

## *Replication Report*



# **A Matter of Balance Volunteer Lay Leader Model**

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**Partnership for Healthy Aging** (PFHA) is a collaborative enterprise established by MaineHealth, an integrated, not-for-profit, health care delivery system serving southern, central and western Maine. PFHA seeks to build a bridge between clinicians, evidence-based programs, and vast array of community services that serve the older adult population. A key goal is to support older adults to more actively participate in the self-management of their health care.

The partners in the translation of *A Matter of Balance* into a program staffed by lay leaders have included the Southern Maine Agency on Aging; MaineHealth's Partnership for Healthy Aging; Maine Medical Center Division of Geriatrics; and University of Southern Maine, School of Social Work.

This effort was guided by a Project Advisory Committee comprised of *A Matter of Balance* participant and a volunteer lay leader, as well as representatives from AARP Maine, City of Portland Office of Elder Affairs, Maine Office of Elder Services, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Maine Nutrition Network, Maine State Housing Authority, New England Rehabilitation Hospital, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, and the University of New England Geriatric Education Center.



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# **A Matter of Balance/Volunteer Lay Leader (VLL) Replication Report**

## **I. Introduction/Background /Executive Summary**

### **Falls: A Serious Problem for Older Adults**

Falls are a major cause of injury and death for older adults, and the leading cause of injury hospitalization in Maine (Healthy Maine 2010). In 2000, the CDC estimated the total medical cost of all fall injuries for people age 65+ to be \$19.5 billion (CDC, 2005). In addition, 1/3 to 1/2 of older adults acknowledge fear of falling, which is associated with depression, decreased mobility and social activity, increased frailty, and increased risk for falls as a result of deconditioning.<sup>1</sup>

Falls in older adults are common, dangerous, predictable, and preventable, so interventions that help older adults learn more about and minimize fall risks are important for maintaining independence.

### **Choosing “A Matter of Balance”**

Due to the complex nature of a fall event, there are no easy solutions. The good news is there are effective interventions to reduce falls among older adults. These programs do, however, require a multidisciplinary approach to the problem. Accordingly, in 1999, a variety of key providers in Maine representing diverse fields—including health care, social services and education—joined together in a multi-disciplinary effort to address this health issue in the state.

The Partnership for Healthy Aging (PFHA), initiated this collaboration by bringing an innovative fall prevention program to Maine called A Matter of Balance. PFHA is a non-profit organization—established by MaineHealth, Maine Medical Center, Community Health Services, and Southern Maine Agency on Aging—to offer older adults and their families a comprehensive resource for health promotion, wellness, social services, family caregiver support and service integration. A Matter of Balance had been created by the Roybal Center in Applied Gerontology at Boston University (BU) and the New England Research Institutes (NERI) with funding from the National Institute on Aging (NIA). It employs a professionally led (most frequently a nurse or PT), group-based fall prevention program model. PFHA invited staff from the Roybal Center to train health care professionals from Maine Medical Center and Community Health Services to deliver this program.

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<sup>1</sup> Lach, H., 2003, Fear of falling: An emerging public health problem”, *Generations*, VXXVI, 4, pp. 33-38.;  
Perterson, E. et al, 2003, Resources for fall prevention and management of fear of falling:, *Generations*, VXXVI, 4,  
pp 89-92; Friedman, SM, et al, 2002, Falls and fear of falling: which comes first:”, *Journal of the American  
Geriatric Society*, 50 (8): 1329-35.

### ***A Matter of Balance: A Short Description***

A Matter of Balance is a program specifically designed to reduce fear of falling, stop the fear of falling cycle, and increase activity levels among community-dwelling older adults (physical inactivity is cited as a significant risk for falls and fall-related injuries in older adults). As described by the Roybal Center, “[A Matter of Balance] is a comprehensive approach to maximizing activity engagement and function and reducing fall risks.” (Tennstedt, S., et al, 1998).

The original program is designed for small groups of older adults living independently in community settings or senior housing. A trained (health care professional) facilitator conducts the classes using an extensively detailed training manual and two instruction videos. The program focuses on practical coping strategies to reduce both the fear of falling and the risk of falling. A variety of activities address physical, social, and cognitive factors affecting fear of falling.

Early sessions focus on changing attitudes and self-efficacy before attempting changes in actual behavior. Later sessions introduce exercises to improve balance and strength. Strategies to reduce the fear of falling include:

- Promoting a view of falls and fear of falling as controllable;
- Setting realistic goals for increasing activity;
- Changing the environment to reduce fall risk factors; and
- Promoting exercise to increase strength and balance. (Tennstedt, S., et al, 1998).

### **Adapting A Matter of Balance for Lay Leaders**

Following the initial effort to employ A Matter of Balance in Maine, PFHA sought to make it more broadly available. To this end, Maine’s Office of Elder Services and the Bureau of Health, for whom falls are a major concern, partnered with PFHA. These state agencies worked with PFHA to disseminate the program to older adults in the service areas of three Area Agencies on Aging (AAA)—Seniors Plus, Eastern Area Agency on Aging (EAA), and Aroostook Agency on Aging (AAAA). Through this effort, we piloted training AAA outreach staff to offer the program in collaboration with community health providers. While very well received and less expensive than the professionally led model, the AAA budgets still could not sustain this model on an on-going basis.

