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Someone Like Me: Increasing Participation in Physical Activity Among Seniors With Senior Peer Health Mentors

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The Someone Like Me Programme (SLME), supported by a national advisory group and funded by the UK's Department of Health, is based on the principles of Age Concern England's Health Mentor training program and the CHAMPS program (1). Evidence (1, 2) indicates that support strategies are a consistent feature of effective interventions to

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promote physical activity and that support can be provided by trained seniors or peers (1). **Translating Evidence Into Practice:** Training courses are provided for health, exercise, and social care professionals who work with older people that concentrate upon physical activity as the focal point of mentoring programs. Courses include the planning of local programs and training with senior peer mentors. Mentors are recruited through community programs and trained in motivation, communication skills, and support strategies and to assist in overcoming the barriers to participation faced by older people (3). Training has been provided to over 40 local partnerships and there are now more than 25 current local SLME programs. The scope of a local program may vary significantly including supporting participants on exercise referral and rehabilitation programs, increasing participation opportunities in addition to motivating and supporting new participants into physical activity. **Evaluation:** Evaluation of programs is undertaken using a case study approach employing both quantitative and qualitative measures reflecting local needs, (e.g., one program has trained 60 mentors and reached over 600 new participants, another has reached 3,000 members of a local community in 1 year, a third initiated 25 new activity classes in a community. In addition to the benefits reported by participants, volunteer mentors also report increased physical activity and improved physical and mental health consistent with other studies into volunteering (6). This program has reached more than 12,000 older people and was quoted in the UK Government Audit Commission Best Practice in Older People's Services Review (5). Future applications include developing the role of the senior peer mentor to include training in the use of buddying to target specific population groups and to support specific activity programs. The training will be used to develop programs targeting older men, falls prevention, and cardiac rehabilitation patients both in the community and in people's own homes. **References:** (1) Stewart AL et al. Physical outcomes of CHAMPS II: A physical activity promotion program for older adults. *The Journals of Gerontology Series A-Biological Sciences and Medical Sciences* 2001; 56(8):M465-70. (2) Stewart AL et al. Community Healthy Activities Model Program for seniors. *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity* 2002; 3:336-353. (3) Finch et al. *Physical activity—At our age*. Health Education Authority, London Qualitative Research Among People Over the Age of 50. London: Health Education Authority, 1997. (4) Yardley L et al. Older people's views of advice about falls prevention: A qualitative study. *Health Educ Res.* 2006; 21(4):508-17. (5) Audit Commission. *Good practice in services for older people*. UK Audit Commission Report, London, 2005. (6) Black, W., & Living, R. Volunteerism as an occupation and its relationship to health and well-being. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy* 2004 67(12); 526-532 **Keywords:** aged; exercise intervention; mentoring