

Gateshead Older People's Assembly

Staying Steady

Impact and Evaluation Report

September 2017 (Course 3)



About Gateshead Older People's Assembly

As a charitable organisation, Gateshead Older People's Assembly exists to support older people (50+) across Gateshead and does this in a number of ways. The projects undertaken by the Assembly and the services it provides are guided by the organisation's Strategic Delivery Plan, which was driven by the charity's trustees, themselves older people from Gateshead.

The Strategic Delivery Plan is underpinned by nine strategic objectives:

1. Increase older people's knowledge of issues affecting them
2. Be the voice of older people in Gateshead
3. Reduce loneliness and isolation for older people in Gateshead
4. Increase opportunities for older people to live fuller lives
5. Improve the health and wellbeing of older people in Gateshead
6. Reduce the number of falls suffered by older people across Gateshead
7. Build stronger networks to support older people across Gateshead
8. Increase opportunities for older people to participate in wider society
9. Increase community safety and awareness of safeguarding issues

These objectives are not mutually exclusive and the Assembly's management aims to meet at least three of the objectives with every project it undertakes.

About Staying Steady

Gateshead Older People's Assembly received funding from Gateshead Council's Public Health Department to run 8, 20-week Postural Stability Instructor led exercise courses over a year across Gateshead. The project aims to reduce the number of falls in the area and increase the exercise opportunities available to older people in Gateshead who are at risk of falls.

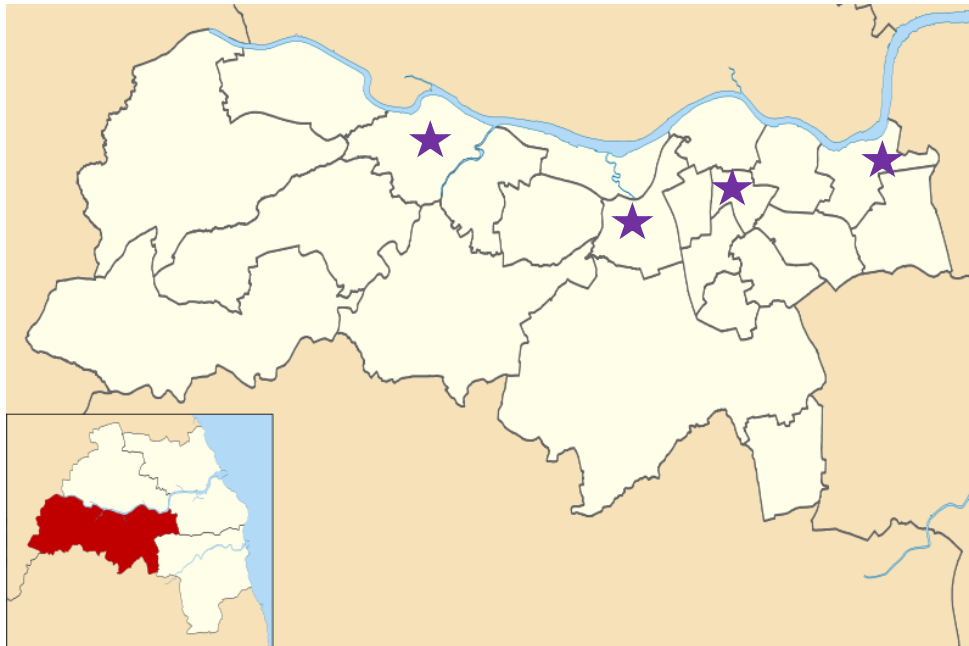
Staying Steady is the name of our Level 4 Postural Stability Instructor led strength and balance course. The course includes a series of evidence based exercises to improve strength and balance and is recognised to reduce falls.

Each class had a maximum of 15 participants and in order to enrol onto the course, participants were required to meet our inclusion criteria which was set by the Postural Stability Instructor along with Gateshead Council's Falls Coordinator using the Later Life Training guidance. Participants were required to:

- Be in control of any long-term health conditions they may have.
- Be able to either mobilise independently, with a stick or with two sticks.
- Be able to carry out standing exercises for a minimum of 5 minutes.
- Be able to make their own way to the classes.

