

Implementing evidence-based practices

In ageing societies we need to find ways of promoting the wellbeing of elderly people. The Age Institute promotes good ageing by implementing evidence-based health promotion

There is extensive knowledge on the role of nutrition, different activities and social and healthcare services in the promotion of healthy ageing and independent living. Several studies have shown that promotion of physical activities is one of the main methods of promoting physical, mental, social and cognitive functioning in old age. However, the evidence is not adequately utilised.

The aim of the Age Institute is to promote good ageing by implementing evidence-based health promotion methods in Finland. Implementation is demanding and it requires long term co-operation and a systematic approach. In the following we describe experiences gathered during the ten years of the 'Strength in Old Age' programme (2005-2015) focusing on the promotion of evidence-based health exercise among home-dwelling people older than 75 years with mobility limitations. The goal was to promote their autonomy and quality of life. Finland's Slot Machine Association, Ministry of Education and Culture, and Ministry of Social Affairs and Health financed the programme.

In the first stage of the programme (2005-2010) 35 non-governmental organisations (NGO) developed good practices to implement health exercises. In the second stage (2010-2015) 38 municipalities implemented these practices with the mentoring support provided by the Age Institute, which co-ordinated the programme. During the second stage about 70% of the target population living in the 38 municipalities participated in the activities of the programme. Based on the assessment of 2,000 participants, strength and balance were improved in 53% and maintained in 38% of them during the 3-12 month period (Table 1).

Co-operation

The programme has required several steps and multiple ways of co-operation. Box 1 summarises the good practices developed and implementation methods used in each municipality. The follow-up

	2010-2011	2014
Number of exercise groups	786	1,500
Participants in exercise groups	10,883	22,044
Volunteer assistants in outdoor activities	592	1,150
Peer instructors in exercise groups	210	732
Persons received counselling	5,484	14,374

Table 1: Key results of the Strength in Old Age programme

Key elements of the Strength in Old Age programme

Local cross-sectoral collaboration:

- Local development was done in co-operation groups which were established at the beginning of the work; and
- Practical co-operation was guided by co-ordinators for health and social care, sports, and local NGOs.

A mentor pair from the Age Institute for the local projects supported:

- A survey and development and implementation plan;
- Building a network of actors;
- Training of local trainer and instructor network;
- Support for organising exercise and counselling; and
- Support for communication and evaluation.

data has demonstrated the success of the programme and showed that research evidence on health promotion in old age can be implemented successfully, but it needs to be locally adapted and supported by training, mentoring, cross-sectoral collaboration and sharing of knowledge. In the programme, the role of NGOs was central in finding the target groups of old people.

Because of the complexity and importance of implementation we hope to see more studies focusing on the implementation of research findings on promotion of health and wellbeing in old age. The lessons we have learnt are that such activities should focus on the needs and motivations of older people, be based on local resources, involve decision makers and promote cross-sectoral co-operation.

The Age Institute promotes functioning, mental wellbeing, social inclusion and an age-friendly living environment. In all these fields we need the involvement of old people from the very beginning of the study because they can provide innovative research questions and approaches and improve the quality of research.



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