"LIFT for a Better Life"

Section 1: Introduction

If you've spent much time at all with independent senior citizens, I'm sure you've heard them talk about wanting to stay in their own homes as long as they can. "They aren't going to put me in a home" is often repeated by many of our elderly community members. Unfortunately, many seniors recognize that a fall could severely hurt them, which could possibly reduce their ability to age in place. Because of their fear of falling, many are hesitant to be very active. LIFT (Lifelong Improvements Through Fitness Together) is an in-person, group-based strength training program that focuses on increasing balance and flexibility, to help seniors remain independent as long as they prefer. The program was developed by Virginia Cooperative Extension, who trained North Carolina agents in program implementation in the fall of 2019.

Adults should move more and sit less throughout the day. For substantial health benefits, adults should do at least 150 minutes to 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes to 150 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity. Adults should also do muscle-strengthening activities of moderate or greater intensity and that involve all major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week. Currently, only 17% of older adults are meeting the current recommendations for physical activity. Less than 30% of older adults are meeting the current dietary guidelines for fruits and vegetable intake. Older adults with healthful diets and who meet the physical activity recommendations are more likely to age in place.

LIFT participants meet for one-hour sessions twice per week for a total of eight weeks (sixteen sessions). The program objective is to **help aging adults evolve into a more healthy, active lifestyle** by helping them 1) improve strength, balance and flexibility, 2) learn healthy food options, and 3) form a community around healthy living. In accordance with the 2018 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans for Older Adults, LIFT encourages participants to set a goal of achieving 150 minutes of moderate activity per week, in addition to the strength training they do during class. Similarly, seniors are challenged to improve their nutritional intake through increased fruit and vegetable consumption, and a nutritional education piece is included with every class.

In Montgomery County, North Carolina, LIFT was implemented at the Troy-Montgomery Senior Center beginning in January 2020 and concluding in February. Another series was scheduled to begin in April, but due to the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic, those plans were canceled. Recognizing that senior adults would be even less likely to engage in regular physical activity when confined to their own homes (under NC Governor's Stay-at-Home orders), the program was moved to a virtual delivery method in April and May using the Zoom

platform, with necessary modifications. The effort was expanded in June and July to LIFT PLUS, through partnership with FCS Agent Hayley Cowell in Stanly County. In the fall, the partnership efforts increased to a four county collaboration in the South Central District.

Target Audience. SNAP-eligible, inactive, aging adults in Montgomery County, North Carolina were the target population for the LIFT program. According to the Piedmont Triad Regional Area Agency on Aging, the number of people in Montgomery County under the age of 18 was equal to the number of people over the age of 60. Over the next two decades, the child population in the county is only expected to grow 2.5%, while the older population will grow by 21.2%. Seventy-nine percent of the aging population in Montgomery County is white and 13% are black. Only 1.5% are Hispanic. Montgomery County is designated a Tier 1 rural county, and rising health care costs impact the budgets for seniors, resulting in the inability to pay for necessities such as housing, utilities and food. LIFT was conducted through partnership with the Troy-Montgomery Senior Center, which serves as one of two congregate meal sites in the county. In additional to the senior newsletter, outreaches via social media, the County Extension webpage, direct email communication were done in an effort to reach our target population and their families.

Section 2: Program Description

The LIFT program was implemented in Montgomery County face-to-face at the senior center in January and February, and virtually from April-May, June-July and October-November, all in 2020. Every session includes a warm-up, facilitation of eight core exercises, a nutrition focus, and a group activity to help members build connection and community. Early in the series, participants engage in a collaborative goal setting process to encourage group attendance and motivate each other to be active and increase fruit and vegetable consumption outside of class. Throughout the series, the class discusses the motivators of a healthy lifestyle, and ways of overcoming barriers to regular physical activity to lead to long-term behavior change. Increasing fruits, veggies and water are all emphasized, as well as reducing sugary and salty drinks and snacks. Appropriate portion sizes are addressed, as well as substitutions in meal preparation. Participants also learn how dietary behaviors affect physical activity. As the instructor, I provide a list of community resources to support healthy lifestyles, as well as encourage participants to share resources of which they are aware. Participants are given tracking logs at the beginning of each week and encouraged to record the number of times they eat the recommended serving of fruits and vegetables and engage in physical activity outside of class.

