

# Celebrating Healthy Active Lives

ALCOA Members – Making a Difference for Older Adults



# Active Living Coalition for Older Adults **UPDATE**



A Note from the  
Executive Director

## ***Socializing and Exercising – A Great Mix***

Summer is fast approaching, and the warm weather gives us a great opportunity to enjoy the outdoors. One of ALCOA members, Tracy Ralph, recently became certified to teach Urban Pole walking and has written an article on the benefits of this activity. Urban Pole walking has become a very popular trend in Canada. It provides stability, balance and burns more calories than walking.

Your members can also dance away their worries with 'Zumba' classes and "Socialcise". The benefits of these programs far exceed the physical component. The Socialcise class was designed for marginalized seniors and it also helps to stimulate the participants cognitively, emotionally and socially.

Two of ALCOA Round table members have programs that may be of interest to your members. The VON Canada SMART program (Seniors' Maintaining Active Roles Together)<sup>®</sup> is an exciting seniors' exercise outreach program. The Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation, has recently launched 'Ortho Connect', a volunteer peer support program which enables patients to learn, understand, and become comfortable with their upcoming surgery.

I'm sure you will find something of interest to you and please share these programs and ideas with your colleagues and members.

Wishing you a safe summer full of activity and fun.

Patty Clark  
ALCOA National Executive Director

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# Exercise Helps Marginalized Seniors

**M**arginalized seniors are coping with poverty, mental illness, language barriers, isolation and addiction. Group exercise classes may not be the primary solution however regular group exercise classes can help make marginalized seniors stronger and better able to cope.

Vintage Fitness, a Toronto-based company that specializes in energizing the lives of people over 50 with exercise, has been teaching group exercise and wellness workshops to marginalized seniors in Toronto with amazing results. The classes started four years ago in Parkdale with a generous donation by a client's relative to a not for profit agency called LOFT community services. The group met weekly for a 45 minute class that focused on strengthening and stretching.

"I quickly realized how important the classes had become to the participants" said Vintage Fitness founder, Erin Billowits. "The group looked forward to the class all morning and talked about how important the social part of the program was to them". This strong bond combined with how the exercises made them feel encouraged LOFT community services to expand the exercise program to their downtown facility.

The expanded program, called 'Socialcise', was started in the fall of 2008 and included three exercise classes every week with time to connect and socialize included with the class. The planning and organization of the classes was a great partnership between LOFT community services, Vintage Fitness, the tenants association of the building (423 Yonge Street) and Toronto Housing. Regular fitness assessments were done using the Seniors Fitness Test to track the progress of the group. Within the first year of the program, the participants increased their leg strength by 15%, arm



strength by 18%, doubled their cardiovascular endurance, increased the flexibility in their hamstrings and shoulders and improved their agility by 16%. Strong social ties were formed and the group grew to an average of 26 people attending the class.

The program has evolved in the last year keeping exercise as the pillar of the program and starting to develop leadership skills of the group by inviting participants to plan and organize the sessions and including community agencies such as Women's College Hospital, Community Outreach Programs in Addictions (COPA), Heart and Stroke Foundation (Ontario Chapter) to present workshops.

The success of 'Socialcise' encouraged COPA, which is a community organization providing holistic, innovative and non-judgmental addictions, concurrent disorders and problem gambling service to older persons, to run a weekly exercise class in Parkdale. The classes included education on topics such as fall prevention, nutrition, heart healthy lifestyle choices and managing addiction. Carly Murdock, the Vintage Fitness instructor explains that "the class means a lot to each member. It is a wonderful group who come out every single Monday, no matter what, and leave

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# ZUMBA GOLD FITNESS

With the ever changing face of the mature adult population and their diverse interests we are always in the search for relevant engaging programming. In the Spring of 2008 the Centres for Seniors Windsor offered the Zumba Gold fitness program as a sampler to gauge interest. At this time we discovered a keen interest and involvement which lead to a demand that it begin as a regularly scheduled weekly program.

The Zumba program began by accident in the mid-nineties in Colombia by an aerobic instructor. This is a Latin-inspired dance-fitness program in an energetic party setting that has a contagious energy.