To make A Matter of Balance even more accessible, PFHA then adapted the program further, while remaining true to the model itself, so it can be taught by volunteer lay leaders whom we refer to as coaches. In particular:

- We developed a participant workbook.
- We developed the volunteer lay leader coaching curriculum and training.
- We developed the volunteer lay leader manual and modified some exercises to make them safe for older adults with joint replacements and/or osteoporosis

- We developed a Guest Therapist handbook and have added a connection to health care providers via a guest therapist who attends one class to address concerns around assistive devices, how to get up from a fall, and other clinical issues.
- We developed a Master Trainer curriculum and training.

This report describes our work on this adapted program, which we call A Matter of Balance/Volunteer Lay Leader (A Matter of Balance/VLL). Our innovations further reduced the cost of the intervention, allowing the program to be offered more frequently in a variety of settings and reaching a significantly higher number of older adults than would otherwise be possible.

To make this adaptation possible, PFHA collaborated with Southern Maine Agency on Aging (SMAA), Maine Medical Center's Division of Geriatrics, and the University of Southern Maine School of Social Work to apply for an Administration on Aging (AoA) three-year demonstration grant. This AoA request for proposals sought public/private partnerships to increase access for older people to programs that have proven to be effective in reducing the risk of disease, injury, and disability. A Matter of Balance was a good fit and received funding in 2004.

### **A Matter of Balance: A Strong Base of Evidence, Strong Benefits**

Originally, PFHA and its partners selected A Matter of Balance because of its solid research base conducted in a community setting with older adults experiencing fear of falling. It also had a number of other benefits. For example:

- The program was offered in a group format, offering the potential to reach large numbers of community-dwelling older adults.
- Major fall risk factors previously identified in the research literature are addressed throughout the class sessions.
- The curriculum developed by the researchers provided a clear guide to teaching the class, and the combination of its comprehensiveness and the training offered by the Roybal Center provided solid fundamentals for replication.

In general, we recommend an evidence-based health promotion approach to programming. This strategy employs a thoughtful process of planning, implementing, and evaluating programs adapted from *tested* models or interventions. Evidence-based programs enhance an agency's ability to use common health indicators and match tested health programs to recognized community needs. Evidence-based programs make it easier to defend or expand health promotion programs, increase the effective use of resources, provide hard data to advocate for new programs, and generate new knowledge about "what works" and "how to do it" that can help others.

For additional information on the concept of evidence-based health promotion and other programs that may be appropriate for your community, please go to:

[http://www.healthyagingprograms.org/resources/IssueBrief\\_1-R\\_UsingEB.pdf](http://www.healthyagingprograms.org/resources/IssueBrief_1-R_UsingEB.pdf)

### **PFHA: A Multi-disciplinary Partnership**

As noted above, the PFHA partnership, which has been responsible for Matter of Balance/VLL, is multi-disciplinary based upon the need for expertise in many areas to address the risk factors for falls. Our partners also reflect our goals of developing a statewide dissemination process, of reaching older adults from diverse socioeconomic groups, and our need to guide the evaluation of and revisions to the original A Matter of Balance model, which used health care professionals as facilitators.

The partners in the translation of A Matter of Balance into a program staffed by lay leaders have included the Southern Maine Agency on Aging, MaineHealth's Partnership for Healthy Aging, Maine Medical Center Division of Geriatrics, and University of Southern Maine, School of Social Work.

This group is guided by a Project Advisory Committee comprised of A Matter of Balance participant and a volunteer lay leader, as well as representatives from AARP Maine, City of Portland Office of Elder Affairs, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Maine Nutrition Network, Maine Office of Elder Services, Maine State Housing Authority, New England Rehabilitation Hospital, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, and the University of New England, Geriatric Education Center.

The community connections of this diverse group of organizations have helped us to disseminate the volunteer lay leader model across the state of Maine. By the summer of 2006, we had trained twenty four Master Trainer sites including all of the state's Agencies on Aging; regional hospitals; Healthy Maine Partnerships (community coalitions); and YMCAs. (For a fuller description of the role of Master Trainer Sites and Master Trainers, please see page X)

### **The Many Benefits of A Matter of Balance/VLL**

A Matter of Balance/VLL offers participating organizations an opportunity to bring an evidence-based fall prevention program to your community. In our experience, it has created new collaborations or built upon current partnerships within the community. A Matter of Balance/VLL can also enhance your agency's image among a variety of stakeholders, increase organizational visibility generally, and provide the opportunity to attract new volunteers. Importantly, A Matter of Balance/VLL has critical benefits for the older adults who participate, as well as the lay leaders who play a pivotal role in running the program.

#### ***Benefits for Older Adults and Lay Leaders***

A Matter of Balance/VLL helps the older adults who participate in several ways. Evaluations conducted just six weeks after classes end demonstrate that participants build their confidence to manage the risk of falls. They self-report increased confidence in managing falls by increasing physical strength, becoming more steady, and finding a way to get up if a fall occurs (fall management). They report an increased level of confidence about performing everyday activities such as going up and down stairs, reaching into cabinets or closets, and carrying bundles from the store (falls efficacy). They come to believe they can prevent falls and overcome their fear of falling (fall

control). They increase their level of regular exercise and their social activity. And, we have found through subsequent studies, older adults maintain improvements related to confidence managing and controlling falls as well as engaging in everyday activities without falling and increased exercise level six months after finishing MOB/VLL and even a year after they finishing the class, participants reported maintaining a significant level of confidence in managing falls and revealed a trend towards increased exercise levels. Moreover, participants reported a reduction in monthly falls experienced at 6 and 12 months after completing the classes.

