

- Good morning, Virgin Islands. You are tuned in this morning to Ability Radio, You and Your Life. My name is Amelia Headley LaMont. I am the Executive Director of the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands. And I'm joined this morning by my co-host, Iris Bermudez. Good morning, Iris.

- Good morning, Amelia.

- How are you?

- I'm fine. Good morning, Virgin Islands.

- Well, we are joined this morning by a person who had appeared on our show previously by the name of Linda Gavin. She is the coordinator of the Saint Croix Senior Collaborative. Linda, good morning.

- Good morning.

- And it's wonderful to have you this morning. I understand you have a new project.

- We do. We do.

- And I'd like to hear a little bit about it. I know it has to do with training a variety of people in the community, so tell us a little bit about what this is all about.

- Okay. We, the St. Croix Senior Collaborative is basically an organization that helps seniors prepare for their futures by understanding what kinds of programs we have available on the island. And also in helping improve the services that are available in the territory. And one of the programs that we ran across a couple of years ago is the program called A Matter of Balance. You know, it's a series of eight classes that seniors over the age of 60 can take to help them prevent falling and to deal with concerns or fears about falling that could seriously make demands in terms of their activity level which could lead to mental and physical decline. And so, we have gotten, my husband and I become master trainers for the program and we've come back to the island, and we've now trained 30 coaches both here and a few on Saint Thomas that are gonna start the initial program over there. And we started offering classes the end of January. To anybody on island with the help of a grant from the Bennie and Martha Benjamin Foundation, we are able to offer the classes for free. And we're hoping to have at least 30 classes this year and six on St. Thomas and this is just the tip of the iceberg. We would like to see every senior citizen in the territories take this class in an effort to overcome this very difficult health issue that arises with seniors.

- So, and, Linda, is this the reason particularly why you went into this program because you knew that people were afraid of falling, and that something was available to help them?

- Well, one of the issues that we have that really is the whole purpose of our organization is to help seniors stay in their homes as long as possible. And I don't think I have to explain too deeply that, you know, when you start to fall at an advanced age, many times there's complications of broken bones, hips, wrists, ankles, and also serious head injuries that then can lead to having to move to an assisted living or a nursing home, or a fulltime care situation. And so, it was kind of a natural because most of our members are not people who do need assistance at this point. They're just thinking into the future and what they are gonna do when they do need assistance. One out of every two seniors over the age of 70 in the United States will fall every year. That's a 50%, and although some of those falls are not gonna end in injury, it's a 34 billion dollar cost to our Medicare, medical system every year. And quite honestly, the program was original developed by the Roybal Center at Boston University and about 10 years ago, it was taken over as a result of the agency on aging's concern about falls and subsequent health issues that arises as a result of them with seniors. And an organization called main health and there were a couple of other, you know, prominent organizations worked together to make this program what we call a lay leader model because before it was always just trained by healthcare professionals at Boston University. And they wanted to be able to take the program out and make it much more widespread than it had been. And so, our trainers, our volunteers, they are trained in an eight hour session to train the

eight classes that lasts for two hours apiece and there's one session that's conducted by a healthcare professional. So we do bring in a doctor, or a PA, or a nurse, or a physical therapist who helps in one class and is there then to answer any of the medical issue questions that might come up during the class. But because it's a lay leader model, we can distribute it. It's in 40 states now and one territory, ours. And they were very pleased to get us. And it's expanding on a daily basis into areas all across the United States.

- I do recall that you did come and talk to us a little bit earlier about the St. Croix Senior Collaborative. Can you remind our audiences to what this group is, your membership. How that came about and just so there's a context and a connection.