Zumba was originally aimed at the baby boomers that had become members, but its feel-good energy seems to attract our members of all ages. The music is usually zesty Latin rhythms like salsa or meringue with modified moves and a pace suitable to the active older adult. Variations or modifications can be made for those beginning at different fitness levels and some begin in the chair. This program has inspired a new excitement for fitness and an interest in adding other forms of exercise into their weekly schedule. We offer Zumba once a week at both of our locations in a one hour time slot, however the demand is there for a second class per week if space allowed. We've found that the desired length of class is 45 minutes, but the extra time allows participants and the instructor to ask questions, practice movements and socialize with new friends. When participants enter the room the music is playing and the mood is set.

Early feed back was positive and reports of increased mobility, flexibility as well as other emotional and social benefits from the camaraderie in the classes were all noted. This program continues today and has prompted the addition of other programs like Latin Cardio and Pilates to our weekly offerings. The connection of mind, body and soul can't be overlooked as we evaluate the benefits of a fitness regime in any lifestyle.

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# The healing power of communication

## Orthopaedic patients find relief with peer support program

If you or a loved one has recently been faced with an upcoming orthopaedic surgery, you know all too well it is a time of stress, anxiety, fear and confusion.

Patients and their families face doubt and questions about upcoming surgical treatments. So where do they turn for guidance? Who can they depend on to offer a real world view of what to expect? In many cases, speaking with someone who has been through the same experience can provide needed support.

Orthopaedic patients have come to rely on and benefit from the power of communication delivered through the Ortho Connect peer support program available at [www.orthoconnect.org](http://www.orthoconnect.org). Operated by the Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation, Ortho Connect volunteers help patients to feel confident and informed through providing an experienced, understanding ear and encouragement when waiting for surgery and throughout rehabilitation.

“Ortho Connect enables patients to learn, understand, and become comfortable with their upcoming surgery, and as surgeons, we see that people who take part in decisions about their health care are more likely to have better outcomes,” says Dr. James Waddell, orthopaedic surgeon at St. Michael’s Hospital in Toronto, and Board Chair of the Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation. “A live voice or online peer who understands just what you’re going through provides immeasurable comfort – and a personal view of what to expect and how to get ready for your return to mobility.”



For more information on the Ortho Connect peer support program and bone and joint health, visit [www.orthoconnect.org](http://www.orthoconnect.org) or call **1-800-461-3639**.

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feeling great. This group needs this class for more than just physical activity. It helps stimulate them cognitively, emotionally and socially which makes it so wonderful. They are a dedicated, motivating, inspiring group of people!”

After four years of working with seniors in Toronto, Erin Billowits, has seen group exercise programs transform the lives of marginalized seniors by strengthening their bodies, minds and improving their feeling of inclusion and self worth. This transformation is best described in the words of a participant of the downtown LOFT community services program; “the only other thing that I have ever completed is a cigarette...this is the first good thing that I have ever finished”

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# The VON Canada SMART (Seniors' Maintaining Active Roles Together)<sup>®</sup>



The SMART Program is an exciting seniors' exercise outreach program developed by the VON (Victorian Order of Nurses) in 2002. It is available in nineteen regions across Canada, and growing. The VON SMART Program assists seniors to become and stay functionally fit – in other words, able to take care of personal, household, social and daily living needs. The goal of the program is for participants to improve their strength, flexibility and balance so that they can maintain their independence and quality of life, and remain living in their own homes. Exercises are offered in both a group setting and one-to-one

in a participant's home for those not able to attend a group session. VON volunteers, who are trained and supported by VON Canada staff, deliver the SMART services. The program's outcomes are a perfect fit with VON's vision: "Health Starts at Home" and SMART continues to expand nationally, with waiting lists in several communities.

The VON SMART Program specifically targets seniors who might otherwise not have the opportunity to participate because of barriers such as cost, limited transportation, chronic health conditions, or a lack of appropriate programs for their levels of ability. The program was developed to expand active living opportunities for seniors, not duplicate existing programs and services. The concept has gained popularity over the past several years, as older adults strive to maintain an independent, active lifestyle. "I think you have more get up and go, rather than get up and sit back down again!" commented one participant.