The volunteer lay leaders who facilitate the program report a sense of confidence about teaching A Matter of Balance/VLL and find it a rewarding experience. They are especially enthusiastic about seeing older adults gain more independence. In a follow-up survey, these leaders indicated that they gained a sense of accomplishment (80%), found their purpose in life had increased (48%), felt they could make a positive difference in another person's life (76%), and increased their own confidence about managing falls (84%).

Based on our extensive experience with this program, we believe A Matter of Balance/VLL is a safe, effective, and cost-effective fall prevention program that can benefit older adults in communities around the country.

## II. Planning and Partners

### Getting Started

As described in the first section, falls are a leading cause of injury hospitalization and death both nationally and in the state of Maine. In addition, fear of falling leads to increased isolation and depression creating a downward spiral for older adults. However, falls can be prevented and fear of falling can be addressed by community level interventions. A Matter of Balance/VLL, in particular, provides a mechanism to address these concerns, and the volunteer lay leader model described here can allow you to make the intervention available to a broad range of people in diverse community settings.

If you are interested in considering A Matter of Balance/VLL (or indeed any evidence-based fall prevention program), we recommend you start by looking for relevant community or statewide data on falls, perhaps opening a dialogue with your state health department or statewide organizations to identify what data are available for use in your planning efforts.

As with developing any health promotion or disease prevention program, it is important to also take the time to understand your local older adult community. You can review the epidemiological data and other available state and local data on community residing older adults to identify health issues, functional disabilities, or risk factors that might be addressed through a fall prevention program. You'll want to learn about older adults' income levels, educational attainment, culture and ethnicity, geographic considerations, and service access. If possible, you will want to look at data that relates these characteristics to fall risk factors.

Once these issues are identified and your target population defined, it is then helpful to scan the environment to locate what resources are already available to address falls and what service gaps exist. This scan may also identify potential partners, funding sources, and existing collaborations that can be leveraged in your work.

### Data and Planning

Using the data and feedback from your environmental scan, as well as dialogue with any current partners, you can identify and recruit additional partners interested in fall prevention. If you are working at the state level, you may investigate collaborations with the Department on Aging, Department of Health, and state associations related to aging or health. If you are working more locally, possible partners may include community health partnerships, senior centers, senior housing sites, libraries, faith based communities, and adult education or senior college locations.

To be most effective, be sure to include older adults in your planning activities and as partners in this effort. Partners, including older adults, can further assess the relevant data. Ultimately, your planning group should come to consensus on a set of clear goals and objectives for your common work. In collaboration, the partners can then select among various program options, (hopefully A Matter of Balance/VLL!), agree upon

expected outcomes, and get clear on the contributions and roles of each partner. Any intervention chosen should be appropriate for the target population, particularly ensuring that it is sensitive to participants' cultural characteristics, history, values, and belief systems.

### **More Resources on Partnerships**

A variety of resources are available to help you organize and sustain effective partnerships that will promote this work. We refer you to the Center for Healthy Aging Web site [www.healthyagingprograms.org](http://www.healthyagingprograms.org) for a listing of resources including:

- *Partnering to Promote Healthy Aging: Creative Best Practice Community Partnerships* which may be found at:  
[http://www.healthyagingprograms.com/resources/HA\\_CommunityPartnerships.pdf](http://www.healthyagingprograms.com/resources/HA_CommunityPartnerships.pdf)
- *MD Link: Partnering Physicians with Community Organizations*  
[http://www.healthyagingprograms.org/resources/MDLink\\_PartnerPhysicians.pdf](http://www.healthyagingprograms.org/resources/MDLink_PartnerPhysicians.pdf)

### **III. Adoption – Recruiting Implementation Sites and Staff/Volunteers**

#### **Finding Master Trainer Sites with a Request for Partners Process**

After developing a clear consensus on using A Matter of Balance/VLL, PFHA and its partners moved to find sites that could successfully implement and potentially sustain the program. We used a request for partners (RFP) process to identify qualified organizations that wished to become what we called Master Trainer sites. These sites in turn are tasked to train and support the volunteer lay leaders who facilitate A Matter of Balance/VLL classes.

We distributed the RFP widely throughout the state to AAAs, YMCAs, community hospitals, Healthy Maine Partnership Communities, and others. The RFP required potential Master Trainer sites to address the core components of the A Matter of Balance/VLL model and identify which community groups were available to assist with implementation. A copy of the RFP is attached in Section VIII at the end of this report.

Once prepared, Master Trainer sites are responsible for recruiting volunteer lay leaders, teaching the curriculum to volunteer lay leaders, providing guidance and support, sponsoring classes, recruiting participants, and measuring outcomes. In short, they coordinate the community offering of A Matter of Balance/VLL. Master Trainer sites should have:

- Capacity and experience recruiting, training, and supporting volunteer lay leaders;
- Experience offering programming for older adults;
- The ability to recruit older adult participants;
- The capacity to observe and evaluate volunteer lay leaders; and
- Access to barrier-free locations for classes in a private setting.