- Well, originally, it came about, it was just a small group of people that had moved here. Not native to the island who originally in our plans that well, we'll live on, in paradise for 10 years and then we'll go back and find our assisted living facility on the mainland. Because at that time there were no assisted living facilities. We do have one now in turning point which is hopefully going to grow and have more capacity in the future. But our thought was after a couple of years of living here is that we didn't wanna leave and pick up at the end of 10 years, and go, you know, learn a new place and friends, and all that kind of stuff. So, we decided we'd look around for property to see if we could do, have a do-it-yourself assisted living facility. And that just, you know, feasibility of that and the money it would take to do that, and dividing it up and the legalities got to be too complicated, so we dropped it for a few months. And when we came back and called another meeting, the group had just, like, tripled in number which, and it was made up very, almost equally between people that had moved here and people who had been born and raised here because there was an increasing need for those seniors who's families had moved away. They no longer have the nuclear family that takes responsibility for their elder members as they age. And so, our mission changed a bit just to let's find out what's available, you know, and we had every entity on the island we could find. We had the administration of the hospital come talk to us. We've had continuum care come talk to us. We've had people talk about wills and trusts, and different health issues that affect seniors. You name it, we've, medical transport providers. ADT with their Med Alert buttons so that everybody can be fully informed as to what it is they need that we have available here on the island, and then also to identify things that we don't have on the island that we need to pump up. And I know one of the areas that it is our goal this year to start examining is transportation because that seems to be the biggest issue. I mean, we have VITRAN Plus which is for handicap but we, for people that just don't wanna drive anymore, there isn't an easy access to get to the bus or to the taxi, or to be able to afford transportation. And so, we're exploring different programs in the States and even in Saint John. Saint John now has a van available for senior transportation that was made through a block grant through the St. John Foundation. So, those types of things we're working on. And this program is I think a really important one because it's sort of, it's our beginning of an education program but it's also helping I think a lot of seniors realize that we are here and what we're about. And we hope to do some more things for the whole community. We have a plan in October to have a Senior Fair where we'll have speakers for a day and also vendors that do provide services can be available to talk to people or people can ask them questions. Our members themselves pay \$40 the first years for new membership and \$30 after that for renewing membership. They get a membership manual which is everything you could ever wanna know about being a senior and all the contact information, and services here on the island, and we have monthly meetings. Our next one is next Wednesday and then we're in open enrollment right now, so guests are welcome to come. We meet at AARP Office in Sunny Isle and our speaker next Wednesday at 3:00 is Tracy Sanders and she's gonna talk about home health as it relates to Medicare and also a medical equipment as it relates to Medicare because as you know they are, they are the only providers on the island right now. And so I'm sure there'll be also questions that relate to Medicare in general. And so everyone in the audience who is interested in learning more about that are welcome to join us next Wednesday at 3:00 at AARP.

- Well, I'm really glad that you're looking at transportation because that is a terrible need here, on all the islands. At one point, we were here, when I work with CMS, we were here because the ambulances were being used to take people to their dialysis appointments, which is a non-medical emergency, a non-medical emergency transportation issue. So the fact that you're looking into it, it's, you know, it's music to my ears because when I was with CMS that was a big, big issue in the Virgin Islands and also in Puerto Rico. But now getting back to A Matter of Balance, when you came to us the first time we talked about

this program being evidence-based, could you share information to the listening audience about what that means because it's not like you came and made this program, you know, you know.

- Exactly. Well, and it kind, in fact, I was just helping get an, a class started this morning over at Red Cross and that, it does, it's very important for people to understand that it was developed, really, originally 30 years ago. And every piece of the program has been tested, beta tested, alpha tested, every imaginable way, and updated, and evaluated so that the advice, the exercises that we do with people to train them to become more stronger, the analysis of what we call faulty habits, the behavior modification that we cover, which is important, and I'll talk about that in just a second, has been tested with seniors and all these classes for a long, long time. It's not something that just some people sat down and came up with, you know, over the course of a weekend, and put together. We go, about once every three months we have a conference call with all the trainers across the United States, and we bring up what we're doing, and what's happening, and anything that we might suggest can be improved. In fact, my husband and I just worked on a piece for our fourth class. I believe it was at Saint Patrick's that I had some suggestions for them as to how they might make that a little stronger piece that we will make in our next conference call and hopefully they'll improve upon it. The thing that is really important I think for people to understand taking the class is that all eight weeks of classes are important. I think some people come in and they think, "Oh, I'm gonna get a nifty set of exercises and I'm gonna get a nice little checklist to go around my house to make sure it's safer so that I don't fall at home." But they're, every piece of the training is vital. And one of the challenges that I had in the first class that I taught was just understanding that somebody can take this class at the age of 60, and be fully mobile, and not have any issues. But it's just as valuable probably more so for them to take it then to realize things that might be happening in the future that they're gonna be confronted with than it is to when they take it when they're 80 and they're already pretty sedentary. They've cut back on their activity and to come, overcome that. What studies are showing currently is that we age because of inactivity meaning I'm sure that I wouldn't look like I did when I was 20 years old if I've done the exercises I said I was gonna do every day. But still I think my health would be better and I would be more flexible, strong, and balanced. Those are the three things that we really emphasize with the exercise portion. And so it's, one of the things that's really critical is the behavior modification. So if you are someone who, it might be as simple as you cannot stand the idea of having to make two trips from the car to the kitchen with your groceries, and so you load each arm down with four bags, which is a no, no, that's a faulty behavior. It's overcoming that and understanding that if there's anything you can do to prevent injury while falling as, to have at least one hand free that you can catch yourself with. And a lot of heavy injuries, et cetera, caused because that doesn't happen.