The innovative program also focuses on building connection with each other "instead of just being an exercise class where nobody talks to each other" (words of a participant regarding what made LIFT different than other programs offered by other organizations elsewhere). By building relationships with each other, attendance, participation, encouragement, and motivation, all increase. Each class includes a group activity to help meet this goal. One example is the "Activity Timeline" where the instructor starts with a question and

answers it, and then the person to the right answers, and then the person to that person's right, until all participants have answered. Topic areas include things like activities I did growing up; activities enjoyed in the 1960s, 70s, 80s, 90s, 200s, 2010s, etc.; barriers to activities; motivators for activities; fruits and veggies that we look forward to each season; and many others.

The majority of the materials I used were provided through Virginia Tech as part of the LIFT curriculum. "LIFT in Functions of Every Day Living" shows participants how each exercise learned and practiced during class supports them in their goals to remain strong and independent. For example, the Standing Leg Curl exercise helps adults walk up and down the stairs, stabilize the knee to prevent injuries, toilet, walk the dog, improve their ability to leave the house quickly in case of an emergency, play with grandkids and put on their pants. Handouts also provide modifications for additional ease or challenges with class exercises. I supplemented the resources provided from Virginia Extension with brochures, learning tools, and resource lists that I had collected at the local level.

The face-to-face program offered in January and February was a partnership between the FCS Agent and the Troy-Montgomery Senior. When we stepped into the virtual world, I partnered with a FCS Agent in a neighboring county, and eventually with a team of three other FCS educators.

For the face-to-face series, the program was marketed through the Troy-Montgomery Senior Center's bi-monthly newsletter and our local newspaper. As I moved into virtual delivery, marketing included the county Extension webpage, county newsletters, social media.

Section 3: Program Impact

According to the curriculum development team at Virginia Tech, the ideal group size for a LIFT program is between eight and ten participants. When I implemented this program in January, I had such an overwhelming response, that I had to immediately break the group into two groups – a 9 am "Early LIFTers" session and an 11 am "Lady LIFTers" group, serving a combined total of 18.

Each participant set a personal goal related to nutrition, physical activity and program attendance. Participants were given tracking sheets to log their daily intake of fruits and vegetables as well as physical activity outside of class. Program participation was measured via an attendance log, and a pre- and post-survey was administered for further insight.

A functional fitness test was provided through Virginia Tech to determine participants' ability to complete a series of exercises in order to gain measures of strength, balance and flexibility. Exercises include a Balance Station, 30 second Chair Stand, 30 second Arm Curl, 2 minute Step Test, Chair Sit and Reach, Back Scratch, and the 8 Foot Up and Go. For our in-person session in the spring of 2020, participant achievement in each of these measures were recorded during orientation (prior to the program start), and at the conclusion of the program.

Tracking logs and pre and post survey results indicate that 100% of participants made improvements in their lifestyle habits,

including eating a variety of fruits and vegetables and increasing the amounts of recommended servings from five food groups they have

eaten daily. Ninety-three percent feel stronger, have more balance and are more flexible. Eighty-six percent report being physically active for

30 minutes or more on most days. As a class, improvements were made in every domain of functional fitness:

- Balance increased from 5.4 seconds to 7.34
- Chair Stands increased from 8 in 30 seconds to 13
- Arm curls increased from 10 in 30 seconds to 19
- Steps increased from 36 in 2 minutes to 82
- Chair sit and reach went from not being able to touch their toes to reaching almost 2 inches past their toes
- Reducing the gap between their fingers when both hands are stretched behind their back (indicating flexibility improvement)
- Reduction in speed in being able to get up and go.

Taken together, this program indicates adult participants are more likely to be able to age in place longer due to increases in their physical health.

