# Aging in Place: Improving Health and Wellness Programming Through Occupation-Based Activities for Older Adults Living Independently

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## Background and Significance

**Background**
- Moorhead Tower Apartments, a Beacon Community, is an independent living apartment building intentionally designed for older adults with visual impairments or physical disabilities to age in place safely.
- Beacon Community is a privately owned real estate firm dedicated to providing superior housing and support services programming to help its' residents lead healthy and social lives.
- Moorhead Tower Apartments was created with the Living Well by Design framework which follows a holistic approach to resident services with focuses of education, wellness, and community building.
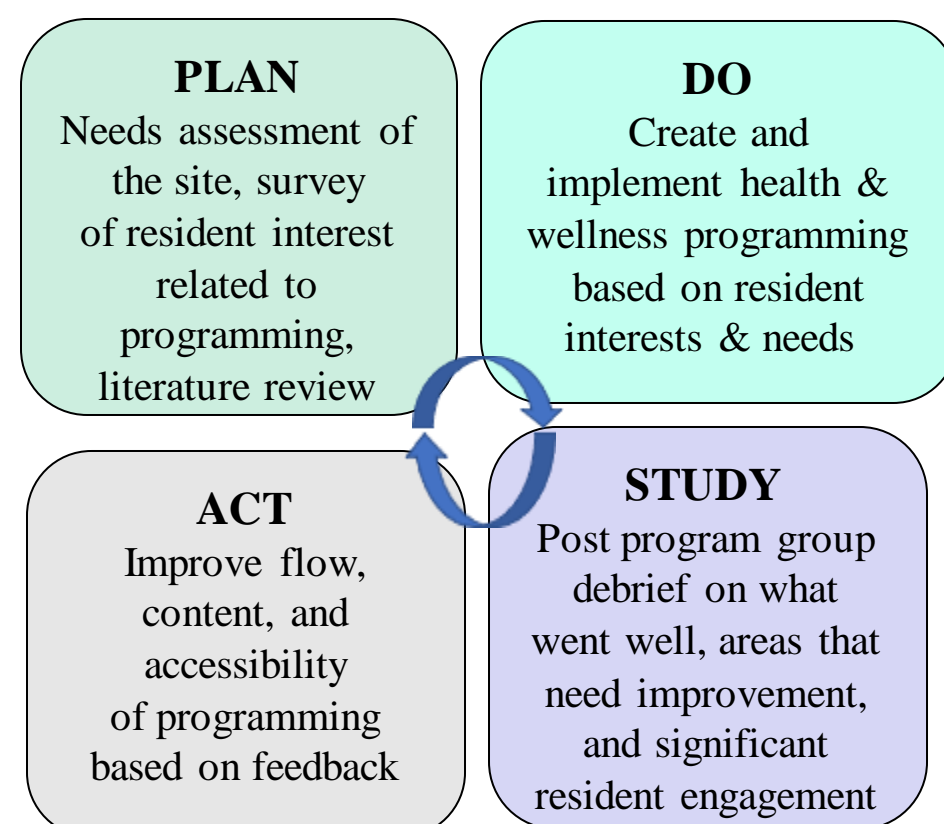
**Significance**
- The critical need outlined by staff at Moorhead Tower: **health and wellness programming promoting aging in place through increased physical activity and social engagement**
- Factors that can contribute to an older adult's ability to age in place:[1]
  - Physical and psychological health status
  - Social connectedness
  - Environment
  - Chronic diseases and disabilities
  - Health behaviors
  - Financial status
- Evidence indicates that both individual and group interventions targeting these factors can improve an individual's ability to remain in their home as they age.[3]
- To address social isolation in adults with vision impairment, it is important to provide interventions and education addressing leisure and social participation.[2]

## Objectives

1) Improve health and wellness of older adults at Moorhead Tower Apartments with varying levels of physical disability

2) Foster social connectedness among the older adults at Moorhead Tower Apartments through the use of occupation-based activities

## Methods

**Process**

- **PLAN** Needs assessment of the site, survey of resident interest related to programming, literature review
- **DO** Create and implement health & wellness programming based on resident interests & needs
- **ACT** Improve flow, content, and accessibility of programming based on feedback
- **STUDY** Post program group debrief on what went well, areas that need improvement, and significant resident engagement

**Participants**
- Residents that reside in Moorhead Tower Apartments

**Outcome Measures**
- General interest survey for residents about programming
- Pre- & post- program implementation surveys for residents
  - To assess social connectedness, mental health, IADLs, current performance & satisfaction of tasks, leisure pursuits
- Attendance at each program
- Informal interview feedback from residents on programming