In Maine, Master Trainers meet each other during their training session, then are involved in regular conference calls to share ideas and problem-solve. E-mails and phone calls also help to share information and provide support. A tool to assist with assessing site responsibilities and coordinating the class offering is included in the Master Trainer manual.

Critical factors to consider when identifying a Master Training site are accessibility, parking and/or transportation, a private room appropriate for a class of 10 –12 people that is consistently available, and visibility in the older adult community.

#### **Using Community Partners to Support Master Trainer Sites**

In our experience, community partners can enhance the effectiveness of the Master Trainer site. For example, a health care partner may provide a visiting therapist to fulfill some of the program's requirements. Or a senior housing site may have a resident service coordinator who can provide a location for the class, help recruit participants, and offer refreshments for the class.

In general, the community partner organizations responsible for hosting the Master Trainer sites can help bring together the key components necessary to implement A Matter of Balance. In our experience, they have been particularly helpful in recruiting both volunteer lay leaders and program participants. Examples of partners who came forward in Maine and who may be appropriate in your state and/or community include: Agencies on Aging, regional hospitals, existing community health partnerships, public health agencies, YMCAs, senior centers, retirement communities, senior housing sites, and Retired and Senior Volunteer Programs.

### **Master Trainer Training**

The Master Trainer sites learn the following in their training:

- The A Matter of Balance/VLL curriculum;
- How to recruit, train and retain volunteer lay leaders, who are ultimately responsible for offering A Matter of Balance/VLL;
- How to select sites for A Matter of Balance/VLL;
- How to recruit participants and offer classes; and
- How to measure outcomes.

We provide Master Trainer sites with all the materials they need to teach A Matter of Balance/VLL, including the Volunteer Lay Leader Handbook, Participant Workbook, and Guest Therapist Handbook. We have also developed a variety of tools to assist with recruiting, training, and retaining lay leaders; selecting sites; recruiting participants; offering classes; and measuring outcomes. The participants' recruitment tools include a program overview presentation, brochure, sample press release, and list potential community partners to assist in reaching the target population. Please see Section VIII for a complete list of these tools. In Maine, Master Trainer sites also receive ongoing training and support through regular phone calls and e-mails.

### **Ensuring Buy-In**

In our experience, the use of the RFP process ensures that most participating sites are motivated and able to take on A Matter of Balance/VLL. Sites' reluctance to enter energetically into A Matter of Balance/VLL occurs primarily when seed funding isn't available to support classes, or site leaders are faced with competing priorities and limited resources.

## **IV. Reach – Outreach: Recruiting Participants**

A Matter of Balance/VLL is designed to benefit community-dwelling older adults who:

- Are concerned about falls;
- Have sustained a fall in the past;
- Restrict activities because of concerns about falling; or
- Are interested in improving flexibility, balance and strength.

Participants should be aged 60 or older, ambulatory, and able to problem-solve. Older adults who are physically active may find the curriculum to be less active and informative than they need. Since A Matter of Balance/VLL is a structured small group intervention, the ideal class size is 8-12 people. Of course, the number of people who can participate will depend on the broader capacity of your program, the number of volunteer lay leaders available, etc.

### **Recruitment Strategies**

A variety of tactics can be used to recruit and retain participants. Successful strategies we have used to attract Matter of Balance/VLL participants include:

- Community organizations'/partner newsletters
- Exhibits at senior events
- Brochures
- Community newspapers
- Press releases
- Outreach presentations to:
  - Aging service providers
  - Community centers & faith-based organizations
  - Clubs, libraries, social gatherings
  - Physician practices
  - Housing coordinators

In addition to these, one particularly successful approach has been providing a “preview” for A Matter of Balance/VLL. This brief gathering of interested individuals at a convenient community location provides an opportunity to share information about fall prevention and describe the A Matter of Balance/VLL class. The focus is on the good news that many falls can be prevented and that there are strategies to reduce fall risk factors. The preview clarifies the class content so that potential participants are aware that A Matter of Balance/VLL includes group problem solving, strategies, and exercises.

Section VIII includes sample press releases for volunteer lay leaders and participant recruitment, a sample class flyer, and tips for volunteer lay leader recruitment and retention.

### **Creating a Plan**

In developing a recruitment plan for A Matter of Balance/VLL or any health promotion/disease prevention program, it is important to keep the target population clearly in mind. You may already have effective recruitment strategies in place for other similar programs, but it may be helpful to identify potential participants for A Matter of Balance/VLL and have them inform your recruitment strategy development, as well.

For example, it is often helpful to understand potential participants' culture and background. Where are these participants located and how do they access program information? Are there community champions who could help you spread the word? Your partners may also bring a wealth of ideas for effective recruitment. Finally, it is important to set realistic recruitment goals and periodically assess your progress.

### **Stages of Change: Overcoming Common Recruitment Barriers**

Evidence-based health promotion programs like A Matter of Balance/VLL are designed to help participants make informed decisions about their health and support appropriate behavior change. The failure of participants to make appropriate behavior changes or to even participate in programming is often ascribed to a lack of motivation. The Stages of Change model<sup>2</sup> offers us a way of understanding participant readiness to make change, appreciating barriers to change, and helping older adults anticipate relapses.

