

# Achieving the Balance of Wellness

*Providers incorporate a multifaceted way of life focused on the well-being of body, mind and spirit for seniors and staff.*

by Arlene Karidis

Dominant in decades past, the medical model of care that focused mainly on illness has given way to a holistic approach to wellness and quality of life. Aging-services providers who embrace this philosophy are finding innovative ways to engage their residents, staff, and even the community at large in a “culture of wellness.”

**W**ould you believe a rural Pennsylvania retirement community that once housed two small, bare-bones fitness rooms will soon have a \$3 million wellness center with therapeutic and recreational pools, a studio for activities, a fitness room, a fine arts and educational center, a hair salon, space for massage therapy, a computer learning center, a café, a gaming room and a classroom?

The elaborate wellness set-up at Cross Keys Village–The Brethren Home Community, New Oxford, Pa., was made possible by a capital campaign driven by the organization’s desire to take its concept of wellness further.

Kristin Orwick, director of wellness at Cross Keys, speaks of the community’s new philosophy: “Our focus on wellness is about leading a purposeful lifestyle that infuses mind, body and spirit. All components must be balanced. If you let one slack, the others will fall.”

Staff saw that residents who exercise, for example, began participating in additional activities. The more the Cross Keys “villagers” did, the more they wanted to do, and they wanted to do it themselves rather than be directed.

The Artman Lutheran Home is a retirement community that is part of Liberty Lutheran Services, Ambler, Pa. Artman has an entire department dedicated not only to residents’ well-being through a resident personal training program—but it also facilitates programs for staff. The Becoming Center, as the department is called, has a few employees designated as wellness coaches, facilitating one-on-one and group interaction among colleagues. Coaches conduct presentations on health issues and lead staff

in a range of activities.

“One reason we engage our team in these learning experiences is that when they feel the organization believes their well-being is important, they see that it is of great magnitude to have that same perspective on residents’ well-being,” explains Gina Formica, director of The Becoming Center.

One thing Formica discovered while focusing on employee wellness is that competition can be healthy and motivational. Weight loss, walking races and smoking cessation challenges are among many competitions held at The Becoming Center.

“Our staff love competition, and we believe it’s important to have fun at work,” says Formica.

In Rock Hill, S.C., Westminster Towers has worked hard at promoting wellness programming throughout the larger community. President/CEO Anthony Fountain and his team cultivate relationships through wellness education with physicians and local service agencies. By this effort they have promoted a team approach in senior services, which, incidentally, has led to a marked increase in referrals to Westminster Towers.

Staff has engaged graduate students working on their theses to collect program data to promote the wellness philosophy during community events.

Through a partnership with the National Arthritis Foundation, the organization became certified to conduct aquatic exercises in its indoor pool. An off-campus fitness club is a big hit for seniors in the local community, and other wellness programs have scored a home run with seniors on and off campus.



Betty McAfee

Residents of The Redwoods celebrate at the half-mile mark in The Marin Human Race, a walkathon benefiting local nonprofits. The Redwoods used the help of a graduate student to survey residents not only on physical health issues, but also emotional and social aspects of wellness.

## Dimensions of Wellness

Wellness-oriented organizations incorporate the familiar “six dimensions of wellness.” The “social” dimension may be addressed through game nights, attendance at concerts, and theme parties. Residents engage in stress management and journaling to focus on the “emotional” component. An “intellectual” dimension may incorporate college classes and other educational experiences. The “physical” dimension often includes activities such as nutrition programs and walks. Meditation and prayer are means to engage in the “spiritual.” Finally, a “vocational” dimension may involve pairing residents and high school students, with the older adults enlightening the students on career opportunities and life skills.

Documentation and careful use of data help organizations plan targeted programs and services, as well as allocate resources and promote efficiencies in

their use. Data serve as a tool to ensure accountability, facilitate integration of services and, ultimately, advance individual and community healthy aging. Most important, quantifiable information helps providers develop the means to keep older adults in the places they call home.

Kendal Outreach LLC, based in Kennett Square, Pa., along with the Institute for Aging Research at Hebrew SeniorLife in Boston, co-directs COLLAGE, The Art and Science of Healthy Aging®. COLLAGE is a national membership consortium of aging service providers that uses scientifically-grounded assessment tools to track and manage health and wellness, compare best practices and benchmark strengths and challenges. Participating organizations have undertaken multiple healthy aging initiatives based on the assessments, including those to address balance and mobility, hydration and chronic disease prevention.

Data are compiled by going directly to the seniors themselves; the staff is uncovering a wealth of information related to older adults’ problems and personal interests.

“At first seniors were hesitant to talk about some things,” says Beryl Goldman, director of Kendal Outreach. “But once they were educated and assured that the information they shared would be confidential, they began to open up. Now we hear some residents ask each other, ‘Have you been ‘COLLAGED’ yet?’”

Susan Badger, administrator at The Redwoods in Mill Valley, Calif., had a survey tailored specifically for her organization to pinpoint what she and her staff were doing right and where they could improve to ensure residents’ well-being. She recruited a social welfare graduate student from the University of California, Berkeley to develop and administer the survey.

The survey showed that 95 percent

A COLLAGE conversation at Kendal Northern Ohio in Oberlin. The COLLAGE assessment conversation covers a wide range of areas including cognition, communication and vision, emotion, physical fitness, diseases, medications, environment, health recreation, sleep, nutrition, preventive health and more.