Course 3

After completing course 2 in March 2017, planning commenced for the third round of courses, which began in April in four locations: Lobley Hill Community Centre (Inner West), Bradbury Centre for Sight, Pelaw (East), St Joseph's Church Hall, Blaydon (Outer West), Deckham Village Hall (Central).



Course 3 was delivered in a very similar manner to course 2, using the same locations (due to high numbers of referrals living local to these venues) and we continued to formalise the educational element of the course, this time with the second half of the education element; i.e. week 10 onwards, being more interactive and encouraging participants to discuss their personal experiences with regards to the weekly theme.

Another small adjustment that we made to the course evaluation was the addition of a short feedback survey at the end of the course so that participants could comment on the elements they found the most enjoyable or useful, as well as what they thought could have been improved.

Over the 20-week course, participants completed an hour of exercise which became progressively more dynamic and challenging as the weeks went by, adding tasks such as walking and turning, bending and reaching as well as progressing strength and balance exercises. The exercise class was always followed by an educational talk lasting up to an hour, but usually around 30 minutes. This allowed for the participants to receive some valuable information about topics relating to falls, and about local services. They were also able to ask questions, share their stories and to socialise with other group members.

In addition to the weekly session, participants were also asked to complete enough exercise outside of the class to meet the NICE guidelines of 150 minutes per week. In order to achieve this, participants were provided with a home exercise booklet and a theraband. The group also would discuss practical tips on how to meet these guidelines, such as carrying out 'kitchen bench exercises' whilst cooking, or carrying out exercises during advert breaks when watching TV.

The final 5 weeks of each course had a major emphasis on progression, where the exercise element of the course would take the shape of local community exercise classes such as circuits, gym or Tai Chi. We also arranged taster sessions with local instructors so that the group had the chance to try local activities for free and to meet the instructors.

Evaluating Staying Steady

Participants were sent a registration pack which contained an enrolment form, a pre-exercise readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) and an informed consent form, as well as a set of evaluation forms chosen to measure the impact that the project had on mental wellbeing, confidence, fear of falling and perception of general health. These surveys included the following:

- Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)
- Short FES-I Questionnaire (Fear of Falling Scale)
- ConFBal (Confidence in Maintaining Balance Questionnaire)

The Postural Stability Instructor also carried out individual functional tests with each participants using the Functional Grid tool, which included the following tests:

- Seated shoulder external rotation flexibility
- Seated shoulder internal rotation flexibility
- Seated hamstring flexibility
- 180-degree turn
- Functional reach
- 6m timed up and go

Surveys and functional assessments were completed on week 1 of the course and the outcomes were not only used as baseline data for the participants, but also used to help participants to set their goals and to determine which exercises to focus on at home as part of their weekly programme. The same surveys and functional assessments were completed on the final week of the course in order to measure changes in mental wellbeing, fear of falling, confidence in balance and functional capacity.

