



Journey to Health: connecting seniors through virtual exercise and health programs

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Overview

Since 2007 On Lok 30th Street Senior Center has offered high quality exercise and preventive health programs for older adults and adults with disabilities in San Francisco.

In March 2020, three weeks after the mandated shelter in place due to COVID-19 pandemic, the Health Promotion (HP) team adapted programs virtually in English/Spanish/Chinese to serve the multicultural community and break isolation. Below we summarize the strategies that we use:

- a) to create engaging and high-quality online classes
- b) to train seniors in the use of technology and access of virtual classes
- c) to support participants to fight isolation and improve their health management.

Programs description

The **On Lok Always Active** program is a multi-component group exercise class that incorporates aerobics, balance, flexibility, and strength using hand weights and resistance bands. **Format:** Drop-in classes, participants can join the class at any moment. Daily classes online, and in person classes. Program started at the center in 2007.

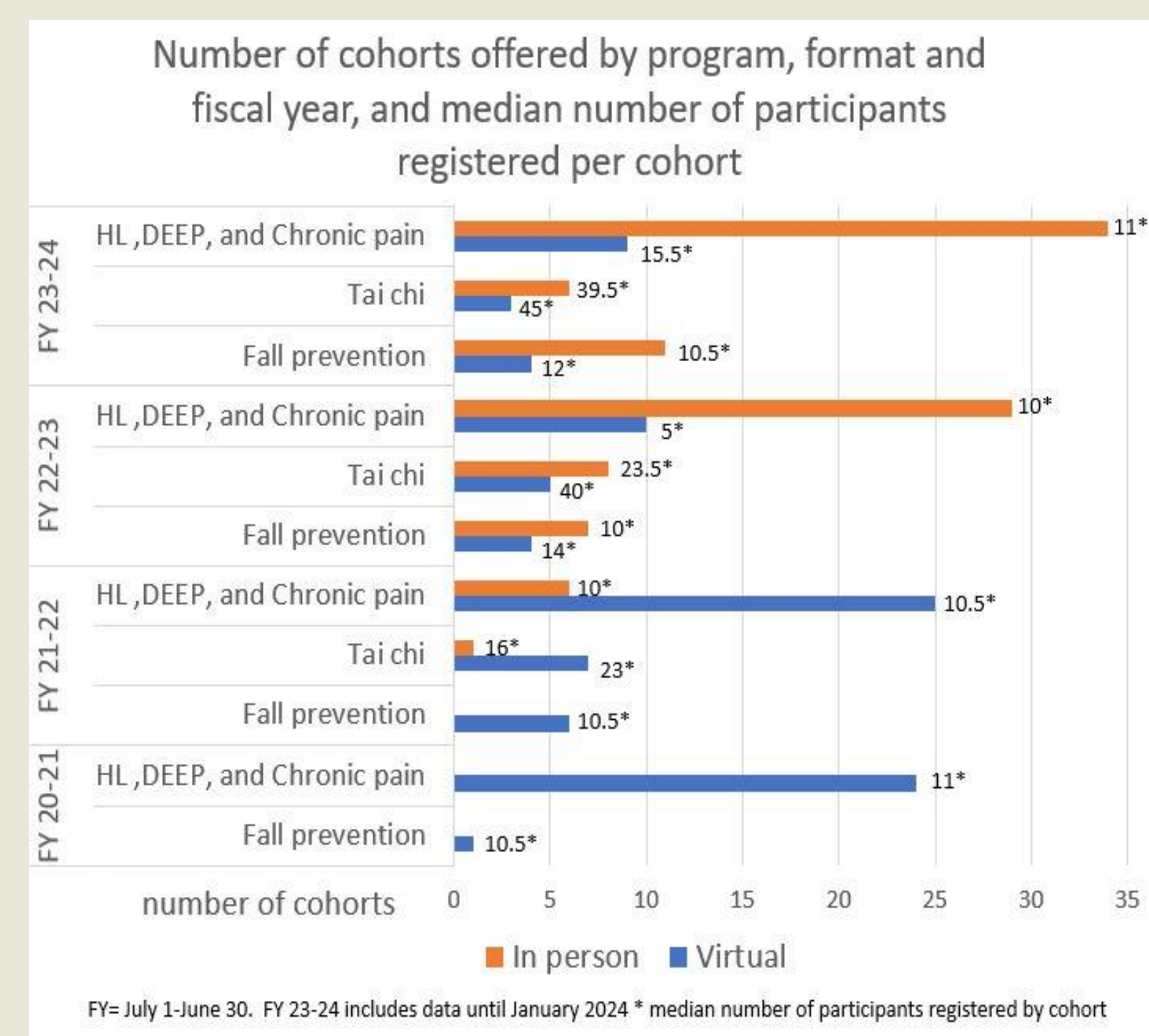
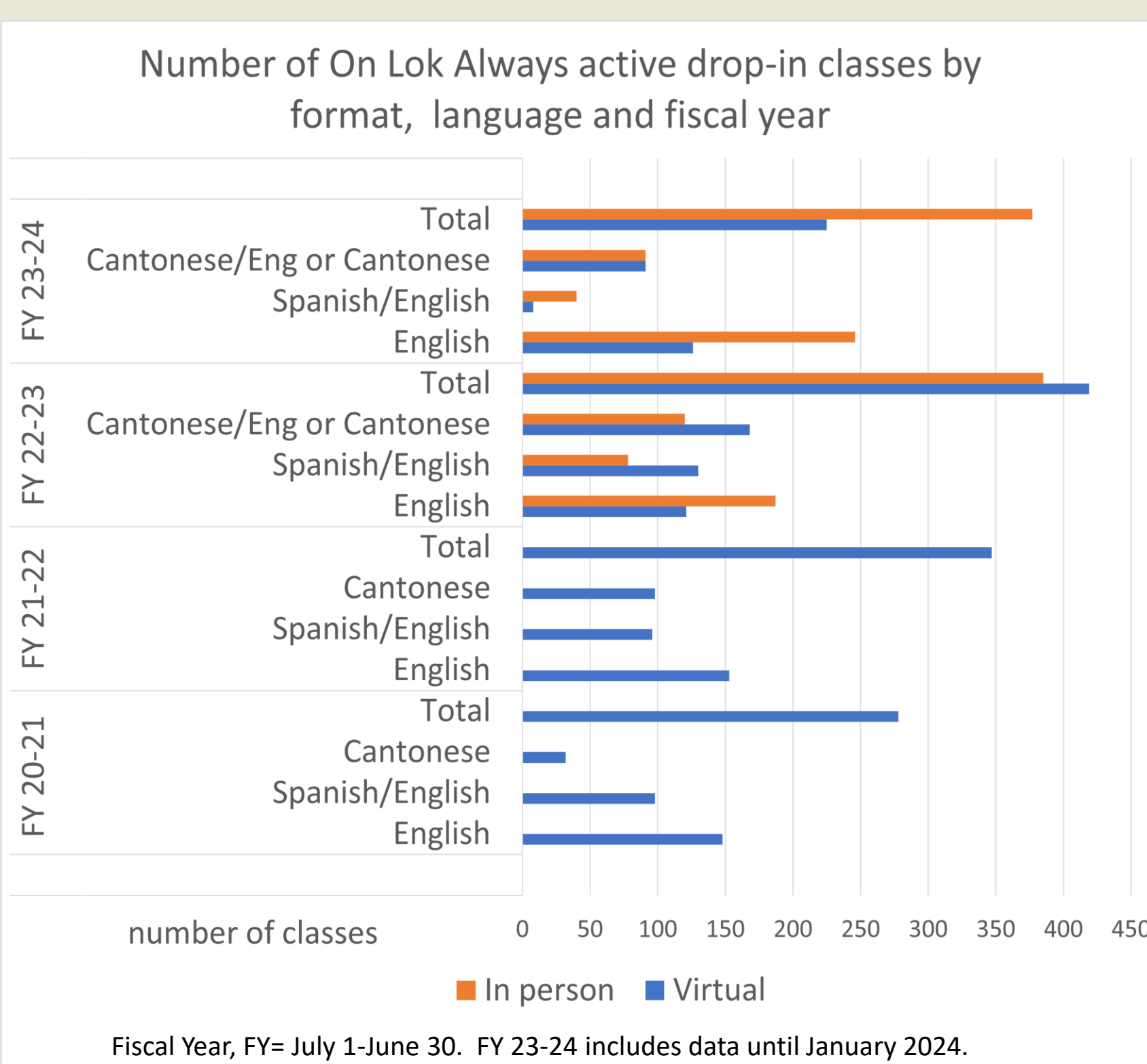
Tai Chi for fall prevention and arthritis is an evidence-based program that improves balance and decreases arthritis symptoms. The curriculum of the classes is based on Sun Tai-chi Style and was modified by Dr. Lam from the Tai-chi for Health Institute. **Format:** cohort program, 10 weeks, 1-hour class, 2 weekly. Program started at the center in 2021.

Fall Prevention program is a progressive group exercise program designed to lower risk of falls. Exercises focus on lower extremity strength, standing static and dynamic balance and gait enhancement. **Format:** cohort program, 12-week, 1-hour class, 2 weekly. Program started at the center in 2007.