The Stages of Change model shows that, for most persons, behavior change occurs slowly. Regardless of age, an individual goes through a variety of stages starting with being uninterested, unaware, or unwilling to make a change (**precontemplation**). He or she then begins considering whether a change is warranted (**contemplation**), before deciding and preparing to make a change (**preparation**). Ultimately, a person takes genuine, determined action and, over time, attempts to maintain the new behavior (**action**). Relapses are almost inevitable and become part of the process of working toward life-long change (**maintenance**). We suggest you learn more about this Stages of Change model and how it can be used to enhance your recruitment and retention of A Matter of Balance/VLL participants.

Effective recruitment and retention strategies take into consideration which stage potential participants may be in, as each stage requires a different approach. By considering potential participants' readiness for A Matter of Balance/VLL, you can tailor your recruitment.

### **Our Experience: Successes and Challenges**

In Maine, A Matter of Balance/VLL has been effective recruiting participants in the contemplation and action stages. Extensive community outreach has enabled us to reach older adults with a consistent message delivered by organizations they know in the community. We have also made scholarships available, which has helped to recruit low-income participants.

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<sup>2</sup> Prochaska JO, DiClemente CC, Norcross JC. In search of how people change. *Am Psychol* 1992; 47:1102-4.

Our main recruitment challenges stem from a lack of awareness that falls are not a normal part of aging. We have also faced environmental issues related to transportation, weather, and A Matter of Balance/VLL accessibility. Money for transportation certainly helps; and in the winter, we try to offer classes in places where people already gather—for example, a senior housing site where a core group of participants reside. In terms of specific sub-populations, we have had difficulty reaching men and have relatively little experience recruiting people of color, particularly in urban settings, given the demographics we find throughout much of Maine.

## V. Implementation

### **A Matter of Balance/VLL: The Basics**

A Matter of Balance/VLL is specifically designed to reduce fear of falling, stop the fear of falling cycle, and improve activity levels among community-dwelling older adults. The program includes eight classes, each lasting two hours, presented over a four-week period by trained volunteer lay leaders, who act as facilitators and use an extensively detailed training manual and two instructional videos. The program focuses on practical coping strategies to reduce fear of falling and to diminish the risk of falling.

The curriculum includes lectures, group discussions, mutual problem solving, role-play activities, exercise training, assertiveness training, and home assignments. Participants learn about the importance of exercise in preventing falls; practice exercises to improve strength, build coordination and balance; learn to get up and down safely from a lower surface or ground, conduct a home safety evaluation; and discuss strategies and options to affect appropriate changes. Maximum class size is twelve (12).

Matter of Balance/VLL is presented to participants in a group format by a volunteer lay leader, augmented by a visiting therapist (OT or PT) to address specific issues and participant questions. Initially, the volunteer lay leader must undergo a structured training program and agree to routine observation by what we call a Master Trainer. At that time, volunteer lay leaders learn the curriculum, receive their volunteer lay leader manual and materials to assist with site scheduling and development.

The logistics of recruiting participants and setting up classes is managed by the Master Trainer, who also has access to teaching tools such as the required videos/DVDs, flip charts, etc. In Maine, Master Trainers are prepared for this training and oversight role through a two-day training and certification session offered by PFHA.

As noted in Section III, the Request for Partners (RFP) document describes the types of these and other logistical issues necessary for local planning. This resource and the other tools necessary to assist local host sites with offering the class are included in Section VIII of this report.

### **A Matter of Balance/VLL Curriculum**

A Matter of Balance acknowledges the risk of falling, but emphasizes practical coping strategies to reduce the effects of fear of falling. It is a structured group intervention consisting of weekly two-hour sessions, which utilize a variety of activities to address physical, social, and cognitive factors affecting the fear of falling. Early sessions focus on changing attitudes and self-efficacy before attempting changes in actual behavior.

During A Matter of Balance/VLL classes, participants learn to:

- View falls and fear of falling as controllable. Program processes are designed to change behavior with a focus on building fall self-efficacy (i.e., the belief that one can engage in an activity with out falling.);

- Set realistic goals for increasing activity. The goal is to instill adaptive beliefs such as greater perceived control, greater confidence in one's abilities, and a more realistic assessment of failures;
- Change their personal environment to reduce fall risk factors; and
- Engage in regular exercise to increase strength and balance.

Class activities include group discussion, problem-solving, role-play/ skill building, assertiveness training, exercise training, videotapes, and practical solutions.

A Matter of Balance/VLL benefits anyone who is concerned about falls; has sustained a fall in the past; restricts activities because of concerns about falling; or is interested in improving flexibility, balance, and strength. As noted above, we offer the program to men and women age 60 or older, who are ambulatory and able to problem-solve.

### **Maintaining Fidelity to A Matter of Balance/VLL**

Evidence-based programs are grounded in research. There are specific core components or constellations of components that are the essence of the program. To achieve the health outcomes ascribed to the program, these core components must be maintained in your implementation. This is termed "maintaining fidelity" to the model.

In order to implement A Matter of Balance/VLL in your community and better match the program to your target population, you may wish to alter some of the program's characteristics. However, before making changes, be sure you understand what adjustments can be made without affecting the core components of A Matter of Balance/VLL, and hence the outcomes you can expect for participants. The following discussion should help you understand what we see as the core elements of the A Matter of Balance/VLL program.