Unfortunately, because of the nature of virtual program delivery, I was unable to collect these measures for the participants in the three Zoom groups. During the first virtual program, called "LIFT Live", six regular seniors participated in the 16 session series while other guests popped in and out as schedules allowed. One senior reported this success story: "Someone had given me a suitcase full of reams of paper. It was so heavy that I couldn't lift it, and I left it in the den downstairs refusing to bother with it. After the program ended, I hesitantly decided to try to move it. To my astonishment, when I picked it up, it wasn't even heavy AT ALL!– not because the contents changed, but because I had gained so much strength." Additionally, participants all commented that they enjoyed being able to interact with their peers so regularly - especially during the COVID-19 epidemic.

As previously stated, I partnered with an FCS Agent in a neighboring county to offer the LIFT class again in the Fall, and we then expanded that outreach to cover a total of four counties in the fall. A combined total of 26 participants were active in these groups. Based on the surveys, over 75% of the responding participants report exercising between 30 to 60 minutes on their own and 25% responded that they complete between 1 to 30 minutes of exercise in a day. Because of the program, over 50% of the participants consumed at least 2 cups or more of fruit, and 75% consume at least 2 cups or more of vegetables. All the participants agreed that this program has increased their knowledge of strength training and nutrition.

LIFT is visible in Montgomery County. The Troy-Montgomery Senior Center sends over 1400 printed newsletters through that mail every other month to seniors' homes. LIFT is regularly featured in these publications, and promotional posters can be seen at the senior center. Similarly, LIFT has been featured in our local newspaper, The Montgomery Herald, and updates are placed on our county webpage, our social media page and sent to community members via Constant Contact. Most recently, the LIFT work being done in Montgomery

County was highlighted as a feature story in the Winter 2020 Try Healthy magazine, available from N.C. A&T State University Cooperative Extension. The magazine was funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Though the current COVID-19 restrictions are preventing me from having another LIFT face-to-face series at the current time, the program will continue virtually. Our next online series is set to launch in Montgomery County in March, as the kickoff to Living Well month. The Troy-Montgomery Senior Center will remain a partner in hosting, promoting and evaluating the program, for virtual program delivery as well as face-to-face when that becomes available. As the program progresses and participants get more familiar with the exercises, they are given leadership opportunities to facilitate sessions. As they get more comfortable in this role, they are encouraged to help recruit future participants and serve as co-facilitators in upcoming sessions. As long as the program is delivered in a positive manner, the participants themselves are enthusiastic about helping to sustain it.

LIFT is an extremely cost-effective program. The only needed supplies for class include hand weights for each participant, and a chair that does not roll. Purchasing dumbbells is not necessary – participants can use canned goods, water bottles, or any other household item to serve as hand weights. The senior center has more than enough hand weights and folding chairs that they share with program participants for live sessions. The senior center also contributes meeting space, and promotional services. With virtual program delivery, participants need to have a computer, tablet or smart phone to access Zoom. North Carolina Cooperative Extension provides staff time and printed materials (weekly tracking logs, brochures, fitness assessment results, etc.). A final celebration is planned at the conclusion of each session, and participants themselves bring baked goods and foods, giving them further buy in.

Section 4: Supporting Materials

The supporting materials included in this application includes five separate documents that have been chosen to show outreach, sustainability and resources associated with the LIFT program in Montgomery County. Items include a program flyer that was included in the senior newsletter that is mailed to more than 1400 residents bi-monthly; a news article explaining the shift to virtual programming; a program flyer highlight program expansion into a four county regional effort; a magazine article to further educate the public that also indicates ongoing support and resources by the university; and a letter of commitment from the Troy-Montgomery Senior Center pledging ongoing partnership in terms of meeting space, shared use of program equipment and future marketing efforts through the newsletter.

"Lift for a Better Life" Supporting Materials

Submitted by Rhonda Peters

1) LIFT Program Flyer

(pages 2-4)

To expand the outreach and marketing efforts for the LIFT Program, I partner regularly with the Troy-Montgomery Senior Center. This flyer was printed on half-sheets of paper with information included on the front and back, and then was inserted into the January-February 2020 edition of the Troy-Montgomery Senior Newsletter. This partnership helped us reach 1400 seniors in Montgomery County. The cover page to the newsletter is included for your review, as well as copy from the front and back of the flyer that was included.