The **Diabetes Empowerment Education Program (DEEP)** is a workshop developed by the University of Illinois at Chicago that helps older adults with diabetes or pre-diabetes manage their condition by understanding main concepts and concrete actions to improve their well-being. **Format:** six-week program, 2-hour class, 1 weekly. Program started at the center in 2017.

Healthier Living (HL) is a workshop developed by the Self-Management Resource Center (SMRC) to help adults self-manage their chronic health conditions. Participants learn to manage ongoing health conditions by using mind-body tools, communicating with medical providers. **Format:** six-week, 2-hour class, 1 weekly. Program started at the center in 2010.

Chronic Pain Self-Management Program is a workshop developed by the SMRC to help adults self-manage their chronic pain conditions. Participants learn to live a healthy life with chronic pain by practicing the Moving Easy Program of gentle exercises, better breathing, mind-body awareness. **Format:** six-week, 2-hour class, 1 weekly. Program started at the center in 2022.



Acknowledgements

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How did we create engaging online classes?

High quality sound

- Sound mixer (Behringer, Xenyx 802)
- Microphones (Kimafun®)
- Music Software (Power Music NOW®) to access music with adjustable BPM
- Training of staff in equipment use

High quality image

- Camera with high definition image, software with flip image capability for zoom users (Logitech PTZ PRO2)
- Green rubber flooring and curtains
- Professional lights (Fovitec Classic 3-Light Studio Kit)
- Ethernet direct connection
- Software to download background images (Istock)