To ensure fidelity to our program, A Matter of Balance/VLL is based upon a scripted/detailed manual. The detailed curriculum helps to ensure that participants understand and demonstrate the behaviors during the course. Other key components in the program include classroom and home-based exercises to reinforce new behaviors in both settings. The course also includes the development of a participant action plan, which is critical to reinforcing the participant's enactment of the strategies learned.

To further promote fidelity to our model, the program's volunteer lay leaders receive a two-day training and then teach in teams, usually pairing experienced volunteer lay leaders with new ones. Master Trainers also observe lay leaders using a standardized observation tool.

In implementing and adapting A Matter of Balance/VLL, we believe you should try to follow our curriculum as closely as possible as the eight sessions build on each other. Early sessions focus on changing attitudes and self-efficacy before attempting changes in actual behavior. As you implement A Matter of Balance/VLL, therefore, it is possible to select activities from each session that are of particular interest to the group, but skipping sessions will undermine the program's ultimate impact.

### **A Matter of Balance/VLL: Is it Right for You?**

This program is a good fit with organizations working with community dwelling older adults, especially those with the ability to reach people who may be decreasing their activity and becoming more isolated. Agencies on Aging, regional hospitals, existing community health partnerships, YMCAs, senior centers, retirement communities, senior housing, and Retired and Senior Volunteer Programs often are in contact with these older adults. They already provide a range of programming and information. Assisted living or long-term care facilities are likely not good sites, as A Matter of Balance/VLL participants need to problem-solve and participate in cognitive restructuring activities.

### ***Getting Trained***

In order to implement A Matter of Balance/VLL, key staff from a community organization interested in the program must attend a Master Trainer session. It is recommended that organizations identify two staff members who will assume responsibility for the program. The session addresses core concepts such as fall risks and prevention and cognitive restructuring, implementation strategies, class logistics, the materials and how to use them, training strategies for volunteer lay leaders, the class curriculum, recruitment of lay leaders, participants and sites, and program evaluation. An agenda for this training is included in Section VIII.

### ***Critical Roles***

There are three important roles in the implementation of A Matter of Balance—the Lead Trainer, the Master Trainer and the Volunteer Lay Leader.

#### ***Lead Trainer***

A Lead Trainer is responsible for teaching the A Matter of Balance (MOB) curriculum to Master Trainers and providing them with guidance and support as they implement A Matter of Balance Volunteer Lay Leader Model in their communities.

Qualifications for Lead Trainer include a health care background or equivalent experience and an interest in working with older adults and knowledge about the special needs of older adults. Lead Trainers should have good communication and interpersonal skills along with good organizational skills and attention to detail. They should also have experience with group process and facilitation, teaching and leading group discussion and role-plays. They should have a willingness to learn about and support the principles and protocols of evidence-based programs. Lead Trainers should be dependable, enthusiastic about being a team member, and be able to use audiovisual equipment (TV/VCR, overhead projector). Finally, Lead Trainers must be able to perform A Matter of Balance's range-of-motion and low-level endurance exercises and be able to carry up to 20 lbs.

To become a Lead Trainer one must attend a two day Master Trainer session and earn A Matter of Balance Master Trainer Certification, conduct at least two Lay Leader Training sessions, and complete a Lead Trainer Certification Course that includes attending a Lead Trainer Session and teaching a Master Trainer session

under the supervision of Partnership for Healthy Aging (PFHA). Lead Trainers provide A Matter of Balance Master Trainers sessions with permission from PFHA. All requests for training shall be submitted to PFHA for registration and scheduling of Lead Trainers.

### *Master Trainer*

A Master Trainer is responsible for teaching the A Matter of Balance/VLL curriculum to volunteer lay leaders and providing them with guidance and support as they facilitate A Matter of Balance classes.

Qualifications for a Master Trainer include experience and interest in working with older adults and knowledge about the special needs of older adults. Master Trainers should have good communication and interpersonal skills. They should also have experience with group process and facilitation and be comfortable teaching and leading group discussion and role-plays. They should have a willingness to learn about and support the principles and protocols of evidence-based programs. Master Trainers should be dependable, enthusiastic about being a team member, and able to use audiovisual equipment (TV/VCR, overhead projector). Finally, Master Trainers must be able to perform A Matter of Balance's range-of-motion and low-level endurance exercises and be able to carry up to 20 lbs.

Master Trainers attend a two-day training session and earn A Matter of Balance/VLL Master Trainer Certification and participate in an annual update. Within three months time of their training, they must agree to provide training sessions for A Matter of Balance/VLL volunteer lay leaders and assess each leader's understanding, ability, and comfort with facilitating A Matter of Balance/VLL classes.

Master Trainers must also be available to answer questions, provide support, observe, and evaluate the volunteer lay leaders using the Coach Observation tool and process. Master Trainers encourage and collect feedback from volunteer lay leaders and collaborate with healthcare professionals to provide a therapist or healthcare professional visit to the A Matter of Balance/VLL class using the Guest Therapist Handbook as a resource. Master Trainers pair an experienced lay leader with a new leader whenever possible.