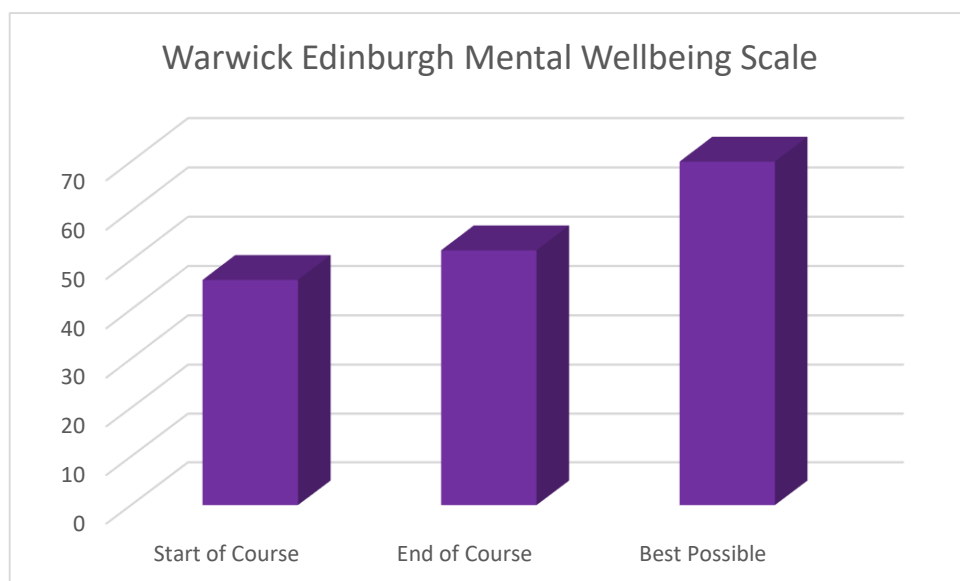
55 participants originally enrolled onto the Staying Steady course and 40 people completed the course (73% completion rate). Out of the 40 people who completed the course, 35 participants were available on the assessment dates to carry out the functional assessments and complete follow up surveys. Therefore, the below statistics are based on 87.5% of the participants who completed the course.

Results

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS):

This scale is designed to monitor the mental wellbeing of the participants and includes a 14 statement scale with 5 response categories. The scores from each statement are summed up to provide a single score ranging from 14-70 (the higher the score, the better).

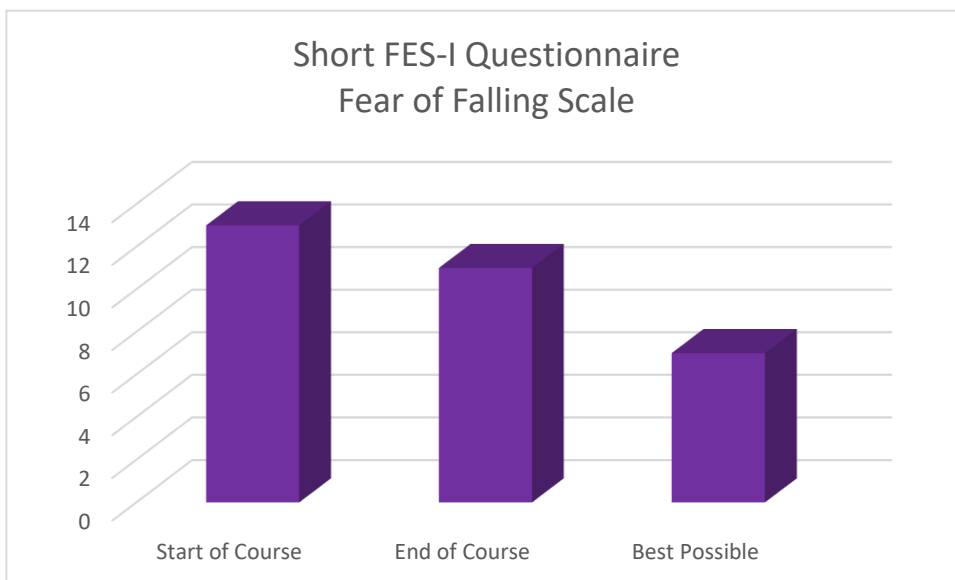
This chart shows the average scores of 35 participants at the beginning of the course (46) compared to the end (52) alongside the best (70) possible score.



Short FES-I Questionnaire:

The FES-I survey is designed to measure fear of falling in older people and includes 7 'scenarios' in which the participant is asked to rate their level of concern when carrying out the task. The levels of concern are scored between 1-4 and the scores from each scenario are totalled to provide a single score ranging from 7-28 (the lower the score, the better).