- Give us, give the audience a few examples of faulty behaviors. I like the example that you just provided. What are some other things that people do that places them at risk?

- Well, the, another thing that I think happens to us at any age, but more so as we age is we move too fast, you know. It's like, especially like in the morning when you wake-up, you know, you realize you overslept by half an hour and you pop out of bed. And anyone at any age if you move really quickly from one position to the next could get dizzy, and, you know, get faint and fall as a result of that. And one of the things we try to get people to do is to, you know, slowly sit up, sit on the edge of the bed for, you know, a few seconds until they feel like they really are steady, and then they stand. And before you start moving, to wait a couple of seconds, and then walk so that you're really very solid in terms of that. That one is a huge one. Multi-tasking of all sorts is another really easy one to get over because...

- Iris is blushing. I wonder why.

- Yeah.

- [ laugh ]

- And that's the biggest challenge for people. Even at, you know, an older age, you know, trying to text at the same time you're walking and thinking about something else at the same time. I mean it's really important to be in the moment and to, especially when you're moving in an, in an atmosphere that might prevent, present challenges to really be focused on that, that's really important. A lot of people don't

handle like reaching or climbing to get something, or they're not organized for that like what we just did at training yesterday, just a two hour overview with the AmeriCorps workers at Flamboyant Gardens because they go into the living apartments and work with seniors that live in that facility. And one of the things we suggested that they could ask a senior that they might help with is to reorganize their kitchen shelves. So those things they only use at Thanksgiving are on the top shelf and things that they use on a daily basis are on a lower shelf. Shoes. And on this island that, this is a big problem. Flip-flops are a no, no. The key is you need a strap behind your heel. You know, it might be a sandal, but if you have that strap behind your heel, you're less likely to trip and, or have your shoe flop so that it catches on a rug and that type of thing. And then another thing that a lot of people get into is clutter and hoarding, you know, not having free pathways. You know, a chair that the legs sticks out and you always catch your foot on it, that type of thing, which is simplicity, and going around your house, and saying, you know, "What is it that could be a hazard if I don't take care of it?" We have about 30 or 40 things that we cover. And then we also, the group becomes very personalized like one group we had, one class we had, we had a fear of escalators. And lots of people were talking about issues they had, you know, you're in the busy Atlanta Airport, you're using an escalator, you're pulling a bag behind you, how do you not fall down or fall up the escalator? And so what's nice about the program is we train people that even if it's not on the list, this is how you handle how to overcome that or how to deal with it. And there are things that you shouldn't be doing at 80 too. We have a one visual that we use as the stop light and there are things that at the age of 80 you shouldn't be doing and some things you need to be going slow, and then others said you can come overcome your fear with green light.

- But just to make sure because we want the listening audience to understand this that the training, the exercises that are done do not take the place of the physical therapy or the medical related therapies that they're probably be having.

- Exactly. And that's one of the things we do is they have to go through a questionnaire that they go and really self-evaluate, "Am I able to do this exercises?" And if there's any question, then we ask them to at least call their doctor or make an appointment, and see if they think there's some concerns. As we go through the exercises, I was just over at Red Cross, I have a person that broke some ribs. They'll be, and I'm gonna go teach their exercise section next week. And I've already told that there's gonna be things that I'm gonna tell you just to sit tight, not do. If you've had a knee replacement, there is a couple exercises you need to skip. If you've had a hip replacement, there's a couple exercises you need to skip. But in addition to that, we promote them to think about other activity. You know, the exercises are about 25 minutes a day that we prescribe. But we encourage them to walk, swim, if they do that, you know, dance if they like to dance. I saw the cutest routine on Facebook this morning. It's a zumba class done with walkers. Now, I don't know how legitimate it was because they seem to be pretty well-organized. But we're gonna show it to our class on Saturday because we have a zumba lover in the groups. But, you know, to exercise as, at a level that's appropriate for your age, you know, I can't run anymore. But I can walk. You know, it's, running is not good for my hips at this point. But...