### *Volunteer Lay Leader*

The job description for A Matter of Balance/VLL volunteer lay leaders includes the following qualifications: good communication and interpersonal skills, enthusiasm, dependability, a willingness to lead a small group, and interest in working with older adults. Life experiences are valued with education or healthcare experience a plus. Volunteer lay leaders also need the ability to perform range of motion and low-level endurance exercises and carry up to 20

lbs. They complete eight hours of coach training to earn A Matter of Balance/VLL Certification and attend 2.5 hours of facilitator training updates annually. They also agree to facilitate two Matter of Balance/VLL classes within one year of certification.

Lay leaders prepare for each class by reviewing the A Matter of Balance/VLL manual and materials and organizing the classroom with supplies and refreshments. They present the class according to the directions, use the training and materials provided, and encourage interactive discussion about the concepts and skills presented. They demonstrate the exercises outlined in A Matter of Balance/VLL and monitor and connect with each participant to promote socialization and a solution-oriented environment.

### **Useful Implementation Tools**

A variety of tools are useful, in fact necessary, to implement A Matter of Balance/VLL. PFHA offers a full set of tools, available in the Master Trainer handbook, which partners and trainers can purchase at a Matter of Balance/VLL Master Training. Tools include:

- Sample Press Release for Coach Recruitment
- Coach Job Description, which outlines criteria for leadership, training expectations, classroom responsibilities, confidentiality, communication, and record keeping
- Coach Application, which collects coach demographic information, experience, areas of interest and availability
- Pledge of Confidentiality, through which coaches confirm that they will keep participant information confidential
- Tips for Coach Recruiting and Retention, which includes strategies for those who will be recruiting and supporting volunteers
- Sample Agenda for Coach Trainings, which is a detailed agenda for Master Trainers, along with class agenda for coaches
- Sample Homework, which includes A Matter of Balance session activities distributed at the end of the first session, provides an opportunity for new coaches to work with the materials and present an activity at the next training session
- Coach Observation Process, The purpose of the coaching skills observation is to support the coach and for both the coach and mentor to share ideas. It is also an opportunity to identify ways to strengthen the coach training process and to maintain the fidelity and quality of the A Matter of Balance Program.
- Coaching Skills Observation Form, which is used for coach observation with coach self-evaluation and mentor feedback
- Coach Certificates, which are awarded at the completion of the training session
- Coach Training Evaluation Form, which is used to collect coach feedback about the training and their confidence level to lead the class, answer participant questions, and teach the exercises.

See Section VIII for a full list of tools and resources.

## **VI. Maintenance**

In order to sustain A Matter of Balance/VLL, the sponsoring organization/partnership should plan to:

- Continue to recruit new sites, new volunteer lay leaders, and reach new participants;
- Maintain the partnerships that have already formed and/or seek new partners;
- Identify new potential sources of funding;
- Provide ongoing support and education for coaches through Volunteer Lay Leader Team Meetings, newsletters, e-mails, and phone calls;
- Provide feedback to coaches by sharing participant class evaluation results and survey outcomes; and
- Thank host sites, conduct satisfaction surveys to identify opportunities for improvement, and share class evaluation results with community partners.

Evaluation tools, a sample site thank you letter, and the satisfaction survey are all available in Section VIII.

In Maine, we conduct quarterly conference calls with Master Trainer sites to provide updates and an opportunity to share ideas and problem-solve. Currently, we compile the data from the first and last class survey and the participant class evaluations for the Master Trainer sites in Maine. We provide the results of these surveys to Master Trainer sites to share with their volunteer lay leaders. To support program maintenance further, we also have regularly scheduled Master Trainer sessions for new partners and provide an opportunity for current partners to expand capacity or replace staff.

## **VII. Effectiveness, performance measures and other outcomes**

Appropriate participant outcome and performance measures can assess whether or not the program is producing benefits for participants that are comparable to the tested intervention. This is critical as A Matter of Balance/VLL's positive outcomes generate interest in the program among public and private funders and other sponsoring organizations, as well as older adults themselves.

### **Key Outcome Measures**

In Maine, we selected the key outcome measures that were used in the original research in order to compare our outcomes to those of the professionally led model. These key outcome measures capture the heart of the programs' objectives: promoting a view of falls and fear of falling as controllable; setting realistic goals for increasing activity; and promoting exercise to increase strength and balance (Tennstedt, S., et al, 1998). In addition, we added a measure of exercise levels because exercise has been shown to reduce the risk of falling.

### **What We've Found: Participant Outcomes**

Overall, there are strong indications that A Matter of Balance, facilitated by volunteer lay leaders, benefits the older adults who participate in several ways. According to our initial evaluations, key measures of success for participants include improvements in their:

- Confidence concerning their ability to manage the risk of falls and actual falls by increasing physical strength;
- Steadiness and ability to find a way to get up if a fall occurs (i.e., fall management);
- Confidence about performing everyday activities such as going up and down stairs, reaching into cabinets or closets, or carrying bundles from the store (i.e., fall efficacy);
- Beliefs about their ability to prevent falls and overcome their fear of falling (fall control);
- Level of regular exercise (as measured by the modified PACE, which provides a choice of six levels of exercise based on the stages of change from 1. (I do not exercise or walk regularly now, and I do not intend to start to) 6. (I have been doing moderate exercise three or more times per week); and
- Social activity.

