



RSVP of *Hampshire & Franklin*

Name of Project: The Osteoporosis Exercise Program of RSVP of Hampshire & Franklin Counties

Name of Organization: United Way of Hampshire County
Northampton, MA

Description of Program:

As our population ages, more and more people are at risk of developing osteoporosis. People with osteoporosis are at high risk for bone fractures. But we know that osteoporosis-related fractures and falls can be prevented, enabling seniors to live longer and fuller lives, staying out of nursing homes and living independently longer. Strength training and balance exercises minimize falls, and regular exercise and attention to nutrition are critical for people facing osteoporosis.

RSVP of Hampshire and Franklin Counties is committed to preventing osteoporosis-related fractures and falls. Through our Osteoporosis Exercise Program, 25 trained RSVP volunteers serve as Wellness Advocates, providing peer-led group osteoporosis exercise classes and nutrition and health updates free of charge to area elders to restore bone density, improve health, and decrease the incidence of falls and bone breaks. Wellness Advocates lead exercise classes for over 130 seniors at 11 community sites, including senior centers and senior housing complexes. The exercise classes last for one hour once or twice per week (as determined by individual sites) and are offered year round. Classes are open to any senior interested in improving their physical health and preventing osteoporosis. Through their participation in the classes, seniors make behavioral changes in lifestyles that can reduce risk of disease, disability and injury.

A variety of groups come together to make this program possible. RSVP provides program management oversight; coordinates recruitment and training of volunteer Wellness Advocates; and helps class sites initiate their classes by providing start-up supplies and on-going publicity. 11 senior centers and senior living communities host the classes, providing safe spaces for exercise, and promoting their own classes and registering participants. A certified orthopedic therapist under contract with RSVP provides on-going consultation and training, and an RSVP Volunteer Team Leader researches health and nutrition updates and shares them with the Wellness Advocates.

RSVP's Osteoporosis Exercise Program continues to grow and has a history of success. This past year we found that 87% of class participants improved their physical health, and 93% reported an improvement in their ability to avoid falls or broken bones. Our target audience is people age 55+ residing in Hampshire or Franklin County. Incoming participants vary in their

quality of health, but all improve as a result of the weekly classes. The classes become close-knit groups, providing support and encouragement to participants.

For more information about this program, contact: Megan Barber, RSVP Director at 413-584-1300 x180 or by email at mbarber@unitedwayhampshirecounty.org

The website for the program is www.unitedwayhampshirecounty.org