- You're listening to Ability Radio, You and Your Life. Our special guest is Linda Gavin from the St. Croix Senior Collaborative. This program is brought to you by VI Lottery, making a difference. And it's certainly making a difference in our community. Linda, let's again repeat when these courses are offered and location. I know there was some question as to where these courses are available.

- Yes. We're in the process of setting up. The ones that are running right now are full. But we will hopefully be able to go back to the same locations in our next round which will probably start sometime in May and June for them. And we've offered them at Frederick Cid Healthcare, Beach Side Café, and Saint Patrick's Learning Center. And we're currently running one at Red Cross. We hope to be able to, we know in the future we'll have one at AARP. We just haven't scheduled that. That'll be coming up I hope pretty soon. We're talking to the hospital at Juan F. Luis about having one there. In fact, I need to work with them next week. And that one hopefully we can get started sometime in April. I've contacted [ inaudible ] learn, new community center that just opened up a week ago. And we hope to be able to offer one there. My big challenge right now is the East End and I think Saturday I said I was being challenged. This was my week to find a location there. I have two places that I'm working with right now to see if we can get one up there. But we definitely have to have one on the East End because I already have a list of people

from the East End that wanna take it. So, what I would suggest is that they call my number which is 340-690-3002 or they can email balancestx@gmail.com. And balance is B-A-L-A-N-C-E stx@gmail.com. And then I will put them on a contact list. And as soon as we have classes that are available, then they'll be the first I contact as far as enrollment. We also have contained classes, like, we're setting up the Flamboyant Garden classes for April. And they'll have like four different classes just to get through their population. And anyone that might be listening that goes to the Richmond Senior Center, we will be starting classes there in April with the seniors that attend sessions at the senior center. And then we also have one at the, at the New Life Senior Resort that will be starting in April. So, one thing I might say to listeners is that we are more than glad to talk to people about having a class for their group. It might be a church that wants to offer one to their seniors or another organization that it would work well to, for us to send trainers in for them to have their group take the class. We're more than glad to work with that. And like I said, we provide all the materials. There's no cost to it. Thanks to the Benjamin Foundation.

- You mentioned helping individuals get over that fear of falling. How do you do that? I mean, I'm thinking of a person who may have fell already was in a hospital could have had a hip replacement done because of the fall because our bones get brittle and, you know.

- Yes.

- How do you help that person overcome that?

- Well, mostly what we do is help them brainstorm solutions.

- Okay.

- You know, if it's a matter of, usually it, it's something that's curtailing their social life. Like for example, they don't wanna go out to lunch or they don't wanna go out in the evening because there's, it's a long walk from the restaurant to the car or they're afraid to go to jump up because the uneven sidewalks in Christiansted, you know. I'm afraid to go jump up because of the uneven sidewalks in Christiansted. I think if enough of us and I'm sure your organization is most concerned about that too, the lack of handicap accessibility up there. And so, what you do first is you, the whole process asks them to evaluate where their fear is coming from first. You know, I'm sure that a choice of not going out to lunch with a couple of girlfriends isn't because they don't like the girlfriends and they don't want to spend time with them. But if it is a fear that I, I'm really afraid that I'm gonna have trouble walking from the car to the restaurant, then that's where the fear is coming from. And then the second thing that we have them evaluate is what am I gonna lose as a result of this fear? You know, am I going to? My friends are going to think I no longer wanna spend time with them. Am I gonna lose friendships? Am I gonna have to be more isolated in my home and have an activity that's gonna make me even more unhealthy? And then the third piece is to have them brainstorm what can I do to overcome this? And with each situation, it may be different. But usually it's asking for help. That's one of the things that a lot of people are afraid to do, you know, just saying, "Can I hang on to your arm while I walk?" Or suggesting a different restaurant that's more accessible. We're finding that something that I find that's kind of odd although I have a husband that's a little hesitant about this too is the fear, the negative feelings people have about assistive devices like canes and walkers. And they're, you know, we just keep stressing, use them, use them, use them if they get you up on your feet and your heart is pumping a little harder because you're using that kind of activity. It's worth having them. In fact, I'm a believer. I'm going to Washington D.C. in April and I'm gonna go buy one of those collapsible canes because my hips have been giving me a little trouble. And I figure walking them all can really set something off. So, I'll have a cane in my bag just in case I need a little extra support. But I think our whole society needs to look at that, you know, that it's not anything to be ashamed of when you say, "I have, I'm gonna use a little safety gear and make sure I have something to lean on."