Participants made significant gains in all of these areas six weeks after participating in A Matter of Balance/VLL. Six months following the class, participants reported a decrease in monthly falls, in addition to sustaining their gains with regard to fall management, efficacy, and control and exercise levels. One full year after taking A Matter of Balance/VLL, participants reported sustained significant gains in fall management and there was a trend to increased exercise level as well. In addition, participants sustained a reduction in monthly falls a full year after participating in MOB/VLL.

### **Volunteer Lay Leader Outcomes**

Feedback from our volunteer lay leaders after experiencing the two-day training indicate that volunteer lay leaders feel confident to totally confident about leading A Matter of Balance (90%), teaching the exercises (97%), answering questions (90%) and using the Home Safety Checklist in the class (97%).

Six months after becoming a lay leader, the percentage of these leaders feeling this level of confidence had increased in all areas after leading at least one class. Lay leaders also indicated during focus groups conducted after they had taught at least one class that they maintain a high level of respect for delivering the curriculum of A Matter of Balance/VLL as intended. They also reported an appreciation for the importance of the mental exercises in helping participants think differently about their fall risk. They also indicated that they highly valued the mentor system.

Though most volunteer lay leaders acknowledged feeling nervous about facilitating the group and managing group dynamics, the rewards of facilitating or coaching were well worth overcoming these challenges. All respondents indicated that coaching A Matter of Balance/VLL is a rewarding experience. They were especially enthusiastic about seeing older adults gain more independence. In a follow-up survey, lay leaders indicated that they gained a sense of accomplishment (80%), found their purpose in life had increased (48%), said they felt they could make a positive difference in another person's life (76%), and reported their own confidence about managing falls had increased (84%).

### **Brief Effectiveness, Performance measures**

In Maine, we selected three tools and associated performances measures that adopting agencies may want to use to measure participant benefits. We recommend the use of:

- A short questionnaire at the first and last classes that uses the Five-Item Fall Management Scale;
- The modified PACE to measure exercise level, and
- One question concerning social activity to measure short-term participant outcomes.

Please see Section VIII for samples of each of these instruments. There is also an Excel file included that can be used by adopting agencies to determine whether a class has improved on these three measures. In addition, we recommend the continued use of the participant satisfaction questionnaire at the end of the last class. This questionnaire has provided valuable feedback concerning participants' understanding and application of course content.

## VIII. Tools and Resources

### A Matter of Balance Coach Handbook

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**A Matter of Balance/VLL: Managing Concerns About Falls  
Coach Training Session I**

Time: 4 hours

- I. Welcome, introductions and our plan for today
- II. An overview of A Matter of Balance Volunteer Lay Leader Model
  - Role of the Coach
- III. A Matter of Balance Materials
  - Coaching Tips
- IV. Session 1: Introduction to the Program  
*Fear of Falling* Video  
  
Session 2: Exploring Thoughts and Concerns about Falling  
  
Session 3: Introduction to Exercise and Fall Prevention
- V. Questions & Answers
- VI. Plans for next time & homework assignments

**A Matter of Balance/VLL: Managing Concerns About Falls  
Coach Training Session II**

Time: 4 hours

- I. Welcome, Check-in....
  - What we learned at the last class and our plans for today
- II. Session 3: Exercise and Fall Prevention  
*Exercise is Never too Late* video
- III. Session 4: Assertiveness and Fall Prevention  
  
Session 5: Managing Concerns about Falling  
  
Session 6: Recognizing Fall-ty Habits  
  
Session 7: Recognizing Fall Hazards in the Home & Community  
  
Session 8: Practicing No Fall-ty Habits and Overview

- IV. What's next? How we will work together
- V. Questions, Answers, Feedback and Ideas
  - Coach Training Evaluation
- VI. Celebration and Awarding of Certificates

## **Additional Tools**

(Samples available at NCOA site and PFHA site, and complete tools with MT Workbook)

### **Planning and Partnering**

1. Request for Partners
2. A Matter of Balance: Managing Concerns about Falls Overview

### **Adoption**

1. Master Trainer Job Description
2. Pledge of Confidentiality (MT)
3. Sample Press Release for Coach Recruitment
4. Coach Job Description
5. Pledge of Confidentiality (coach)
6. Sample Agenda for Coaches
7. Sample Homework
8. Coach Handbook Table of Contents
9. Tips for Coach Recruiting and Retention

### *Lay Leader handouts:*

1. Principles of Adult Learners
2. Tips for Working with Older Adults
3. Dealing with Different Types of People
4. Stages of Change
5. Brainstorming
6. Coach Pre-Class Communication
7. Coaching Skills

### **Reach**

1. A Matter of Balance Sample Flyer
2. Sample Press Release for Participant Recruitment
3. Sample Class Flyer

### **Implementation**

1. Site Application
2. Site Satisfaction Survey
3. Site Thank You – Sample Letter
4. Class Checklist
5. Class Schedule
6. Attendance Sheet
7. Participant Workbook – Table of Contents
8. Sample Snacks
9. Participant Agreement
10. PAR-q

11. Certificate of Attendance
12. Guest Therapist Handbook – Table of Contents

**Maintenance**

1. Pre and Post Survey Tool
2. Participant Satisfaction
3. Dashboard

**Effectiveness**

1. Coach Observation Process
2. Coaching Skills Observation
3. Coach Training Evaluation
4. A Matter of Balance Survey – 1<sup>st</sup> session
5. A Matter of Balance Survey – Last Session
6. A Matter of Balance Class Evaluation