Conventional rehabilitation services such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy often begin after a health crisis. Unfortunately, once that active therapy cycle is complete, there is often a large gap between these rehabilitation interventions and community fitness programs. Many seniors then decline in functional fitness and risk losing their independence. The VON SMART Program was designed to fill that gap and keep people on the road to recovery and independent living.

The local VON Peterborough site has SMART Group programs throughout Peterborough and Haliburton counties, as well as volunteers providing one-to-one in-home exercise visits. Ann Wylie is a SMART Group program participant who joined in May 2008. She belongs to a group of 25 enthusiastic participants who are benefiting from the gentle, multi-level program at St. John's Anglican Church in Ida, a tiny community just west



of Peterborough. Ann looks forward to Thursdays and her attendance at the VON SMART class.

About a year ago, Ann was involved in a vehicle accident that left her seriously injured. This was a difficult time in so many ways and, at 72 years, Ann is still on the journey to recovery. Ann states that her loyal attendance in the SMART class prior to the accident helped her to recover – that she was stronger and more resilient due to her participation. Ann commented, "I don't know what I would have done without SMART". She feels that her SMART class is an integral piece of the circle of care that is serving her health care needs. Ann continues to faithfully attend class and feels that much of its success is due to how the volunteer leaders present the program in a fun and meaningful way by connecting the exercises to the activities of daily living. One example is when the leaders say "you could do this on other days of the week by holding onto your kitchen counter". She states the classes are interesting and challenge each person on an individual basis. Ann also appreciates how the volunteers encourage and help her to build confidence, and fill her with a positive attitude. She leaves feeling energized, which lasts all day.

Ida's SMART class is led by five caring, competent and dedicated volunteers. Ann notes that the volunteers help create a positive environment that is supportive of everyone. She states, "everyone is very understanding—if we have to sit down to exercise—that is just fine". Ann goes on to say that "people pass by and give us a pat on the shoulder as if to say that's okay. It's like we are striving for the same goal and getting there in our own way and we feel good about ourselves". Ann continues to exercise with her Ida SMART group and comments that she wishes it was available twice weekly.

VON Canada is a national health care organization and registered charity offering a wide range of community health care programs and services, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. VON was founded in 1897 and now has 52 sites that deliver community health care solutions in communities across Canada.

For more information on the SMART program, please contact:

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# Why just walk... when you can Urban Pole walk



Urban Poling was developed in Canada, by Mandy Shintami, an Occupational Therapist living in British Columbia. The idea originated from the Nordic countries where it is called Nordic Pole walking. Urban Pole walking combines an upper body technique similar to cross country skiing with the lower body technique of regular walking.

It is a non-intimidating way to get inactive people moving and can be performed by people of all ages and almost all fitness levels. It can improve balance, gait pattern and confidence of walking. There are biomechanical benefits as well as stability and balance benefits. Pole walking reduces stress on the hips and the knees when compared to running. Research shows that pole walkers burn 20 – 46% more calories, as 90% of the bodies muscles are being engaged. Using poles diminished neck and shoulder symptoms in office workers and increased mobility of the upper body. Studies have also shown improvement of mood and reduction of fatigue in subjects who walked with poles verses those who did not. Those who had Parkinson's disease had significant improvements in exercise tolerance, perceived functional independence, and quality of life. Breast cancer survivors also showed improved muscular endurance of their upper body.

Mandy Shintami and Tom Rutlin (the creator of the Exerstrider walking poles) modified several features on the Urban Pole and created the Activator Poles which are designed for a walking technique for an older adult who requires secure stability.

The Activator Poles are excellent for those older adults who are post rehab and need to gain and maintain ADL's (Activities of Daily Living). Individuals who use walkers, lose the strength in their core area due to poor or stooped posture, and gait pattern. Using the Activator poles engages the core muscles and many other muscle groups. The individual becomes stronger, with improved self efficacy, mental well-being and self confidence with regard to going for a walk outside and maintaining the activities of daily living.

A great program you can start at your own facility. For more information on becoming certified or to find Urban Pole or Activator classes in your area, check the website at [www.urbanpoling.com](http://www.urbanpoling.com).

*Happy Poling!*

Tracy Ralph, FHP dip.  
Urban Pole certified