## Methods (Cont.)

**Program Implementation: Dimensions of Wellness**
- The Hettler's 6 Dimensions of Wellness offers a holistic framework to assess older adults' wellness priorities.[4]
- Programming was based four main domains from The Dimensions of Wellness: emotional, physical, occupational, and social health

| Program | Goal/Mission | Activity & Education Example |
|---|---|---|
| **Healthy Cooking** | Simple healthy recipes for increased nutrition intake for aging in place along with evidence-based educational handouts on nutrition for older adults | Corn and bean salsa recipe with balancing your plate education. |
| **Fall Prevention** | Exercise classes targeting strength, balance, and endurance + education and discussion about fall prevention strategies and preventative measures | Tai chi exercise class with a discussion about the barriers/benefits of exercise. |
| **Emotional Well-Being** | Fostered a safe place to self-reflect while increasing self-efficacy, gratitude, and resilience. Utilized body scans, mindfulness, and stress-relief activities. | Created a community flower and vegetable garden to promote teamwork, pride, and social connectedness. |
| **West African Dance** | Utilized dance to improve physical activity, coordination, balance, strength and social participation; encouraged residents to share their unique cultures with one another. | A traditional Ghanaian Dance, "Adowa" was taught to residents with education provided on the use of dance to increase physical activity. |

**Educational Materials:** verbal education; take-home handouts and resource binders featuring large, legible font and high color contrast for each program

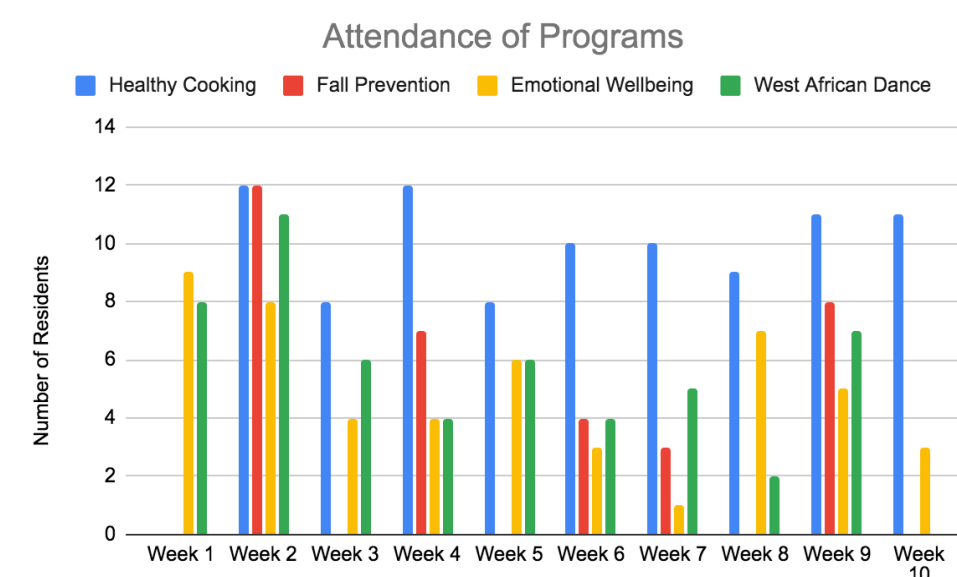## Results

**Pre- and Post- Program Implementation Survey:**
(Scale: 1 = not at all to 5 = extremely)

| Category | Pre-Program (Avg.) | Post-Program (Avg.) |
|---|---|---|
| Satisfaction in completing daily occupations | 4.0 | 4.0 |
| Feelings of connectedness within Moorhead Tower | 3.54 | 4.16 |
| Effectiveness of coping strategies | 3.67 | 3.92 |
| Fear of falling | 3.77 | 3.25 |
| Satisfaction with ability to access healthy food | 3.70 | 4.0 |
| Confidence to cook a healthy meal | 3.85 | 3.1 |
| Confidence with using the fitness room | 3.10 | 2.75 |

**Informal Interview Quotes about Programming:**

| Resident Report Pre-Programming | Resident Report Post-Programming |
|---|---|
| "need individual aids for blind people during programming" | "you have made such a positive impact on us, teaching us things" |
| "[accessibility is] mostly okay, art is for people with more vision" | "your programs get us out of our rooms and improve our quality of life" |

Each program occurred weekly or biweekly for 1 hour in the community room.


Attendance of Programs

## Discussion

- The resident-centered approach resulted in programming with high participation potential
- Providing one on one supports to residents during programming promotes engagement
- Resident feedback is crucial for ensuring accessibility and maximizing participation

**Facilitators:**
- Support from staff at site
- Resident engagement
- Incorporating evidence-based programming

**Barriers:**
- Modified program timeline
- Dissemination of program schedule to residents
- Attendance fluctuations due to unforeseen circumstances
- Sustainability of peer led model

## Implications for Practice

It is within the distinct value of occupational therapy to provide occupation-based programming to improve the health and wellness of older adults. Findings from this program demonstrate the potential of various occupation-based programs to create positive and sustainable improvements in this population.

## Sustainability & Future Plans

**Sustainability**
- Developed comprehensive facilitation guides for each program
- Created resource binder of exercises, physical activity guidelines, and videos of equipment use for the building gym
- Collaborated with existing programming staff to ensure continuation of physical activity and healthy cooking programming

**Future Plans**
- Increasing accessibility of programming for those with visual impairments or physical disabilities
- Continued expansion of programming based on the dimensions of wellness
- Possible collaboration with Pitt undergraduate organizations to foster intergenerational connections

## Acknowledgements

## References

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