based exercises twice a week for the duration of the 16-week programme. As a result of participating in these balance exercise sessions, participants have said that they are more able to complete tasks in and out of the house more easily (e.g., housework and doing the shopping), that they felt more confident, and they had an improved social life.

Amy Fastier, Health Development Officer (Falls Prevention) said: "Continued funding from the EIJB will mean that we can continue delivering this important service creating a positive impact on the health, and crucially the confidence, of our participants. Research shows falls are preventable and do not have to be an inevitable part of aging. However, once a fall does happen, the chances of another fall are dramatically increased. Sadly, this can really knock the confidence out of some adults, deterring them from going out and socialising. The methods used by Steady Steps are known to reduce falls by up to 35%, as well as having a hugely positive effect on the overall physical, mental, and social wellbeing of participants."



PHOTO – Chris Watt Photography



Retired primary school deputy headteacher, Katherine Bates, has experienced the project as both a participant and a volunteer, training as a volunteer after completing the 16-week programme in 2017.

Initially referred by her physiotherapist because of several falls, as well as having osteoporosis and other musculoskeletal issues, she found the programme helped to improve her strength and balance and particularly liked that the exercises in class were designed to be incorporated into daily life.

On completion of the course, and with the encouragement of her instructor, Michael, she completed the volunteer training and now volunteers at a Steady Steps class at Gracemount Leisure Centre. Katherine's role involves setting up the room, welcoming people into the class, and carrying out assessments so that Michael can focus on delivering the class without distractions. As Katherine explained: "Some people need a bit of extra support, and I can help them without disrupting the class or drawing attention to them."

"Volunteering has been such a positive experience for me and it's helped that I have experienced Steady Steps as a participant as well. It's helped me to understand the challenges participants face and what it's like to go through the programme. Some participants live very rich lives, others have lost their confidence and have become socially isolated because of their falling. It's wonderful to see them out, enjoying themselves, and making social connections as well as improving their balance and mobility."

For more information about Steady Steps please contact Edinburgh Leisure's Active Communities team – active@edinburghleisure.co.uk or 0131 458 2260.

