

## Seniors Helping Seniors to be healthy and more active.

*Interview with HaiDong Liang, Project Manager, West End Seniors Activity Centre*

In 2014, the Network funded a project to build a peer leader program that would promote better health and wellness among the seniors at the West End Seniors Activity Centre (WSAC). Trained seniors (peer leaders) were used to motivate other seniors on their health and wellness path.

Here are some reflections from Haidong Liang, PhD - the Program Manager and Exercise Specialist on the Seniors Helping Seniors project.

### How useful do you think the on-line *Seniors Helping Seniors Toolkit* of exercises and stretch routines will be to seniors activity centres across Alberta?

Most seniors activity centres currently offer some physical activity programs, but funding cuts are creating challenges. The fact that this online toolkit is a low-cost program; is easily accessible electronically; and is based on evidence in a seniors centre, makes its potential uptake huge. With the increasing population of seniors, this program is very timely.

This program is also volunteer-based and peer-led, perfectly suited to the climate in health and wellbeing of today, and particularly helpful in times of reduced budgets for staff-led programs.

### Have other seniors activity centres expressed an interest in adopting this program?

We have been approached by a number of other seniors centres and residences, looking for a practical physical activity program they can offer their members.

Now that the Seniors Helping Seniors Toolkit is available online, barriers to spreading its use are drastically reduced. The WSAC is willing to work with other organizations and sites to answer questions and to provide direction for them to new funding sources to help them get their program off the ground.

The staff at the WSAC (Haidong), have a "let's do it together" attitude to help centers find the resources they need so that their volunteers can be trained as peer leaders. WSAC has the background knowledge and ability and willingness to act as a platform for other centers to learn from. Their membership is flourishing, and the energy put into developing this program and the toolkit are near and dear to their hearts. WSAC has a keen interest in seeing this toolkit widely distributed and taken up.

## What are your thoughts on other opportunities or learnings from the project?

It would have been valuable to include a greater nutrition section to the overall health and wellness package. We are also seeing that exercises that have been tailored to a specific chronic disease such as diabetes, COPD or arthritis – are being created with involvement of a physical therapist in the development phase: this could have been another avenue to consider. The program as it is, is general enough to help lots of people, and that's what we decided was the best way to go.

- Please find the [Seniors Helping Seniors Online Toolkit](#) posted on our website.
- The [Seniors' Stretch Routine](#) is embedded in the toolkit, and also posted on the Network website.