

Success Stories

from the Montana Disability and Health Program

Facilitated version of the *14-Week Program to a Healthier You!*

Public Health Issue

The Montana Developmental Disabilities Program (DDP) identified the leading causes of deaths (2010-2014) among adult consumers, ages 18 to 84 years (Mean age = 50 years old), as pneumonia, cancer, seizures, and heart disease. A multi-level approach is needed to reduce preventable deaths and support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to lead healthy lives in their communities. Increasing the availability of health education programs designed to fit the learning needs of this population is part of this approach. Inclusive health education programs also strengthen the capacity of people with I/DD to participate in evidence-based chronic disease prevention programs-- a need identified through process evaluations of at least one of these programs.

Program Overview

The *14-Week Program to a Healthier You!* is an internet-based fitness and nutrition program targeted to people with mobility limitations, chronic health conditions and physical disabilities (available at: www.nchpad.org/14weeks/). In addition to weekly exercise and nutrition tips, the program also offers the opportunity to connect with other participants and tools to track and encourage participants to meet their exercise and nutritional goals. Evaluations of the on-line *14-Week Program* curriculum directed National Center of Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD) efforts to develop a facilitated curriculum with additional resources and tools for health educators to better support individuals with I/DD to access the *14-Week Program* content as delivered in a weekly group class.

Making a Difference

The Montana Disability and Health Program is coordinating an iterative participatory approach to adopt NCHPAD's facilitated version of the *14-Week Program to a Healthier You!* for statewide implementation. Participants and program facilitators at Montana Centers for Independent Living and IDD service provider agencies reported having learned the importance of good nutrition and exercise to improve their health. Participants and facilitators reported the program's weekly materials were useful, and they provided recommendations to better improve the weekly curriculum. Participants noted that they can accomplish more when their bodies are healthy, and have more possibilities in life when including exercise and healthy eating in their daily lives. One respondent mentioned avoiding fast food and seeking a balanced meal to develop good daily eating habits. Additionally, facilitators reported next steps such as referrals to a diabetes prevention class, walking groups, and ongoing healthy cooking group meetings.

Shaping Tomorrow

Implementation of the *14-Week Program* with people who have I/DD will continue throughout the state, serving as an *on-ramp* to build capacity for participants to benefit from other health education classes. Program facilitators will work with community partners to provide referrals and help identify options for graduates of the *14-Week Program* to have continued support on the path to healthier lifestyles.

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"I learned that eating healthy and exercising can be fun. Keeping track of how much water I was drinking was fun."

"It was fun doing different kinds of exercises each week. One that we all liked was a balancing on a line exercise. Also going to the park to do exercises with ball was fun."

"I like trying new foods now. Before the class I was kind of afraid to try new things"

~ Stacia and Shelby, participants in the *14-Week Program to a Healthier You!* facilitated version, in Butte, MT.

