

https://lancasteronline.com/news/health/bingocize-blends-bingo-and-exercise-for-a-healthy-dose-of-fun/article_bf5081ec-cfb9-11ec-b6c8-6fb0ff8334bb.html

Bingocize blends bingo and exercise for a healthy dose of fun

MARGARET GATES | Staff Writer

May 11, 2022



From left: Mary Lou Alsentzer, of Willow Valley, Betty and George Aurandt, of Games inside Spooky Nook Sports Monday, May 2, 2022.

BLAINE SHAHAN | Staff Photographer

Editor's note: This story appeared in Senior Living section of the May 11 edition of LNP.

Marie Strait sits alone in a back room of the Elizabethtown Senior Center, a pair of bingo cards in front of her and a laptop by her side. With a collection of blue chips and a magnetic bingo wand at the ready, she listens intently for the numbers and starts marking her card. It seems like a typical round of bingo until number caller Gail Young switches gears:

“Everybody ready for a little dance party?” she asks. “Alexa, play ‘The Twist.’ ”


Strait is now on her feet watching Young and the seven other participants on her laptop screen, moving to the beat of the Chubby Checker classic and following Young’s instructions: “Weight on the front foot, weight on the back foot.” Another participant breaks into song, “Let’s twist again like we did last summer ...”

And just like that, ordinary bingo turns into Bingocize.

Like the name suggests, Bingocize combines exercise, health information and the game of bingo with the goal of helping older adults improve or maintain independence, reduce falls, improve nutrition and stay socially engaged.

The Lancaster County Office of Aging currently offers Bingocize twice a year as part of its free virtual programming. Bingocize also made its in-person debut as a Lancaster Senior Games event this month.

The 10-week workshop, approved through both SNAP-Ed and the National Council on Aging, includes a series of exercises interwoven with periods of rest for calling numbers. If someone wins bingo, a new game begins until all exercises are completed.

 Festoon owner Kathy Frey is fearless in business and style

It's a way to have fun with a favorite senior activity while also improving health.

"Somebody came up with this brilliant idea to combine the two," Young says.

Susan Krasnai, of Mt. Joy, participates in Bingocize during Senior Games inside Spooky Nook Sports Monday, May 2, 2022.

BLAINE SHAHAN | Staff Photographer

A serendipitous start

That somebody was Jason Crandall, an associate professor of exercise science and co-director of the Center for Applied Science in Health & Aging at Western Kentucky University. Crandall calls the creation of Bingocize serendipitous more than anything else.

In 2011, while teaching at Kentucky Wesleyan College, Crandall wanted to prepare physical therapy and occupational therapy students for their future professions, so he tasked them with planning and developing an exercise program for the older residents of a nearby independent living community. The students put up flyers, promoted the program and got excited for it to start.

“The first day, not a soul showed up. They were devastated. ... Everybody was down the hall playing bingo,” Crandall recalls. “It hit me right that very minute: Bingocize.”

The idea was simple: Encourage the residents to do something they didn’t want to do by disguising it with an activity they enjoyed.

Crandall immediately got to work developing a program that incorporated both. The next week, 15 residents showed up to participate.

Soon, Crandall was securing research dollars to do his first study. In 2013, he left Kentucky Wesleyan, a school of about 650 students, for Western Kentucky, with a student population of about 20,000. Working at a larger university allowed him to do

the research and collect the data to take Bingocize from a service-learning project to an evidence-based program approved by the National Council on Aging.

“That’s what propelled it to where it is today,” Crandall says.

Bingocize is now in 43 states and four countries.

“To be honest, people kind of laughed at me. They thought it was kind of silly, especially in academia,” he says. “They don’t laugh too much anymore.”

Certainly, no one is laughing at the results. Crandall’s research has shown improvement in lower body strength and balance, both of which help prevent falls. His colleague, Matthew Shake, a cognitive psychologist, has found improvement in specific aspects of cognition among Bingocize participants. They’ve also seen improvement in patient activation, or someone’s ability to navigate their own health care.

Steady progress

For Marie Strait, the results have been tangible. The 68-year-old Elizabethtown resident usually participates from her home, but she’s completing the last class in this 10-week session at the senior center because she’s having work done at her house. It’s her third time doing the Bingocize program.

“I’m more flexible,” she says. “I have better balance. I feel like I have more energy.”

Each session includes a series of exercises to improve strength, endurance, flexibility and balance. Some are done while sitting, others while standing. Young, a Geri-Fit instructor with the county office of aging, encourages participants to work at their own pace and offers sitting versions of some of the exercises

Senior games attendees participate in Bingocize inside Spooky Nook Sports Monday, May 2, 2022.