2) LIFT LIVE News Release

(pages 5 & 6)

As explained in the program outline, I had to move the LIFT program to a virtual format due to COVID-19. This news release provided explains the switch to virtual programming, and increases the outreach to aging adults during COVID-19 restrictions.

3) FALL LIFT Program Flyer

(page 7)

As explained in the program outline, I partnered with three other FCS Educators in the South Central District of North Carolina to expand the reach of the LIFT program across four counties (Alexander, Anson, Montgomery and Stanly). The attached flyer is for that program expansion piece, which increases outreach to individuals in counties beyond my own. This successful partnership will help us sustain the LIFT program in our region in both virtual and face-to-face settings in the future.

4) Program Spotlight: LIFT for a Better Life

(pages 8-10)

In 2020, North Carolina A&T State University began publishing a quarterly "Try Healthy" magazine, funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – SNAP. The Winter 2020 edition featured a spotlight on the LIFT program being done in Montgomery County. The university printed and distributed 1,000 copies across the state, indicating both the ongoing support of my efforts by my employing institution as well as increasing the reach of the LIFT program.

5) Letter of Continued Support

(page 11)

Written by the director of the Troy-Montgomery Senior Center, this letter shows ongoing partnership between North Carolina Cooperative Extension and the local senior center. The letter indicates a pledge for sustainability in the ongoing availability of the center's meeting space, equipment and marketing efforts.





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January/February 2020

Happy New Year !!

As we enter into the new year we can't express enough how much we appreciate each of you and we are thankful for any input you share with us about Senior Center programming and services. We can best serve you and meet the needs of our Senior Adult community by hearing from you. Please share any

comments and suggestion with the Senior Center staff. We would like to encourage you, as you make those New Year's Resolutions, to include getting more physical activity into your day. Join us at the Senior Center and take advantage of some of the exercise opportunities offered --examples: YOGA, GeriFit, Line Dance, TaiChi and other regular schedules classes. For more information give us a call II

Theresa, Sylvia, Barbara & Seneka

Information in this newsletter is meant to complement the advice of your healthcare provider, not replace it. Before making any changes in your diet or exercise consult with your healthcare provider. Having trouble climbing stairs, putting groceries away, or washing clothes? Looking for a group of individuals to workout with? LIFT may by the perfect program for you!



LIFT is an 8-week, in-person group-based strengthtraining program that promotes balance and flexibility with the goal of improving functional fitness and independent living in older adults!

LIFT will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 11am – noon beginning on January 7, 2020 and ending on February 27, 2020 at the Troy-Montgomery Senior Center.



For more information or to register, please contact:

Rhonda Peters at N.C. Cooperative Extension Montgomery Center by calling (910) 576-6011

Or Theresa Thomas at the Troy-Montgomery Senior Center by calling (910) 572-4464



I can. I will. I must.





Only 13% of older adults are meeting the current recommendations for physical activity



Less than 30% of older adults are meeting the current dietary guidelines for fruits and vegetable



Older adults with healthful diets and who meet the physical activity recommendations are more likely to age in place.



Participate in LIFT this year!



LIFT, or Lifelong Improvements through Fitness Together, can help older adults improve their functional fitness, or their ability to perform activities of daily living with ease.



LIFT is an in-person and group-based strength-training program for older, sedentary men and women. Participants are encouraged to work together towards a common goal while achieving their own personal goals.



LIFT sessions last 2x/week for 1 hour over the course of 8 weeks and include an active warm-up, 8 core strength-training exercises, and a cool down.



LIFT also encourages increasing the amount of fruits and vegetables consumed in your daily diet

Register Today by calling (910) 576-6011



North Carolina State University and North Carolina A&T State University commit themselves to positive action to secure equal opportunity regardless of race, color, religion, creed, national origin, sex, age, disability, or veteran's status. In addition, the two Universities welcome all persons without regard to sexual orientation. North Carolina State University, North Carolina A&T State University, US Department of Agriculture, and local governments cooperating. Persons with disabilities and persons with limited English proficiency may request accommodations to participate by contacting Rhonda Peters, FCS Agent, at 910-576-6011 or rtpeters@ncat.edu or by fax at 910-576-2635, or in person at the County Extension Office at least 5 days prior to the event.