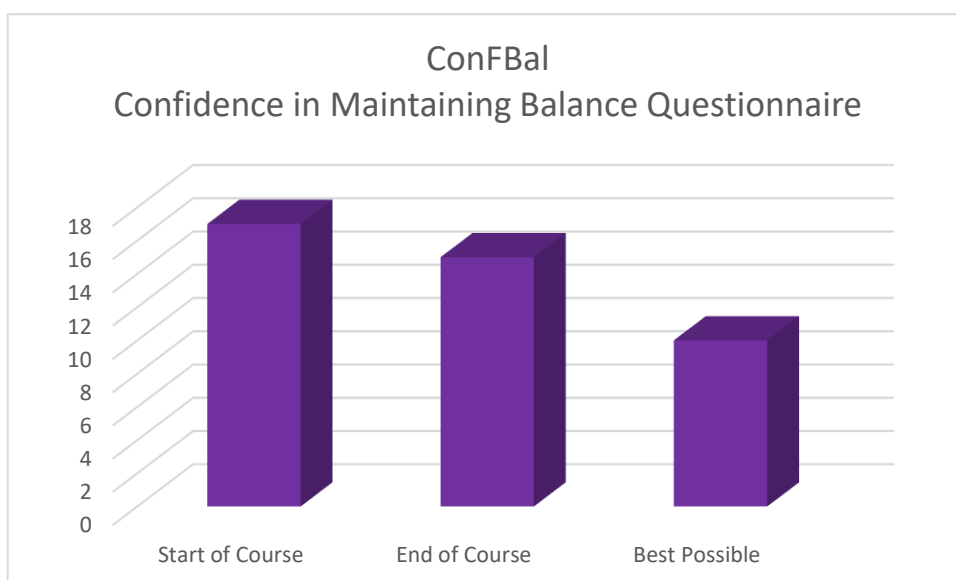
This chart shows the average scores of the participants at the beginning of the course (13) compared to the end (11) alongside the best (7) possible score.



ConFBal:

The ConFBal is a tool designed to measure confidence in balance in older people. It includes 10 questions relating to levels of confidence in different scenarios, for example; "How confident are you that you can pick up something from the floor without losing your balance?". The participant chooses from 3 answers; 'not confident' (3), 'slightly confident' (2), or 'confident' (1). The numbers from each response are totalled to provide a single score ranging from 10-30 (the lower the score, the better).

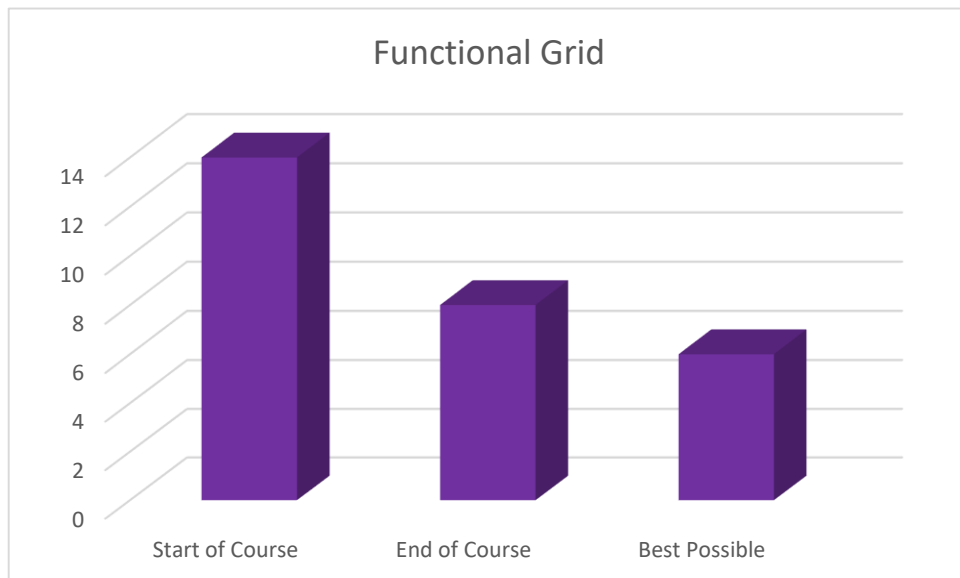
This chart shows the average scores of the participants at the beginning of the course (17) compared to the end (15) alongside the best possible score (10).



