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Bellsite

Moving to Music

Toe tapping turned to dancing and the seniors of Bellsite are healthier for it. Wanda Beaudry is one of several volunteers in the small community of less than 800 who got together with the local seniors 50-Plus Club to plan for chronic disease prevention. Initially the group decided to start a coffee house in the local seniors centre. They would invite musicians to entertain and serve a small evening lunch with coffee and tea. A year later, "It's been a huge success," said Beaudry. Seniors are not only listening to musical talent from their area, but are getting up and dancing to the beat.

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Every first Saturday of the month volunteers from far and wide tune up their instruments and head for Bellsite. "Our community is small," said Beaudry, "We don't have a lot of volunteers." Instead of lamenting and dwelling on the inevitable fact of shrinking rural populations, the group put out an invitation to musicians in neighbouring communities as well as their own. The response has been overwhelming.

Artists, singers and musicians from surrounding communities and as far away as Pelly, Saskatchewan have come to perform. "The least (number of performers in one night) we've had is 12 and the most is 26," laughed Beaudry, adding, "Sometimes we have to limit them to two pieces of music each!"

Beaudry said in the beginning the gathering consisted of performers and an audience. Then one Saturday night she decided to introduce a bit of movement. As MC, Beaudry explained what CDPI funding is – money given to communities to use towards chronic disease prevention – and that the goal of the CDPI committee in Bellsite was to see seniors become more physically active. Then, after consulting with the performers, she invited people to get up and dance. And they did! "It was wonderful to see," she said. "People who are stiff and have a hard time walking are actually getting up and dancing. Even if they don't do a lot of dancing, they get out of their chair and try."

Participants span three decades with the oldest being in their 80s and the youngest in their 50s. Musicians have included talented youth as young as nine. "It's been amazing – a huge success," said Beaudry.

CDPI funding subsidizes the monthly coffee house lunches and has also been used for community walks on Mother's and Father's Day. "This year we held the walk between Mother's and Father's Day and called it a Memorial Day Walk," said Beaudry.

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Take Note

Canadians Cut a Rug:

Personal participation in dance is on the rise across Canada, with over 5.5 per cent of Canadian adults (or over 1 million people) taking dance instruction or participating in an organized dance activity.

http://www.canadacouncil.ca/publications_e/fact_sheets/st127276333609375000.htm