

Press release – March 20th, 2018

Dance class is strictly in step with lowering falls risk for older people



South Tyneside's community falls service is backing a dance programme which is helping older people in South Tyneside and Sunderland to improve their mobility and, ultimately, their overall health.

Participants were assessed at the start of the Falling on Your Feet programme at Ocean Road Community Association, South Shields, using the Timed Up and Go (TUG) test – the time taken from standing from a chair, walking three metres, turning round and returning to sit in the chair. The average score at the start was 9.8 seconds (10 seconds is normal for over 65s). At the end, the average score was down to 6.95 seconds.

Dean Metz, Falls Specialist Physiotherapist with South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust's community falls service, which has bases at South Tyneside District Hospital and The Galleries Health Centre, in Washington, said the results were very good news: "The lower the score, the lower the risk of falling in the future and everybody's score improved."

A former patient initially told the falls service team about the Falling on Your Feet 10-week programme, run by Tyneside-based Helix Arts for people over the age of 65 living independently who had experienced a fall or were at risk of falling. Mr Metz went along to observe one of the hour-long sessions and was impressed by what he saw.

"Here was a group of people moving, dancing, and having fun. I immediately recognised the potential for preventing falls from happening by engaging folks in something that they can actually look forward to doing.

"The purpose is to build strength, confidence and balance, whilst being involved in a creative endeavour, and Helix Arts were looking for evidence that they were actually achieving these goals. We were able to help through conducting the TUG test, which is a recognised measure of mobility.

"Apart from helping to prevent falls, innovative programmes such as this can have far-reaching consequences in terms of reducing social isolation, preserving people's independence and generally improving the health and well-being of the growing over-65 population and, ultimately, reducing the need for health and social care. By providing quantitative evidence and working co-operatively with arts and other groups in the future, we hope to help people in our local communities to stay active, independent and, very importantly, out of hospital."

Falls can cause increased fear and isolation, injury, or even death, and one in three people over 65 and one in two over 80 will have at least one a year. South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust's community falls service helps people living in South Tyneside and Sunderland to overcome this common problem. A team of nurses, physiotherapists,

doctors and healthcare assistants provide an in-depth assessment to determine why someone is falling over and prevent further falls and injuries from occurring.

New patients - about 520 a year in South Tyneside and about 950 a year in Sunderland - are seen in a 'one-stop' clinic, where they have all the necessary tests, such as blood pressure and bone density fracture risk, and are offered joint assessments by a nurse and a physiotherapist to identify possible contributory factors to their falls and the best way to help them. Depending on their individual needs, they are then given physiotherapy and a tailored exercise programme. All this is done with the aim of maximising the individual's ability to safely live as independently and actively as they wish.

Catherine Hearne, Chief Executive of Helix Arts, said: "We were delighted that South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust's community falls service was able to demonstrate that the strength and balance of participants in Falling on Your Feet showed improvement.

"Our regular workshops lead to high quality pieces which the dancers co-choreograph along with dance artists and which wow local audiences when they are performed at the end of each programme. They are a fantastic way for over 65s to have fun, get fitter and make new friends."

The first Falling on Your Feet dance and health programme was held in 2016 in West Denton, in Newcastle, and subsequent programmes have taken place in Wallsend and North Shields, as well as in South Tyneside and Sunderland. To find out more about Helix Arts and about future Falling on Your Feet courses, call 0191 241 4931, email foyf.helixarts.com or go to the website www.helixarts.com

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