

Service keeping seniors on their feet celebrates first birthday

A pioneering café-based healthcare concept helping Hervey Bay seniors at risk of a fall gain the confidence and strength to stay on their feet celebrated its first birthday this week, with a special gathering at The Tree House Urangan Community Wellness Centre.

An initiative of the Fraser Coast Falls Prevention Service, the Lifestyle Café launched at the Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre in October 2021 for seniors over 65 and First Nations people over 50.

More than a quarter of people living on the Fraser Coast are aged over 65.

Hervey Bay resident, Jan Morton was referred by her GP to the service following a fall at home. She has been attending the strength and balance group exercises for six weeks.

“I really enjoy the social time after the exercises, getting to chat with staff and other participants. I also enjoyed the education presentation. I was a nurse and it’s very valuable to refresh my knowledge on different health topics,” Jan said.

Edna Down was referred by Queensland Ambulance Service to the service following a fall at home.

Edna, who celebrates her 86th birthday this year, has been participating in strength and balance classes for eight weeks. “Having a fall really shakes your confidence, and since doing the classes, I feel much more confident, and I’ve gained my independence back,” she said.

Bolton Clarke works closely with the Nurse Navigator Service in providing in home falls assessment, coordination and delivery of the Lifestyle Café and strength and balance program. Participants can be referred by the Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service (WBHHS) emergency departments, Queensland Ambulance Service or their GP.

The PHN’s Manager for Older Person’s Health, Paige Martinez, said injuries resulting from falls are the major cause of death, hospitalisation, and emergency department presentations for older people.

“We worked with our partners in the Fraser Coast Falls Prevention Service to co-design an initiative which incorporates a social aspect and establishes a pathway to reduce the risk of falls,” Ms Martinez said.

“Education programs that are purely falls-prevention focussed tend to have a negative connotation. With the Lifestyle Café we are working from a wellness focus, incorporating the strength and balance program with other health and wellbeing activities.”

Topics in the educational program are determined by the PHN’s health needs assessment and also form part of the program, with other healthy ageing information provided to participants on first aid, healthy eating and nutrition, dementia, healthy bladders and managing sleep and fatigue.

WBHHS Nurse Navigator Kristen James said they are working on broadening the educational offering to address the risks of social isolation.

“The aim is to further increase community awareness on cyber security and protection against scams, seasonal preparedness for storms, heatwaves and bushfires, and other topics which might be identified by participants.”

“The Lifestyle Café with a strength and balance program is an informal way to share these messages, presented alongside afternoon tea and group-based activities which are also led by the participants each week like painting, music, candle making and board games and puzzles.”

WBHHS Chief Executive Debbie Carroll said the purpose of the weekly, three-hour Lifestyle Café is to provide the strength and balance program in an informal setting, and it fills a gap in the community.

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“This program gives older people who are at risk of falling access to coordinated, multidisciplinary care, as well as community support and social connection, with no cost to the participant,” Ms Carroll said.

“WBHHS is grateful to all of the partners who have made this collaborative venture possible and looks forward not only to the service continuing here, but expanding to Bundaberg early in the new year.”

The Lifestyle Cafe is supported by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.

The Fraser Coast Falls Prevention Service is a collaboration between Central Queensland Wide Bay Sunshine Coast PHN, Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service, Queensland Ambulance Service and Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre.

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For more information contact Jessica Barr, Director Communications and Corporate Affairs, Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service 0499 972 960 or WBHHS-Media@health.qld.gov.au