

# Get a mental workout with local mind aerobics program

Sharon Dargay Staff Writer 2:22 p.m. EST December 23, 2015



Stacey Molinaro (Right) of Jewish Vocational Services, shows Tamara Ragon of Inspire Home Care how to play one of the Mind Aerobics games during a recent open house for the program, held at Jewish Family Services in West Bloomfield.(Photo: Debbie Feit)

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Mind Aerobics, a new program offered by Jewish Family Services (JFS) and Jewish Vocational Services, (JVS) is designed to sharpen your thinking skills and improve your memory.

“This program is something very different,” said Yuliya Gaydayenko, JFS director of older adult services, speaking at a recent open house for the program. “For a long time we talked about how we need something for people who are healthy who might have some memory loss. We need something more than adult day programs and memory clubs. We need something that is research based, something we can show people outcomes.

“So we searched and there are a lot of programs out there. About three years ago we came across this program that has 10 years of research behind it. We are so excited about it.”

The program, developed by the New England Cognitive Center, uses games and activities to target reaction time, visual/spacial abilities, attention and concentration, memory, language, and problem solving. Four levels of classes are available, based on cognitive function. The “Mind Sharpener” class is for individuals with no impairment and for those experiencing occasional “senior moments.” Other levels, Lively Mind, Active Mind, and Ready Mind, target participants with early stage dementia, mild dementia, moderate dementia and moderately severe dementia.

JVS and JFS are the only agencies in Michigan offering the program. They’re marketing Mind Aerobics to seniors and have run one 12-week series of classes at JFS’ senior day care program and one community-based Mind Sharpener series at JFS. They’ll add the additional levels in the spring and are collecting names and contact information for future classes. Classes meet twice weekly and cost \$20 each — \$480 for the 24-class, 12-week series.

“We’re finding that everyone who took the sample classes here at Jewish Family Services and at JVS are interested in the program for themselves,” said Julie Verriest, JVS manager of senior adult services. “We may find that this is appealing to a much wider audience.”

### **Testing it out**

Open house guests, including representatives from home health care companies, tried the Mind Sharpener activities. They tested their reaction time by quickly following directions called out by a program trainer. The goal was to point to the correct image on a piece of paper with the left, right or both hands. A drawing activity aided visual/spacial skills as guests attempted to sketch the mirror image of an abstract form. The final sample game involved memorizing items mentioned in a written letter and recalling them later by studying a group of images.

“We used to think only children could develop new stem cells in the brain,” said Angela Popoff, cognitive wellness program coordinator at JFS. “We do know now that adults can grow new

brain cells and new stem cells. Research is showing us three key things can help do that. One is physical exercise. No surprise there. The other is socialization.”

Socialization is one way Mind Aerobics is different from other brain training programs, Popoff said. Rather than playing cognitive games alone on a computer, participants tackle the activities in a group setting led by a trained instructor.

“It’s you and a group of people interacting and enjoying yourself with others,” she said. “The third thing is mental challenge. Brain exercise. Doing new and different things, like cognitive training classes.”

### **Retaining benefits**

Citing research from the New England Cognitive Center, Popoff said participants at the Mind Sharpener level retain at least 80 percent of the gains they made for a year after their 24 classes end.

“They also show that people do have an improvement usually in two out of the six areas of cognition. In the other levels of classes they will show improvement, however, in those classes the benefits fall off faster because the brain is more compromised by dementia.”

After trying the Mind Sharpener level activities, Lorine Beattie, owner of Inspire Home Care, of Bloomfield Hills, said she’d consider offering the program to her clients.

“It just adds to the quality of life,” Beattie noted.

“I love all of it,” added Tamara Ragon, R.N., an Inspire Home Care staff member. “I love that they get to socialize while doing this.”

To learn more about upcoming class dates and times, call 248-592-2313 or email [apopoff@jfsdetroit.org](mailto:apopoff@jfsdetroit.org).