Functional Grid:

There are 6 functional assessments scored on a system ranging from 1-6. Participants scoring 1 will have no limitation and participants scoring 6 will have a severe limitation or will be unable to complete the task. This grid is used to assess participants to determine whether or not they are suitable for the programme, as well as prescribing home exercises to address current weaknesses and areas for improvement.

For the purpose of this evaluation, the scores from each of the 6 tasks have been totalled to give an overall score ranging from 6-36 (the lower the score, the better). Tasks included; seated shoulder external rotation flexibility, seated shoulder internal rotation flexibility, seated hamstring flexibility, 180 degree turn, functional reach, 6m timed up and go.



This chart shows the initial average score of 14 compared to the average score of 8 at the end of the 20-week programme. The best possible score for the Functional Grid is 6, therefore on average participants have improved in functional capacity.

In many cases, participants reported that they were starting to find day to day tasks easier, such as getting dressed, washing hair and making a meal.

Learning

It was observed during this course that in the earlier stages, many of the participants were not adhering to the home exercise programme as well as they should. In order to improve on this in the future, an emphasis on the importance of home exercise has been incorporated into the first educational talk. Feedback has suggested that often participants feel as though they do not have time to complete blocks of exercises at home. In order to overcome this, we will discuss how participants can build the exercises into their daily routines, for example, best exercises to carry out at the kitchen sink whilst boiling the kettle, whilst watching TV, or whilst standing at the bus stop.

We will also look to progress participants to community exercise groups earlier in the course, as evidence suggests that adherence to exercise is often more successful when carried out in a group.

Case Study: Alma Devine (Lobley Hill)

Alma is in her early 60's and lives in Whickham (inner west of Gateshead). Alma had an accident a few years ago which resulted in her having to have surgery to build a new metal ankle. It was also discovered that she had osteoporosis in her leg, hip and spine and also was diagnosed with arthritis in the ankle. Recovery meant that she was unable to bear weight for 8 months and spent much of her time in a wheelchair.

Once Alma was walking again with the aid of crutches or a walking stick, she found that she had lost much of her strength and suppleness. Her confidence was also hugely shattered as she struggled to use stairs, would not use public transport due to fear of the bus jerking and she also struggled with getting dressed due to stiffness in her shoulders. With constant aches and pains in her joints, she stopped going out and dropped all of her former hobbies.

Alma discovered Staying Steady when she noticed a poster at a local pharmacy. She thought it would benefit her, as she had a fear of falling. She was now at a point where she couldn't zip up dresses and struggled to get ready, needed assistance to get out of the bath, avoided stairs and was starting to put on weight and for the first time, started to feel old!

Alma began the Staying Steady course at Lobley Hill in March 2017 and she was immediately put at ease by the instructor. She was taught how to exercise safely and effectively and realised ways in which she could safely challenge herself in order to improve strength and balance. The course taught her how exercises linked to improving her ability in day to day tasks, which pushed her to completing her home exercises every day.

Each week Alma became stronger and she felt uplifted. Her aches and pains started to subside and she noticed her muscles and joints feeling more stable and strong. She can now get out of the bath unaided, get ready with ease (even being able to zip her dress up to the top) and she is more confident when using stairs.

She also has the confidence to use public transport and is getting out of the house and has been trying new classes. So far, after attending some taster sessions with The Assembly, she has taken part in tai chi, yoga and dance and has lost 6 pounds since the beginning of the course.



