

L.J. ROBERTSON, B.A. HALE, D. WATERS. **Peer leaders as volunteers: Their role in sustainable community groups.** *Gerontechnology* 2016;15(suppl):58s; doi:10.4017/gt.2016.15.s.651.00

Purpose This presentation aims to extend the discussion on evidence based practice in relation to falls prevention by introducing a theoretical component that provides direction for practitioners. We argue that the recourse to explanatory and predictive capability of theory is essential to the design of such a programme and to its evaluation. While many programmes provide evidence of their effectiveness in reducing falls this effectiveness is usually described as a simple input-output model of evaluation that does not address the complexity of the intervention. To recognise such complexity we have matched data from a particular falls prevention programme with relevant theoretical concepts which, we suggest, illuminates the value of the programme and guides its use and direction. This particular programme has been chosen as worthy of study to discover the processes which lead to its sustainability in the community, arguably a successful outcome. As Green^{1p126} suggests “it is well recognised that evaluations should be concerned with both process and outcome indicators”. **Method** The steps described by Angeles & Dolovich² have been used to develop a theoretical framework for this community intervention programme. The process is a double constituent. It has its place within the context, being part of the movement towards creating this context. At the same time a process can be a movement towards building a theory, part of the reflection needed for theory building. Elements of building a theory included: identifying the core ingredients, the context the variables – both fixed and flexible. One this background was established, theoretical models were identified that provided support for a theoretical framework which was then scripted into a model. Finally, content and face validity was then pursued resulting in some revisions. **Results & Discussion** Previous research had established the success of the programme in terms of reduction in falls, improvement in strength and balance. Additionally the perspectives of the group members and peer leaders had been obtained in a qualitative study^{3,4}. One aspect that had emerged during these studies was a greater understanding as to why the programme worked so well in terms of its sustainability in the community. To discover the underlying principles, we reviewed relevant theoretical models; from this it emerged that the guidelines used were consistent with the following: situated learning and human need models. The addition of this knowledge to underpin the evidence for the success of the program provided explanations that allowed us to better understand the role of the peer leaders, the interaction of members and long-term continuation of membership. This has also assisted the organisers to develop guidelines for others wanting to implement the programme.

References

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