LIFT Is Going LIVE From Your Home!

Find this article at: go.ncsu.edu/readext?670879

- Written By <u>Rhonda Peters</u>



Are you a currently inactive aging adult who would like to build strength, flexibility, and balance? LIFT is for you! This evidence-based program will help you achieve a healthier lifestyle while working at your own pace. Most recently completed with seniors at the Troy-Montgomery Senior Center, the program has proven results! Although this program concentrates mostly on physical activity and fitness, we will also work on learning more and improving our nutritional habits as well.

While we are all under stay-at-home orders, we are taking the LIFT program to the digital Zoom setting. Download the Zoom app on your computer or phone and simply click the invitation link you will be sent upon registration. Participants will be able to see and communicate with each other and the instructor, but only those with Zoom invitations will have access (unlike Facebook live where anyone can see). Zoom is a free application and very easy to use. The program will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 9 a.m. beginning April 7, 2020, and will continue through the end of May. The program WILL be recorded, so you can participate at the time that works best for you, but registration IS still required so we can plan most appropriately for resources.

Particiation is free and resources and prizes will be provided, but <u>registration is</u> <u>required</u>. (Click the red underlined link right before this note to register.)

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Rhonda at rtpeters@ncat.edu or (910) 576-6011.

WRITTEN BY



Rhonda Peters

Extension Agent, Family and Consumer Sciences N.C. Cooperative Extension, Montgomery County Center

UPDATED ON JAN 28, 2021



N.C. Cooperative Extension prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex (including pregnancy), disability, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and veteran status.

Information on Accessibility



Are you an adult, of any age and fitness level, who would like to learn how to achieve and maintain a healthier lifestyle?

Would you like to learn and practice exercises designed to help increase strength, flexibility and balance while improving nutrition habits?

Would you like to make new friends and build community connections?

Would you enjoy a FREE interactive program in a group setting yet still from the comfort of your living room?

Are you eligible to receive SNAP-Ed benefits?

The LIFT PLUS program is perfect for YOU!

Join us virtually using the Zoom platform. (Link will only be provided to registered participants.)

Tuesdays and Thursdays, Oct 1st - November 24 9 am - 10 am

Register and find more information at: <u>https://go.ncsu.edu/lift2020</u>

North Carolina State University and North Carolina A&T State University commit themselves to positive action to secure equal opportunity regardless of race, color, religion, creed, national origin, sex, age, disability, or veteran's status. In addition, the two Universities welcome all persons without regard to sexual orientation. North Carolina State University, North Carolina A&T State University, US Department of Agriculture, and local governments cooperating. Persons with disabilities and persons with limited English proficiency may request accommodations to participate by contacting Rhonda Peters, FCS Agent, at 910-576-6011 or rtpeters@ncat.edu or by fax at 910-576-2635, or in person at the County Extension Office at least 5 days prior to the event.



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Control Diabetes During the Holidays

Gifting on a Budget

Homemade Healthy



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:



MONTGOMERY COUNTY – Twice a week during the winter months before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Vince and Annette Cerullo would jump in their car and head from their home in Mt. Gilead to the Troy-Montgomery County Senior Center in Troy.

They were part of the "Early LIFTers," one of two groups at the center who participated in Lifelong Improvements Through Fitness Together (LIFT), a program offered by Rhonda Peters, the Family and Consumer Sciences Agent with Cooperative Extension at N.C. A&T in Montgomery County.

"This is an ideal program for older people and Rhonda was a wonderful teacher," said Vince Cerullo. "When you're in your 80s, you might not get around like you used to, but this class was just the right level. It gave us both more energy."

LIFT focuses on building strength, flexibility, and improved balance in older adults. At the start of the program, the instructor conducts a baseline functional fitness assessment to measure strength, balance, flexibility and nutrition habits. The aim is to show improvement in these areas by the end of the course.