Case Study: Lesley Driver (Deckham)

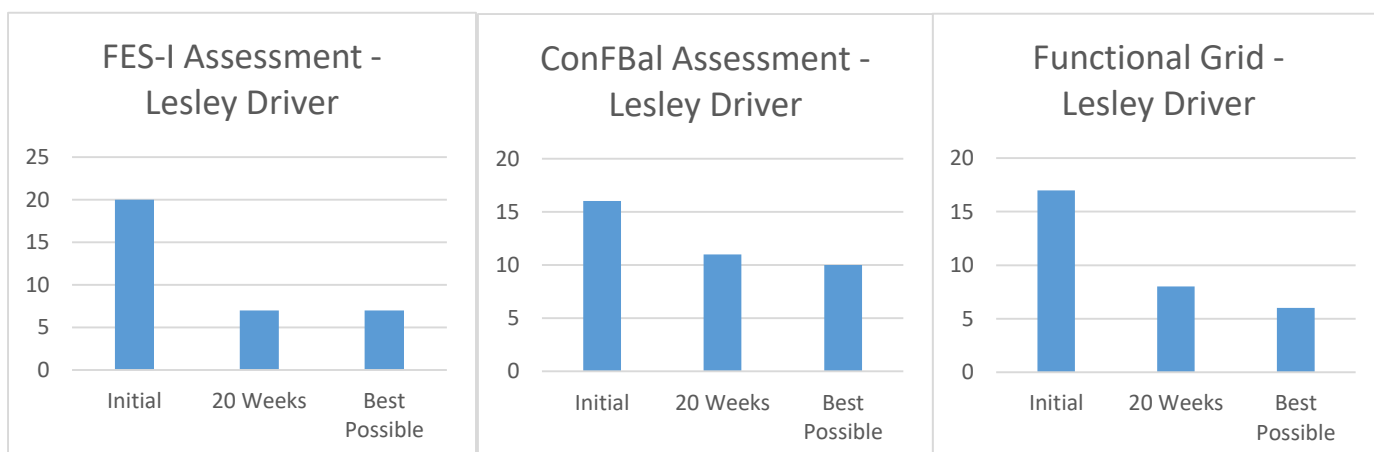
Lesley is in her early 60's and lives in sheltered accommodation in Felling (east Gateshead). For years, Lesley has been living with refractory (uncontrolled) epilepsy, which means that she can experience seizures at any time. In the past, this condition meant that Lesley spent the majority of her time in the house, doing nothing and feeling isolated. She had previously enjoyed attending the gym and keeping fit, but after diagnosis of her condition, she was unable to find a gym or community class that would allow her access due to her condition.

In January 2017, Lesley was trialled on some new medication, which resulted in her seizures becoming less frequent. She met with the Care Navigator at her GP surgery, who recommended Staying Steady as a means to building her confidence so that she could start to get out of the house a bit more. Once Gateshead Older People's Assembly received the referral, the Postural Stability Instructor contacted Lesley's GP to seek permission to exercise Lesley, which was quickly granted, allowing her to start the programme in April.

At the start of the course, Lesley felt very anxious due to her spending so much time in the house. She was afraid that she would suffer a seizure on the way to, or during a class and was worried about how others would react to her if she did. The instructor discussed this issue with Lesley and looked at ways to overcome these barriers. Lesley began to either get a taxi to the class, or if a friend was available, they would accompany her on the bus until she built up her confidence. Lesley also discussed her condition with the Staying Steady group during the class social, which put her mind at ease about how others would react.

Over the 20 weeks, Lesley grew in confidence. She was carrying out the more challenging exercises with ease and she started to get the bus to the centre by herself, and if the weather was nice she started to walk one or two stops before getting the bus and would occasionally walk all of the way home. She started to see that getting out of the house was not only enjoyable, but safer for her, as if she was amongst people if she suffered a seizure, there would be someone to help her.

By the end of the Staying Steady course, Lesley felt like she had a new lease of life. She began to attend community groups and classes including Yoga, Tai Chi, Circuits and she is now a regular at the Dancercise class. Other residents at the sheltered scheme noticed a difference in her, as she was more upbeat and was getting involved in more at the sheltered scheme. She went from not dancing at the social evenings to being on the dance floor all night and she has even started to bring other residents from her sheltered scheme to Deckham to get involved in the classes. Below are Lesley's scores from the FES-I (fear of falling), ConFBal (confidence in maintaining balance) and Functional Grid, which all show the level of improvement she has made.