COLLAGE





Judson Park Retirement Community

Judson Park Retirement Community residents (front to back) Lynne Heydon, Rena Hamburger and Almus “Spike” Larsen work out in the community’s wellness center. Judson Park residents have been heavily involved in planning and launching their fitness/wellness initiative.

of residents felt safe and comfortable in their units, 89 percent felt cared for and supported, and 87 percent said they had someone to whom they could express their feelings.

“The survey was a great tool for initiating dialogues,” says Kiara Lee, a social worker who supervised the project. “It got residents to think about their own sense of wellness and to ask for help with a variety of concerns, including memory and finances.”

A new project stemming from participants’ responses will be a lecture series educating residents on memory and concentration and other topics of concern. Badger anticipates more initiatives. What can she tell administrators thinking of designing their own surveys?

“Consider hiring a professional to design and administer the survey, but if resources make this prohibitive, you may be able to find a college intern to assist.”

Lee emphasizes the importance of

helping seniors who have poor vision or cognitive impairments. Badger and Lee also stress, “Broaden the assessment beyond physical health. It’s important to include emotional, social and other elements of wellness.”

### Getting Wellness Off the Ground

The Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging recently conducted a “National Whole-Person Wellness Survey,” designed to develop a profile of wellness program components in continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs). One survey goal was to identify how much progress they had made toward developing a culture of wellness.

Eight characteristics distinguished the 61 communities surveyed. Among those characteristics were the practice of incorporating staff wellness in the organization’s mission, the presence of a wellness team that includes residents, and having more than two groups (such as

staff and residents’ family members) that use the wellness programs. Communities were categorized into one of three groups reflecting their progress on the path to a culture of wellness: Tenderfeet (no wellness culture), Travelers (developing a wellness culture), and Trailblazers (well-developed wellness culture).

The results? Half of the participants were Tenderfeet, with most having two or fewer components. One-third were Travelers, possessing two to five components, and the rest were Trailblazers, exhibiting five to seven components.

There’s a strategy to rising to the top. “You have to develop a culture of wellness that is pervasive throughout the organization. Everyone must be invested, from board members and CEO to front-line workers,” says Dr. Perry Edelman, principal investigator and director of Outcomes Research, Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging, Evanston, Ill.

Grants have taken some providers far.

Chances for scoring a grant are greater for organizations that demonstrate community outreach work. The odds of securing funding are more favorable when approaching local foundations; there is intense competition when vying for federal money, explains John Rude, a wellness program design expert and CEO of Age Dynamics, Inc., Eugene Ore.

One grant can even lead to greater opportunity, as with a Mesa, Ariz., community. One year after being awarded a \$175,000 grant, it was approached by the city of Mesa to manage a new municipal senior center program.


Whether it's generating revenue or developing creative programming, aging-services providers must stay competitive, says Rude. "The emerging baby boomers grew up with fitness/wellness and will not only expect but demand comprehensive wellness programs."

At Judson Park Retirement Community in Des Moines, Wash., the residents are involved in planning and developing their programs. Not long ago, they played an integral role in launching a fitness/wellness initiative.

The seniors raised over \$40,000 to get the program off the ground, research-

ing and selecting building tools and fitness equipment. Just before the grand opening, residents participated in the interview process to select the best candidate to fill the newly created fitness coordinator position.

"Our fitness room is a hub of activity and something that residents take

ownership in," says Natalie Wilcox McCann, director of Judson Park's resident services. "Between their projects and friendships, they are way too busy to be bored." 

*Arlene Karidis is a writer who lives in Mt. Airy, Md.*

## Resources

### **Cross Keys Village –The Brethren Home Community, New Oxford, Pa.**

Contact: Kristin Orwick, director of wellness, [k.orwick@crosskeysvillage.org](mailto:k.orwick@crosskeysvillage.org) or (717) 624-5303.

### **The Becoming Center at Artman Lutheran Home, Ambler, Pa.**

Contact: Gina Formica, PT, director, [ginaf@artmanhome.com](mailto:ginaf@artmanhome.com) or (215) 643-9908.

### **Westminster Towers Senior Living Services, Rock Hill, S.C.**

Contact: Anthony Fountain, president/CEO, [tfountain@westminstertowers.org](mailto:tfountain@westminstertowers.org) or (803) 328-5123.

### **COLLAGE, The Art and Science of Healthy Aging®, Kennett Square, Pa.**

Contact: Neil Beresin, product manager, [nberesin@collageaging.org](mailto:nberesin@collageaging.org) or (610) 335-1283.

### **The Redwoods, Mill Valley, Calif.**

Contact: Susan Badger, administrator, [sbadger@theredwoods.org](mailto:sbadger@theredwoods.org) or (415) 383-2741.

### **Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging, Evanston, Ill.**

Contact: Perry Edelman, Ph.D., director of outcomes research, [pedelman@matherlifeways.com](mailto:pedelman@matherlifeways.com) or (847) 492-6708.

### **Judson Park Retirement Community, Des Moines, Wash.**

Contact: Natalie Wilcox McCann, director of resident services, [nmccann@abhow.com](mailto:nmccann@abhow.com) or (206) 824-4000.

Residents of Splendido, a continuing care retirement community in Tucson, Ariz., take part in a yoga class. Yoga has become increasingly popular with older adults for total wellbeing and stress reduction. Low impact exercise is important because statistics show that approximately 40 percent of people over the age of 70 say that they do not exercise.



Mather LifeWays