BLAINE SHAHAN | Staff Photographer

for those who have trouble standing.

Young has been teaching Bingocize for three years. In the first year, the program was in person, but it switched to virtual with the arrival of COVID-19.

“Because I’ve done it in person, I was really not visualizing it online,” Young says. “I’ll tell you what, it was so great. People had been kind of cooped up. It was a great way for them to connect. They really did form a group and a support system for each other, encouraging each other. It was really amazing to watch it grow.”

Mary Ann Hess, 77, of East Petersburg, says she tried other exercise programs offered by the office of aging before discovering Bingocize.

“The idea of playing bingo enticed me into it,” she says. “The exercises are fantastic, and the bingo is fun.”

Hess also likes the convenience — and the accountability — of doing Bingocize via Zoom.

“If it’s rainy or ugly outside I don’t have to go out of the house. It’s right there,” she says. “There’s no excuse for not doing it.”

Classes are held twice a week, and the workout intensifies gradually. At the beginning of the 10-week session, participants do each exercise for 20 seconds. By the end, they’ve worked their way up to a minute. Young also challenges her students to continue the exercises on their off days.

Strait does her exercises while watching TV at night and happily reports that she no longer misses the end of a show due to falling asleep.

“(Marie) usually has at least 20 total times that she’s done her whole sheet,” Young says. “She’s made amazing progress.”

Hess says she can easily get in her reps in the time it takes to cook her potatoes.

“I can see the strengthening,” she says. “One of the hateful exercises is sitting and standing up. When I started I could barely do it, now I can keep up. ... It’s a life skill. You have to be able to stand up.”

The Bingocize program includes an education option as well, so instructors can choose to offer exercise only, exercise and fall prevention, or exercise and nutrition education.

Crandall says he is looking to expand the program for people with different disabilities. He’s also hoping to add an educational option focusing on sexual health for older adults.

A winning combination

It should come as no surprise that an activity that involves exercise AND bingo isn’t all work and no play. Crandall says he and his colleagues are just starting to measure the social engagement benefits of the program.

“I like the people, I like all the camaraderie, and I love Gail,” says Katie Cooper, 81, of Manheim. “It’s been just a joy to be able to each Thursday or Monday ... set some time aside for Bingocize.”

Among the participants, there’s some good-natured kidding around, too.

As Strait and the other virtual Bingocizers complete a balance exercise with their eyes closed, it’s time for a dance party again, this one to the tune of “Stayin’ Alive.”

Another participant pipes up: “Ironically, if somebody’s having a heart attack, that’s the song you do CPR to.”

“No one’s going to have one on my watch,” Young says.

Susan Krasnai, of Mt. Joy, let, and Wayne Keene, of Mt. Joy, participate in Bingocize during Senior Games inside Spooky Nook Sports Monday, May 2, 2022.

BLAINE SHAHAN | Staff Photographer

When the Bee Gees song ends, it's time for more bingo. With the call of the next number, Strait shouts, "Bingo!" The win earns her one bingo buck. With nine more she'll get a \$10 gift card.

"If you win Bingocize, everybody cheers," Hess says.

Bingocize seems to be producing a lot of winners — no matter where the chips land on their bingo cards.

VIRTUAL CONNECTIONS

Bingocize is one of a variety of classes offered through the Lancaster County Office of Aging's virtual senior center, LCOA Virtual Connections.

Lancaster County residents who are 60 and older can join the virtual program to connect with other seniors while playing games, creating art, taking up a musical instrument or learning new information.

Classes include acrylic painting, watercolors, oil pastels, craft projects, ukulele, hand drumming, keyboards, Zumba, Pilates, kickboxing, trivia, Family Face Off, Outburst, bingo, "Wheel of Fortune," chess, technology, chair exercises and more.

Participants can get musical instruments on loan and pick up craft supplies at the closest senior center.

LCOA Virtual Connections is offered Monday through Friday. All classes are free. Participants must have reliable internet service, a computer, laptop or a tablet and Zoom downloaded on the device.

For more information or to register, contact Debbie Groff at Lancaster County Office of Aging at 717-299-7979 or dgroff@co.lancaster.pa.us. Staff will give participants step-by-step guidance on how to use the portal to enter classes, access the schedule and preregister for classes.



Willow Valley resident Dottie Giersch has students lining up for her line dancing class

Tags

Bingocize

Office Of Aging

Bingo

