

## Living Well

### Skowhegan Woman Learns Pain Management is Within Her Power



Skowhegan class

Claire Theriault-Perkins, an accounting professor at the University of Maine at Augusta, loves to garden. But four years ago a hip injury changed her life, causing her to ache with chronic pain and avoid her favorite summertime activity.

Now, thanks to Living Well, a self-management program designed especially to help people with chronic conditions, Claire is back amongst the petunias and vegetables – and enjoying the garden in a way that brings her joy, not pain.

“It was frustrating to not be able to all do the things I did before my injury – like work in the garden all day or take a three mile walk,” Claire says as she kneels in her Skowhegan garden. As a self described perfectionist and over-achiever, Claire explored pain management options, went to clinics and researched chronic pain, but found that, “nothing made an impact on me as much as what I learned in the Living Well classes-especially the part about how to set realistic goals.” Now Claire weeds the garden for 20 minutes a day and asks for help, instead of trying to get everything done at once.

Living Well was developed by Stanford University for those living with health problems such as arthritis, asthma, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, or a long-term ailment such as back or muscle pain. The strategies for improving quality of life taught in the program worked for Claire because they are evidence-based, which means they are proven to work. The classes are interactive and offer ways to manage stress, frustration, fatigue, pain, and isolation. Besides learning how to set realistic goals, participants learn relaxation techniques and how to take more time for themselves. Other topics include eating for better health, managing medications, exercise, and how to work in partnership with family members and healthcare providers.

“I live life more fully now because I have the tools to cope with my chronic pain. Living well is a reality for me,” remarks Claire.

Living Well was offered to the Waterville and Skowhegan communities this spring by Inland Hospital and the Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA). Inland nurse, Rebecca Kline, RN and Edwina Ducker from the MPCA together taught two six-week sessions at Spectrum Generation’s Muskie Center and the Skowhegan Community Center. The program was funded in part through a grant from the Administration on Aging to the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Elder Services.

Inland Hospital pursued Living Well as a way to impact startling health statistics about chronic disease in its service area. The 2007 EMHS Community Health Needs Assessment identified that more than a quarter of the population in Central Maine has been diagnosed with three or more chronic diseases, such as diabetes and asthma. As part of its Community Benefit Program, Inland dedicated funds to train a nurse to co-facilitate Living Well classes. Thanks to the fun, personal approach of the classes, the useful lifestyle information, and the support of physicians who recommend the program to their patients, Living Well is improving lives.

*Living Well was also offered in the Bangor area by Rosscare and in Presque Isle by The Aroostook Medical Center (TAMC). TAMC is offering another session this fall.*