- Yeah, especially when our, when we're, our lives are prolonged now.

- Yes.

- You know, and people are aging, you know, for a while. And that really helps especially those that live alone. And we have a lot of that here in the territory. They're afraid of whatever. You know, they have their reasons. I'm sure. But I think something like this can really pay off in the long run because they're really helping people to become mobile again. So, are you thinking of doing something like this in St. Thomas or something they've done?

- Yes. Well, in fact, part of the Benjamin grant is, has funding to send two people from Saint Thomas to Portland, Maine to go through the master training. So they would be trained at the same level that Bill and I are. And it's a two-day training up there. It's wonderful. It's a really good training, training that you go through. Because it would be almost, I mean, I wouldn't even know where to begin in St. Thomas who to contact for setting up locations or to recruit trainers. So, we really need to have some dedicated people over there that are interested in taking that over. We already have one volunteer for AARP that's been trained who lives in St. Thomas. And then we've trained the, people who are in the senior living portions of the program from Lutheran Social Services over there too. So, we're hoping that once they get their classes going, well, we'll recruit some people that maybe are interested in doing that or some social organization over there, a rotary, or a chamber, or whatever that has, would be interested in taking it on.

- So, am I to understand you've identified the trainers who will go to Maine for training or is that still...

- No, no.

- Okay.

- That we're just, we will still be working on that.

- So, this is...

- But hopefully by the year.

- ...a callout to...

- Yes, uh-huh.

- ...perspective of balance gurus in St. Thomas, St. John.

- Yeah.

- Who can assist in that regard.

- Be, it would be great.

- Yeah.

- Because as a train, as a program manager, you know, we order all the materials. We distribute all the materials. We set up the classes. We assign the trainers or the coaches to the classes. We take the registration for the classes. And we evaluate the trainers. We need to go into each training and at least one session and do an evaluation on the trainers. So, to do that from this distance would be almost impossible. We are gonna go over and do what we have, this year, we have a couple of flights in the budget too. But yes, if somebody's interested, just give me a call.

- And one of the things that you said was that it's free.

- Yes.

- And I could imagine you'll have to prepare manuals or handbooks and equipment and have all that stuff. So and yet the person's not gonna pay for it.

- Right.

- So are they provided with ongoing training even after they're certified the first time?

- We, they are required to train two classes a year, minimum. You know, I think many will probably do more than that. And then they're required to do another half day workshop at the end of the year when we have our anniversary date to, deal with updates, etcetera. But the people that have trained already as coaches, are already clamoring to have a meeting. And we told them that we would do that because they're coming up with ideas and things that we can share with one another. We found out in my first class that we can't give out the books right away because we had people that came, and then never came back. And they were explainable circumstances where the, that there was a language problem and, but I, we lost the books, and the books are, that they get are like \$14 apiece. So we decided that we wouldn't hand the books out until the third session when we do the exercises. And that way, people are pretty well-committed. And that reminds, reminded me that we do hope to have Spanish speaking classes. We've had a couple of people expressed interest, but the training days didn't work out for them. And we've already purchased the materials for actually, the videos in Spanish, and the training manual in Spanish. Because we know that will be probably a concern here. So hopefully sometime, hopefully this summer we'll be able to start some Spanish speaking classes.

- And you do have, considering the size of the Virgin Islands, the latest count that I had when I was with CMS was that there are 18,000 plus Medicare beneficiaries in the Virgin Islands, correct?

- Yes.

- I mean, it might sound small compared to New York or whatever, but it's...

- A lot of people.

- It's a lot of people here.

- Lot of people.

- That could benefit from this training.

- Yes. And one thing I'd like to stress is the, the requirement is that they be 60 years or older. They need to, they don't necessarily have, I mean, they could be in a wheelchair, they can still benefit from the wheel, in a wheelchair. They can be handicapped to a degree. But they have to be able to make decisions. And so in that respect, the class would be a waste for people that, you know, are having some dementia or Alzheimer's, and that type of thing.

- Mostly caregivers.

