

## **In-home Workout - Fitness consultants help seniors maintain physical, emotional health**

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Putting her walker aside and using the kitchen sink for support, Mary Ann Origer walks the length of her kitchen counter, from the refrigerator to the oven, both forward and backward.

As she walks, wellness consultant Phil Booth acts as a spotter, making sure Origer doesn't fall.

"Compared to what I do the rest of the time, this is really quite vigorous," Origer says as she takes a break for water.

Twice a week for more than six years, Booth has met Origer at her north Boulder home and led her in a 45-minute exercise routine. Today they're focusing on lower body strength.

"I'm so glad he comes here because you know darn well I wouldn't do this on my own," Origer says between leg lifts. It's her 76th birthday, and a dozen roses fill a vase in the family room.

"I never think about age," Origer tells Booth. "I don't feel any different, mentally, than when I was in my 20s. Physically, though, it's a bit different."

"We'll be sure to get you limbered up so you can go out and party tonight," Booth says. The two have a chuckle and then get back to work. Seven years ago, Booth and his wife, Kylie Gertge, founded Seniors Aging Gracefully with Exercise (SAGE), a custom-tailored, one-on-one functional fitness program for Boulder County seniors. They call their company Senior Wellness Consultants Inc. and run it out of the basement of their Longmont home. The goal is to improve each client's independence, functioning, safety and mobility by meeting seniors in their own environment and keeping them active through exercise and conversation. Each exercise program is designed specifically for the client. The conversation comes as a secondary benefit.

"We'll help them train for the Bolder Boulder or help them practice getting out of bed in the morning. We want them to maintain a quality of life. That's the bottom line," Booth says.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 60 percent of older adults are inactive. However, that's not necessarily by choice. A survey published by Home Instead Senior Care, a senior fitness association with more than 500 franchises worldwide and six in the Front Range, shows that seniors enjoy a variety of activities. Included on a list of top-10 activities are walking and social functions at church and senior centers.

The problem, reports the CDC, is barriers that keep elderly people from exercising. Lack of confidence in their ability to be active, fear of being injured again and lack of encouragement, support or companionship from friends and family are cited as some of the top reasons for the decline in activity.

SAGE's clients range in age from 59 to 102. The company has 65 clients, and they are visited two to five times a week by Booth, Gertge or one of SAGE's seven trainers for a one-on-one exercise session. Some work with exercise balls and weights. Others, like Origer, use their normal surroundings, such as the kitchen sink, Lay-Z-Boy chair or stairs as "exercise equipment."

The idea, Booth explains, is to help delay physical decline and ultimately allow seniors to stay independent longer.

"People see it as a luxury, but it's really preventative health care," says Booth. "I tell people it's an investment. If mom or dad can stay independent, healthy and mobile, that's going to cost less in the long run."

Each session with a SAGE trainer costs between \$45 and \$55. The program is not covered by insurance.

Booth, 33, a recreational therapist and native of New Zealand, and Gertge, 36, an occupational therapist, say they started the company as a response to a need they believed was not being met by the U.S. senior health care system.

"If you've injured yourself, there's good rehab under Medicare," Booth says. "But once you've recovered, Medicare cuts you off." The purpose of SAGE, he explains, is to pick up where Medicare leaves off, by either maintaining post-rehabilitation activity levels or preventing injury in the first place.

Home Instead Senior Care has a similar mission.

"(Seniors) come home from the hospital after an injury, like breaking their hip, and they try to protect themselves. They're afraid they're going to fall again," says Dean Price, owner and director of the Boulder and Broomfield County branch.

"It's about isolation. When you're older, you get into this spiral where reading the newspaper and remembering to take your pills are the activity for the day. What we try to do is provide a stimulus for these folks who are often overlooked."

Caregivers with Home Instead take senior clients grocery shopping, help them bathe, or accompany them to church. The goal is to help them accomplish the day-to-day activities so they can remain at home and stay independent

Both SAGE and Home Instead are unique in that they also focus on the social aspects of a client's well-being. As Booth and Gertge explain, many seniors experience grief over many age-related losses: the death of a spouse, the inability to drive or the decline of physical, sensory and cognitive abilities. The programs are designed to help clients cope by providing emotional support and being an advocate for services.

"We play a wonderful role in that we get to be intimate with the clients," Booth says. "They can talk to us about things they wouldn't talk with their children about. It's cathartic for them."

Gertge says consultants form close relationships with the seniors' families. "They look to us to be advocates," Gertge says. "It involves the whole family unit." They stay in close contact with the family members, alerting them to changes, positive or negative, in the client's behaviors and abilities.

"I think the conversation is as important as the physical part," says Origer of her SAGE sessions. She and Booth have become good friends during the six years they've been working together, she says. For the first 20 minutes Booth is in Origer's house, they

catch up on each other`s lives, inquiring about children, talking about the dogs and discussing politics. More than anything, they do a lot of laughing.

"We do a lot of joy exercises," Booth jokes. "We work on our lung capacity by giggling with each other."

#### INFORMATION

Senior Wellness Consultants, Inc. offers free in-home assessments. For more information about SAGE call (303) 772-7568.