

February 12, 2014

Follow AHS_Media on Twitter 

Adult Leisure Program encourages older adults to socialize

GRANDE PRAIRIE – Older adults can meet new people and try different activities through an Alberta Health Services program now offered through the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital.

The Community Adult Leisure Program is geared toward local adults, ages 55 years or older, who live independently, have minimal cognitive impairment, but require support to get out of their homes and stay active with others.

The program, which launched last September, is designed to encourage social relationships in a safe, comfortable environment and reduce feelings of isolation.

“Getting out and socializing with others can have a big impact on how we feel, both mentally and physically,” says Ellen Helgason, senior recreation therapist with AHS in Grande Prairie. “For seniors or older adults, that can be difficult, particularly during the cold winter months. It’s beneficial for everyone, especially seniors, to challenge themselves and try something new.”

Participants gather every Wednesday for about 2.5 hours.

They participate in hospital-based activities, such as exercising, cooking and doing puzzles and crafts (including painting seasonal themes on the hospital windows), as well as taking trips to the local library and museum.

“Some of our participants receive regular support from family members, so this program also provides caregivers a couple hours of much-needed respite every week,” says Helgason.

Six individuals are currently participating in the program, which is offered through the recreation therapy department and led by an AHS staff member and a volunteer.

Tillie Pirker, 85, says the program provides her with an opportunity to get out of the house, socialize and enjoy a variety of activities.

“You’re pretty isolated when you’re on the farm, so it’s nice,” says the Debolt-area woman.

“You communicate with other people and you help each other out. You meet really interesting people, and the women who lead the sessions are all great.”

Helgason says Pirker’s story is not uncommon.

“We’re starting to see some connections being made between the participants, and that’s what we want,” says Helgason. “Making community and social connections can help give older adults and seniors more energy and a new sense of independence.”

Follow AHS_Media on Twitter 

Individuals must be referred to the program through a health care provider, such as a nurse, therapist or family doctor, and go through an assessment by members of the recreation therapy department before being admitted into the program.

A \$5 per session fee covers program expenses.

Phone 780-538-7360 for more information about the Community Adult Leisure Program.

February is National Therapeutic Recreation Month which highlights the important role that recreation can play in the healing process and wellness as a whole.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

- 30 -

For media inquiries, contact:

Sara Warr
AHS Communications
780-538-5108