- Yeah. Exactly. And we have, and, we tested out the thing with the AmeriCorp yesterday and I think that will be very useful. One of the things, somebody came up, somebody was just gonna give the exercises to somebody else, because they wanted the exercises. And we're discouraging that because they haven't gone through the, what we call the PAR-Q form to see if they really are capable of doing the exercises. They aren't gonna know the ones that are not safe for people who have had a knee replacement. I mean, there's issues in terms of the fidelity of the program. And that's one of the things that we're, we have to sign a form as a St. Croix Senior Collaborative, is saying if we're gonna sponsor this program, we have to teach the program as it is designated. And all of our coaches sign a form that way, too. It can't be piecemealed out because that loses the whole purpose. And then all of a sudden, you have people saying, "Oh yeah, I do the exercises, but I never took the class." And they don't benefit from, like they need to. Yeah.

- In order to participate, how should one appear in the class as far as, you know, their dress, mindset. What's required before you even start?

- They just dress comfortably with shoes that are, that, they are capable of doing exercises in, like I said, something with a strap in the back, no heels, low, preferably non-skid. And that's just good sense in terms of walking around. No flip-flops, type of things. But they just, they just come dressed in comfortable clothing, for sitting and moving around a little bit. They don't have to come fully-dressed up.

- Our guest today is Linda Gavin with the St. Croix Senior Collaborative. She is telling us about an exciting program called, A Matter of Balance. You're listening to Ability Radio, You and Your Life. This program is brought to you by VI Lottery, making a difference. And if you've missed any portion of this broadcast, you can find this on our website, which is located at [drcvi.org](http://drcvi.org). I'm joined this morning by my co-host, Iris Bermudez. And Iris, you had another question?

- Yes, yes. I'm really interested in this program, myself.

- [laugh]

- Because I'm past 60 and I could really, I think I could really benefit from it. Because just this weekend, if I hadn't grabbed onto a railing, I would've fell.

- Yes.

- I was trying to put curtains up. [ laugh ]

- I know.

- So I know there's a process for that now, listening to you.

- Yeah. It is.

- What is the role of the guest healthcare professional, specifically?

- The guest healthcare professional comes in for one class. And they teach the segment and how to get up from a fall. We don't train them how to fall. Somebody, it was, one of the first questions we had, is what method do you use in training them how to fall? And we said, "We don't. We don't want a bunch of people of an advanced age flopping down on the floor. I mean, that would be a disaster." We do teach them, you know, to hang onto things, you know, like, even now, if I go to my dentist, which is on the second floor, I always take stairs. And I use to just go up the stairs, now I always hang onto the railing even though I don't think I need it because it's just good to have that security. And we teach them that, you know, if they're walking down a long hallway to not, not to, just to have their hand on the wall, if that helps them maintain their balance. And if they fall, to try to put their hands out in front of them because if they, even if they break a wrist as a result of that, they are probably preventing their head from taking a bump, and that's where some real serious things can happen. And so that's, what was that? I lost my train of thought. You know, you have, a very important that you do that and then, oh I know, the healthcare professional is gonna have him get up. And basically, it's a technique where one of the exercises we do, people push themselves up with their arms from their chair. And that's to make strength in the upper body. And you need to have that to be able to get back up. Um, we ask if they use a chair or another surface that they hold onto while they come back up. In fact, we even recommend, like, if they're out doing yard work that they have a chair with them. Just in case they fall and they need to get back up. Or if they're sitting down in the ground or they, you know, or somewhere where they need to get from, even they didn't fall but they need to get back up, it's good to have a chair to use that technique to assist. And then, generally, we had, when we had Simone Palmer, she's a physical therapist as ours, when we did the Frederiksted class and she brought all kinds of canes and walkers that she demonstrated how to use that, those devices. Because most people that use a cane, use it wrong. And so that was really helpful to learn that. And then one of the concerns that was big in our class was the proper way to walk. You know,

because people in our class, they're saying they're starting to slouch and, if I can describe this, because I've been doing it ever since she came in the class is she just takes her index finger and middle finger, and puts it right underneath your nose and pushes her head back, and it causes the neck to align more straightly. And you can, you can feel the release in your neck when you do that. And so I am always, you'll see me doing this all the time. And then we walked around the room and she analyzed our walks as to things that we were doing, that could be corrected. Nothing really drastic, but so much of, you know, the posture that we have as we grow older causes pain that then causes weakness, that, then causes falls. And then any other questions we had about, there were a lot of questions in our group about medications because one of the reasons people fall is improper mix of medication. And one of the hints that I learned, was new to me, was if you're really concerned about mixing medications, go talk to your pharmacist. Because sometimes we have several doctors, and they may not even be the experts in how pills mix. Whereas that's what a pharmacist is trained to do. So asking them about any potential problems with the different medications you're taking is really important. Really important.