Added Value

We have continued to end each Staying Steady session with an education element where we cover a range of topics that link closely with falls prevention. These education sessions provide participants with some valuable information and discussion points, and often lead to a referral to a local support service. For example, during the 'home safety' talk, we provide participants with the telephone number for the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service who carry out free home safety checks.

It is also an opportunity for participants to not only share concerns, advice and recommendations, but also to form closer friendships with fellow participants. Education topics include:

- About Staying Steady
- Dealing with a fall
- Fitter feet & footwear
- Home safety
- Medication & side effects
- Nutrition, hydration & alcohol
- Bone health
- Eyesight and hearing
- Staying safe when out and about
- Keeping active
- What's next?

We also offer additional support to participants by providing participants with a Later Life Training Postural Stability exercise guide along with their own theraband so that they can complete their home exercises effectively. We recommend that each participant carries out home exercises at least twice a week in addition to the Staying Steady class in order to meet the recommendations set out within the NICE guidelines. During the initial assessment, all participants will also be advised on additional exercises that they should do regularly at home in order to meet their goals and to improve their functional ability in relation to their functional grid scores.

On enrolment, participants are also provided with a Nexus Bridge Card; a card that people can use when using public transport to inform the driver that they need some additional support. Those who used walking aids were also shown how to check that their aids were set at the right height and were encouraged to regularly check their ferrules and where appropriate, the instructor would help to change the ferrule for the participants.

Progression

In order to encourage participants to continue to exercise after completion of the Staying Steady course, we focus the final 5 weeks of the course on progression to community exercise. The final 5 weeks of the course will take the shape of community exercise classes available locally, for example in a circuit format, in a gym environment, or will incorporate longer tai chi sections. This method allows participants to access community classes with more confidence and with a more accurate idea of what to expect within the classes.

The Assembly has also been fortunate enough to have received funding from The Gateshead Housing Company through the Community Foundation to deliver a project called Discover Health 50+. This project involved delivering health and wellbeing taster sessions to people aged 50+ living in Gateshead. Staying Steady participants were involved in the consultation phase of this project in order to express their opinions on which activities they would like to try and if there were any barriers they faced. One of the main messages from this consultation was that many of the

Staying Steady participants would like to try activities such as dance and tai chi, but were worried about losing balance, or were worried about getting down to and up from the floor during yoga. This feedback was taken on board and a series of beginners classes were organised where participants could use chairs for support during dance and tai chi. A seated yoga session was also organised.

Each month, Staying Steady participants received an invitation to try the taster sessions, which included Nordic walking, circuit classes, tai chi, gentle yoga, health walks, Easyline gym and dance. Many of the group members have now progressed to accessing at least one weekly community class.



Summary

Overall, the Staying Steady course has demonstrated that it has been beneficial to the health and wellbeing of its participants. On average, class members have improved in all areas (mental wellbeing, fear of falling, confidence in balance and functional capacity). The greatest improvements were in the functional grid. Achievements that participants have reported include; moving easier, get dressed with less pain or without support, fastening bras, accessing public transport, being able to do their own food shopping and accessing community fitness classes with confidence. We have also received some excellent feedback regarding how useful participants found the educational element of the course.

At the beginning of the course, 55 people enrolled across the four sites, with 40 of these individuals completing the course (73%). Reasons for dropout were mainly due to illness or having to care for a family member who had become ill during the course. From the 40 participants who completed the course, at least 32 (80%) have progressed onto community exercise, which they now undertake regularly. Examples include circuits, tai chi, yoga, dance and Easyline gym. In future courses, we aim to maintain or improve upon this progression rate, as evidence suggests that continued physical activity is imperative in order to maintain the physical benefits gained during the course.