"It's not a weight loss program," said Peters. "It's about improving basic fitness. For seniors, it helps them stay independent. It can mean you are less likely to fall and able to age at home."

Peters partnered with Theresa Thomas, director of the senior center, to offer LIFT at the start of 2020 after being trained to conduct the program by Shewana Hairston McSwain, coordinator of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP) program with Cooperative Extension at N.C. A&T, and Carinthia Cherry, Ph.D., nutrition specialist at Extension at N.C. A&T.

The program was so popular that the center offered two classes: the "Early LIFTers," who met each Tuesday and Thursday for eight weeks at 9 a.m.; and the "Lady LIFTers," who met on the same days at 11 a.m. Activities in the class included strength building exercises, such as arm curls, standing on one foot to improve balance, improving flexibility through toe touches and arm stretches, and education on nutrition.

Peters evaluated the attendees when the classes concluded in early March, and described their progress as amazing. As a whole, the participants improved their ability to balance in a set position by two seconds. They upped their ability to do high steps from about 36 steps to more than 82 steps in two minutes. The group also recorded major improvements in flexibility, from being unable to do toe touches in early January to being able to reach beyond their toes by early March.

Miriam Holt, a resident of Troy who has had hip and knee replacements and also deals with the aches and pains of osteoarthritis, attended the Lady LIFTers class with a couple friends to improve her flexibility and overall fitness. She saw her strength and flexibility improve, but also enjoyed the social aspect of LIFT.

"The comradery in the class was nice," she said. "We'd go to class and sometimes, we'd go to lunch afterwards. And Rhonda cares about everybody. She made me feel like I had a friend for life."

When the pandemic made in-person classes impossible, virtual LIFT classes were offered in spring and summer for Montgomery County residents. The course was expanded this fall to include Alexander, Anson, and Stanly counties, with classes set to conclude just before the holidays.

The Cerullos acknowledge they miss the social interactions of an in-person class. Still, Annette said she keeps to a general fitness routine using old Gatorade bottles—filled to a weight she can handle—as dumbbells.

"I felt better after the class and I'm trying to keep doing the things I learned," said the grandmother of 14 and great-grandmother of five. "The Gatorade bottles are the perfect size for my hands to grip."

For seniors, LIFT can mean a better ability to handle daily tasks, such as putting away groceries and getting in and out of the tub. But younger people can get a lift out of LIFT too, said Peters.

LIFT can be for anybody," she said. "If you're working in an office all day, this is something you can do standing in your office to stay flexible and work your muscles."

For information about LIFT programs in your area, contact your local Cooperative Extension Center.

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January 27, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

The Troy-Montgomery Senior Center has been long-time supporters of the mission of North Carolina Cooperative Extension. In the spring of 2020, we partnered with FCS Educator, Rhonda Peters, to offer the LIFT program for our seniors. The response was unbelievable! We had so many people interested in participating that Rhonda had to provide the program twice in the same day for different groups to meet the need. We were impressed with not only the beginning interest, but how many participants that stayed faithful through to the end of the sixteen weeks. Many of them had perfect attendance, even during a hurricane! There were also participants who had never taken part in Senior Center programs before that came out to join LIFT.

We had another series of LIFT planned to start later in the spring, but due to COVID-19 and considering we serve the most vulnerable population, that program unfortunately had to be canceled. Rhonda was able to change the face-to-face format to an internet based program, and offered the LIFT program several more times in Montgomery County and through partnership with other counties.

Moving forward, we would love to continue this partnership with Cooperative Extension, specifically with the LIFT program. We have plans to partner with Rhonda for the online program, as well as face-to-face when we can return to live, in-person programming. The Senior Center will continue to make space available for program implementation, as well as allow facilitators, participants and visitors to use any necessary equipment. We will also provide marketing and program recruitment collaboration, through direct mailing to over 1400 seniors every other month.

We highly value the collaboration and partnership with Rhonda Peters and the entire Cooperative Extension staff. We look forward to working together on many projects now and in the future.

Sincerely,

Theresa Thomas, Director The Troy/Montgomery Senior Center

Enhance The Quality Of Your Life