- Yeah, that's one of the reasons that Medicare provided for free to all Medicaid, Medicare beneficiaries. A little booklet or a little card where they could put down all their prescriptions and every time they went to a different doctor, then they could...

- They'd take that?

- They would, yeah. And see what medications, you know, the person was on because they could have side effects if mixed.

- Right. And now I'm, even I've had situations where I've had doctors' offices say, "Bring in your medications."

- The medications, yeah.

- "Anything that you're taking, we wanna see in a plastic bag when you come."

- Yeah.

- And I think that's wise, because it's...

- But it was interesting what you said about the medications not being stored in a bathroom.

- Right.

- That was...

- Right, that was one of the things that we tell them is, "You take your medications out to the kitchen, in a well-lit place." Because of the moisture in a bathroom, from the shower or from the bathtub, and that can damage medication. And we also recommend they keep their medications close to a phone where if they have to call in for their, for their refills. They can do that quite easily and stuff and then have a system for remembering when and what day and how often you take that medication which is really important.

- This is such an interesting program that I think a lot of people in the Virgin Islands even caregivers need to be aware of because sometimes they don't really know what to do in a situation where grandma falls. You know, how to pick her up or how to just leave her there until the paramedics or the emergency team comes.

- Right.

- That I'm hoping that other younger adults will consider taking a training. I wanna sign up for training.

- Yes.

- Because I think it's important that we know what to do in any given situation.

- Exactly. We were real surprised when we did our training in Portland, Maine. One of the young men in the training session was a fireman, and we learned that a lot of fire departments are offering the training and there's a special grant even out of the agency, in aging, and it's because they get so many calls with seniors who have fallen. And they, he was telling us that that's just, you know, it's a regular daily occurrence for them, and many people it's multiple times they're called to the homes and so his department was one that jump right on. Having the, they're gonna offer it right there at the station, for people that are interested in preventing it, I thought that was really neat.

- And you had mentioned that there's a doable size in the group for the training.

- Yes.

- And it doesn't go beyond that.

- Yeah, we like to keep the classes below twelve, between eight and twelve. Below eight, there's not really enough people to have that type of give and take in the discussions, um, but over 12 people start becoming loyal followers. You know, people dominate the conversations and then people aren't as active. So between eight and twelve people is what we recommend. Which is great.

- Now you mentioned that this is an eight week course.

- Yes.

- And each week is a two hour class.

- Yes.

- Typically what time are these courses offered?

- We'll we've tried to do a variety of things. My Frederiksted class was from 2:00 to 4:00, the two classes that are running right now are 9:00 to 11:00. My husband and I are teaching at St. Patrick's 1:30 to 3:30, on Saturdays, um, and the other option we have is to offer the class for four weeks, but two days a week. And down at Beach Side and when we did Frederiksted, we did that. We had it two days a week, but just for four weeks. You wanna have a little bit of time between the classes, and you encourage people to practice the exercises and that type of thing while they are out of the class. But it's really important to have that reinforcement because we teach the exercises, the third class and then every class after that. We do the exercises in the class. So, people have five good practice sessions with them plus illustrated guidelines for doing them at home, but there's a lot of reinforcements on previous lessons as you go through the eight. And so we're, we were kind of experimenting with days. You know, it's difficult because you're trying to get 12 people that can all meet at the same time. Fortunately, we do have a couple of people that have asked if we could do them on Saturday because they still work. But, fortunately most of our audience are people who are retired, so that has allowed us a little more. And then of course, working with the places that are offering the class is a challenge because it might, you know, like Beach Side Cafe. The new owners down at Sand Castles have been most gracious to let us use Monday and Thursdays but we got to be out of there by 11:30 because that's when the lunchtime crowd comes in to the cafe. So, you know, you have to work around that too, so it's not a conflict.

- You also, I as I recall in previous conversations that you were also trying to find a location in the northern part of the island. Any suggestion there, was Mon Bijou the northern option or any other...

- Yes. Yes.

- ...spot to...

- That's, we're hoping to be able to give in to Mon Bijou. Yeah. And our next, um, next thing is starting to go around to the churches to see if they have a space. Unfortunately, a lot of, you know, a lot of places that we checked, you know, that don't open until 3:30. It would take a special, you know, person to come and open up for us and that type of thing. And like I said, parking and handicap accessibilities is a big thing. Because a lot of our people are not real mobile, you know, and so we wanna make sure that the parking is an easy distance from the location. So we're working on that, and if we could have, you know, maybe a good solid six sites that work then we can just hit the whole island that way.

