



## **“WORKING TOGETHER FOR A STRONG, HEALTHY KAUA’I”**

For over two years now, seniors on Kaua‘i have had an opportunity to participate in a regular, physical activity program called EnhanceFitness (EF), which is designed especially for older adults. It is a group exercise program which includes a multi-component design, addressing balance, strength, endurance, and flexibility, and is geared to the level of both active and frail older adults.

It is commonly recognized that regular physical activity in the older adult population can decrease the risk of developing high blood pressure, osteoporosis, heart disease, diabetes and depression or help to manage chronic diseases.

The program was developed and tested by researchers at the University of Washington (UW), in collaboration with Senior Services and Group Health Cooperative (GHC) in Seattle, Washington. It is an evidence-based program, with a proven track record of its effectiveness for older adults. The mission of EnhanceFitness is to provide communities with an effective, research-driven program to improve the overall functional fitness and well-being of older adults.

Since 2003, the County of Kaua‘i Agency on Elderly Affairs (KAEA) has collaborated in a statewide Healthy Aging Partnership-Empowering Elders initiative, along with the State Executive Office on Aging, Department of Health, University of Hawai‘i, Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and other state and local partners. The goal of the Healthy Aging partnership is to improve the health status of older adults through improved nutrition and increased physical activity.

In 2006, the KAEA received a 3-year grant from the Administration on Aging (AoA) through the EOA to implement EnhanceFitness. This was part of a national effort to offer evidence-based, disease prevention programs in keeping with the AoA’s *Choices for Independence* initiative. In addition, the strategic plan of the AoA has focused on five major goals, one of which is to empower older people to stay active and healthy through evidence-based disease prevention programs. Healthy aging is one of six goals in both the Kaua‘i Area Plan and State Plan on Aging and supports older adults to be able to successfully age at home and in their community.

The KAEA has developed partnerships to address and celebrate Kaua‘i’s Healthy Aging Project. Partners include Kaua‘i District Health Office, Kaua‘i County Dept. of Parks and Recreation, and 50+ Lifelong Fitness/Terri Halliday. Other partners include Kaua‘i Economic Opportunity, Inc., Dr. Arnulfo Diaz, and Kaua‘i Community College Nursing Dept. This collaborative effort led to the launch and implementation of EnhanceFitness on July 9, 2007 at two sites located at the Waimea and Kōloa Neighborhood Centers. In addition to these two initial sites, the program has since expanded to a total of six sites at the neighborhood centers, which also include Kekaha, Kaumakani, Līhu'e and Kīlauea.

Classes are one hour, held 3 days a week, taught by certified fitness instructors who have received special training in teaching EnhanceFitness. Terri Halliday is Kaua'i's Master Trainer who has received additional training to support and train all EF instructors and see that EnhanceFitness protocols are followed to maintain fidelity to the design of the classes.

The program has served 171 participants, one of whom transfers between sites on Kaua'i and Washington. There are currently 119 active participants enrolled in the program, with 5% who are male participants. Due to the growing interest in EnhanceFitness, a waitlist is currently maintained for those interested in participating. Mean scores compared to all other sites throughout the U.S. indicate that Kaua'i's participants are slightly older by 2 years, with the average age of 76.4 years old. The age range of participants is 60 – 92 years old, with 4 female participants who are 90 years and older. One of them is Bernice Kubota of Koloa, who has been with the program since its inception. She says that she looks forward to being active and having the opportunity for fellowship while doing the exercises. She adds, “the cardio exercises give me stamina and using the weights strengthens my arms and legs. The exercises also help the stiffness in my joints and muscles. We also have excellent instructors!”

Fitness checks are conducted for each participant when they first begin the program and at 4-month intervals to evaluate each participant's functional fitness and progress. Three areas of performance measures are: 1) up and go, which measures agility and balance; 2) arm curls, which measures upper body strength; and 3) chair stands, which measures lower body strength. Thus far, Kauai's EF participants have significantly improved in the up and go and chair stands.

Participants have commented that the program has helped to improve their health, strength, posture and balance, and has increased their energy. They enjoy the opportunity to meet others and make new friends, and have fun while enjoying the benefits of the program. Participation in EF maintains or enhances cardio-respiratory fitness, muscle strength, balance, and flexibility. It also helps to prevent falls, as a result of balance training exercises, and reduces healthcare costs. A recent cost-benefit analysis for Kaua'i's six sites, conducted by a sub-committee with the statewide HAP, indicates that for EF, the investment to return ratio is about 1:2, with the total averted health costs estimated at \$329,088 per year.<sup>1</sup>

Kaua'i's EF program was nationally recognized in 2008 during May's Older Americans Month as one of the AoA's Program Champions, supporting its efforts to empower older adults to stay active and healthy. Kaua'i's County Council also presented the AEA with a certificate of recognition for supporting Kaua'i's seniors to take control of their health. This year, the AEA received funding through June, 2010 from the County of Kaua'i, thanks to the support from Mayor Bernard Carvalho and the County Council.

EnhanceFitness has provided the opportunity for Kaua'i's older adults to improve their health status and quality of life through physical activity. The Healthy Aging partnership is “**Working Together for a Strong, Healthy Kaua'i**” and helping our older adults to make choices for a healthier future.

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<sup>1</sup> Pang, L., Braun, K., Tomioka, M., Watanabe, M., Sugihara, N. (2009) Cost:Benefit Estimates of an Elderly Exercise Program on Kauai