- I do believe and we had here on our show. There's a program in the Department of Human Services for Caregivers. I don't know if you've--have reached out to them or if you didn't know about it because I can give you the contact person.

- Yeah, I'd like the contact information. I have heard about the group before and then I had heard that they weren't working any, they weren't operating anymore. But they might be back up and running.

- Yeah, I haven't heard that they weren't working anymore because I know the person.

- Yeah.

- But I can call her and find out and let her know, and maybe give her your number.

- That'd be great. That would be great.

- Because they do a lot and do caregiving in the community.

- Yeah.

- Okay.

- When there used to be, maybe what I'm thinking about is I know I have a friend who's, who came back to the island to take care of her parents. And when they were still alive, there was a group that got together of people in that situation who would meet once a month, as a support group and they talked, you know, out their frustrations and shared ideas and that, kind of, stuff and those people need a lot of support because many of them are on their own caring for people that are, you know, they have pretty great needs to, so I don't know if that's tied with that or not. Yeah.

- During the break , I got the impression from you that the Matter of Balance training sessions are also it's implicit in what you're doing is a vehicle for support.

- Yes.

- Of the students that attend, um, so that, you know, it seems, like it's serving the same function, am I wrong in that?

- Yeah, it is. It is, if people have the ability to come and take the classes, yes.

- Okay. Now the other thing you mentioned earlier and I'm gonna repeat this is you've mentioned about fidelity to the program, how do you maintain that, who do you make sure that we stay true to what you're trying to accomplish.

- Yeah, a lot of it, the people who are in the class will do in the class, evaluation. My husband and I, you know, are checking in on the classes so to speak. I mean, we're not watching every class because we can't do that but...

- We should identify your husband.

- And my husband, yeah. My husband's name is Bill Boyton and he assists me with this, we're co-trainers and did the master training in Portland, Maine and ate a lot of lobster while we were out there. Oh, it was so good. And we evaluate the trainers when we--when we go into at least one of their full classes, We have to do an evaluation of that and, just giving them the support they need, you know, we really, in the training we do a--when we train them it's an eight hour training session. And we really stress why it's important to do that and we tried to do it humorously, we talk about, we have a little beanie baby that's a duck and we say, you know, if you have a duck. And then all of a sudden you start to dress it up with some extra things all of a sudden and then it gets so, it looks like the beanie baby we have is a flamingo. And you wanna stay a duck, and they all get a little rubber duck when the graduate and get their certificate, but we, a good example is, you know, when we start doing the exercises. I'm a yoga person and then I kept thinking, "Oh, they should be doing the measured breathing with these exercises. Inhale and exhale and that type of thing." And it would be so nice if there was some really nice soft music in the background. So we got done with the exercises and the first thing the trainer said was, "And don't ever have music in the background." And she said "Because a lot of people are hard of hearing." And you may, if you play music and you're trying to give directions, um, they're not gonna hear you give the directions, and if you try to have them do a paced breathing with the exercises. They're gonna be paying more attention to that, than they are doing the exercises, as best we, I think after every couple of exercises we stop and say, "Okay, just take a deep breath." You know, we so we know they are breathing. There's a lot of people, a lot of people don't breathe when they exercise. But she was right on, because I remember when I started yoga, that was the most important thing for me to try to get down, was should I be inhaling or exhaling now. And basically we're just hoping they do the exercises, so they get that physical work out. And so it's a good example of how you start changing it to the way that you think it should be or something that was in your experience. Um, you can get off track and not realize that this has been tested. I mean, they've tested it with a variety of people, and you need to be open to the fact that, you know, there may be a six year old in your class but they're may be an eighty-five year old too. So you got to, you got to really follow the rules and follow what they had to say.

- All right. Well, this has been a very interesting program. I'd like to thank you so much for bringing this exciting project to our attention it's called A Matter of Balance. Linda can you provide us with your contact information again, in case anyone is interested and wants to participate.

- Okay. My, the number is 340-690-3002 and the email is [balancestx@gmail.com](mailto:balancestx@gmail.com). So it's B-A-L-A-N-C-E-S-T-X@gmail.com.

- Excellent, this has been a broadcast of Ability Radio, You and Your Life. And this program has been brought to you by the VI Lottery, making a difference. Thank you so much for listening.

- Thank you for having us. We really appreciate it.