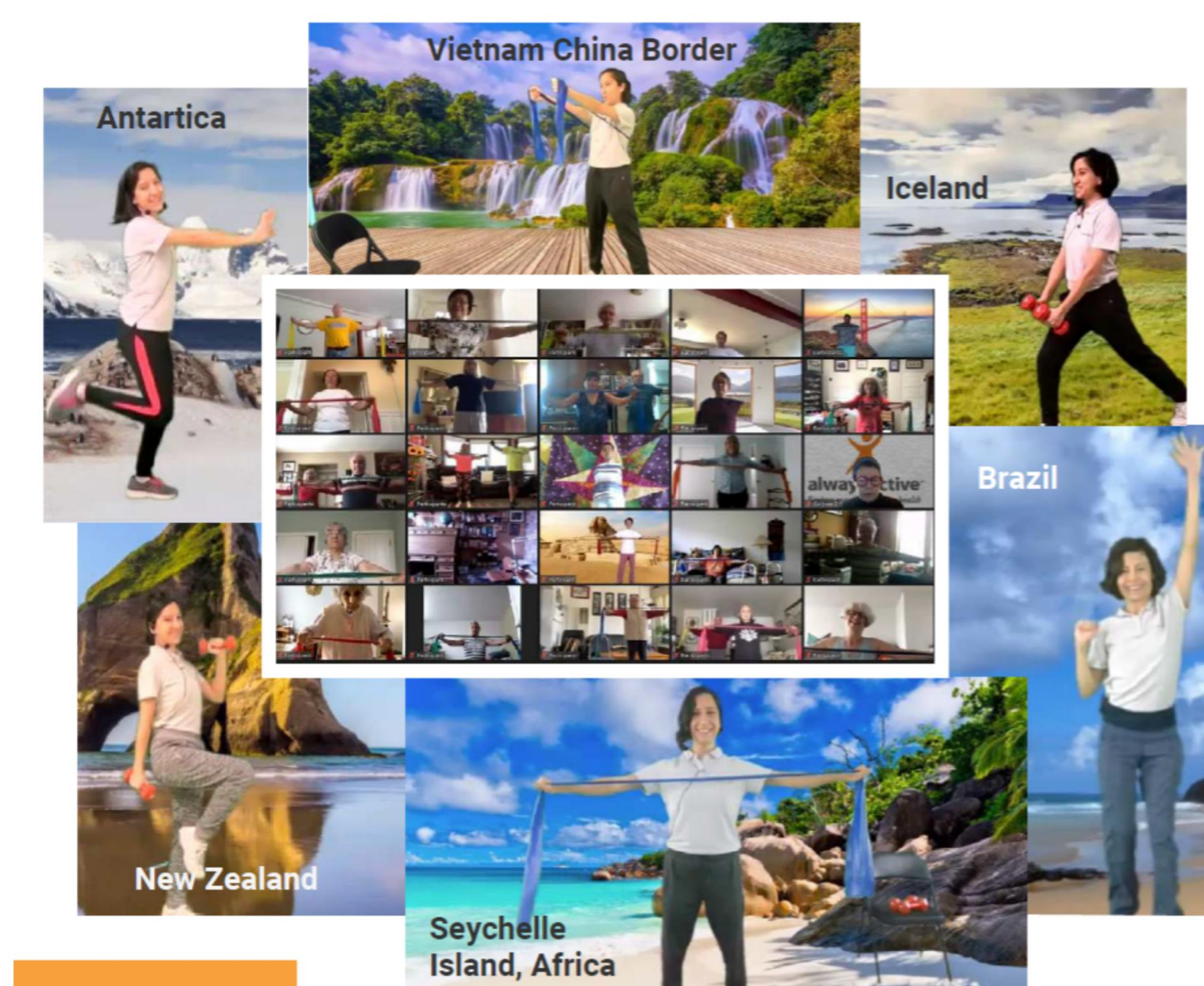
Certified instructors leading programs

- High number of certified instructors teaching in each program: On Lok Always active (8-11 instructors), Tai chi (3-5 instructors), HL (3-21 leaders), DEEP (7-15 leaders), and Chronic pain (9-12 leaders)

Partnership with community organizations

- Our programs were offered through different senior centers, and community organizations, targeting seniors who speak different languages and have specific needs

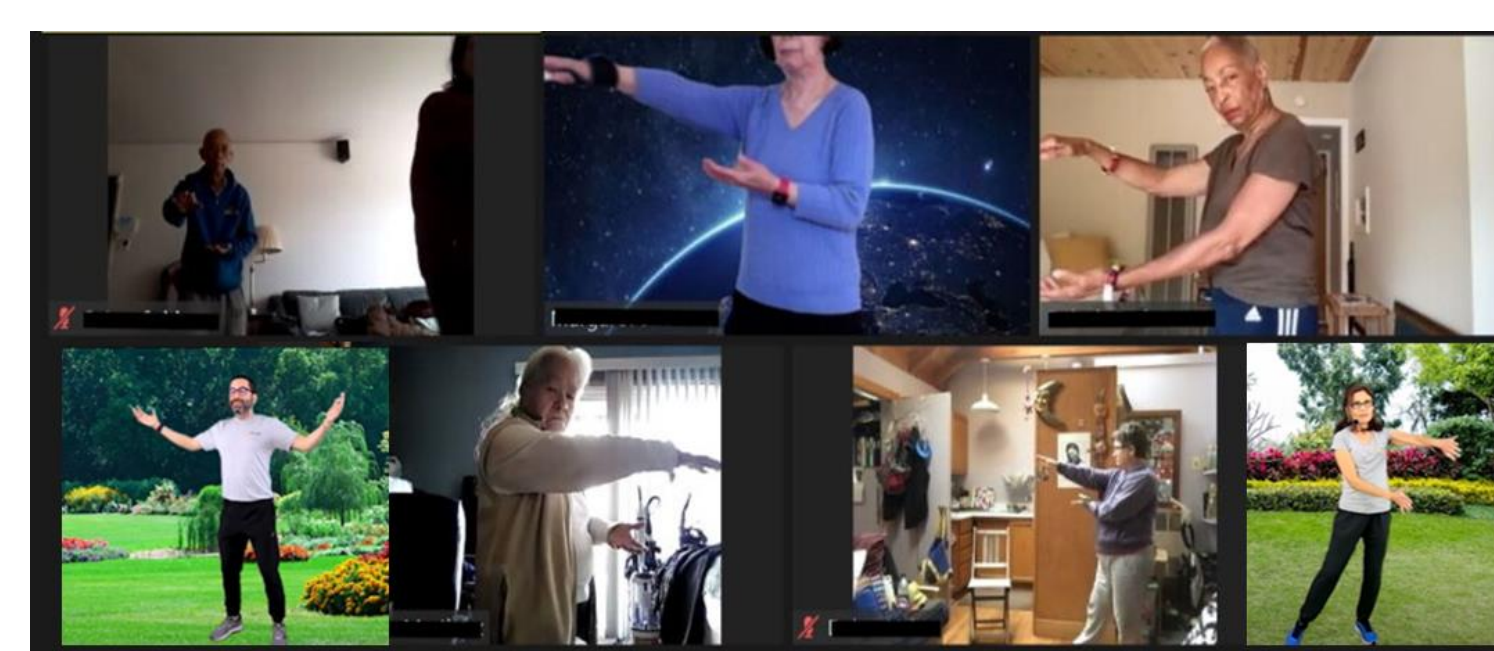
On Lok Always Active online classes with virtual backgrounds



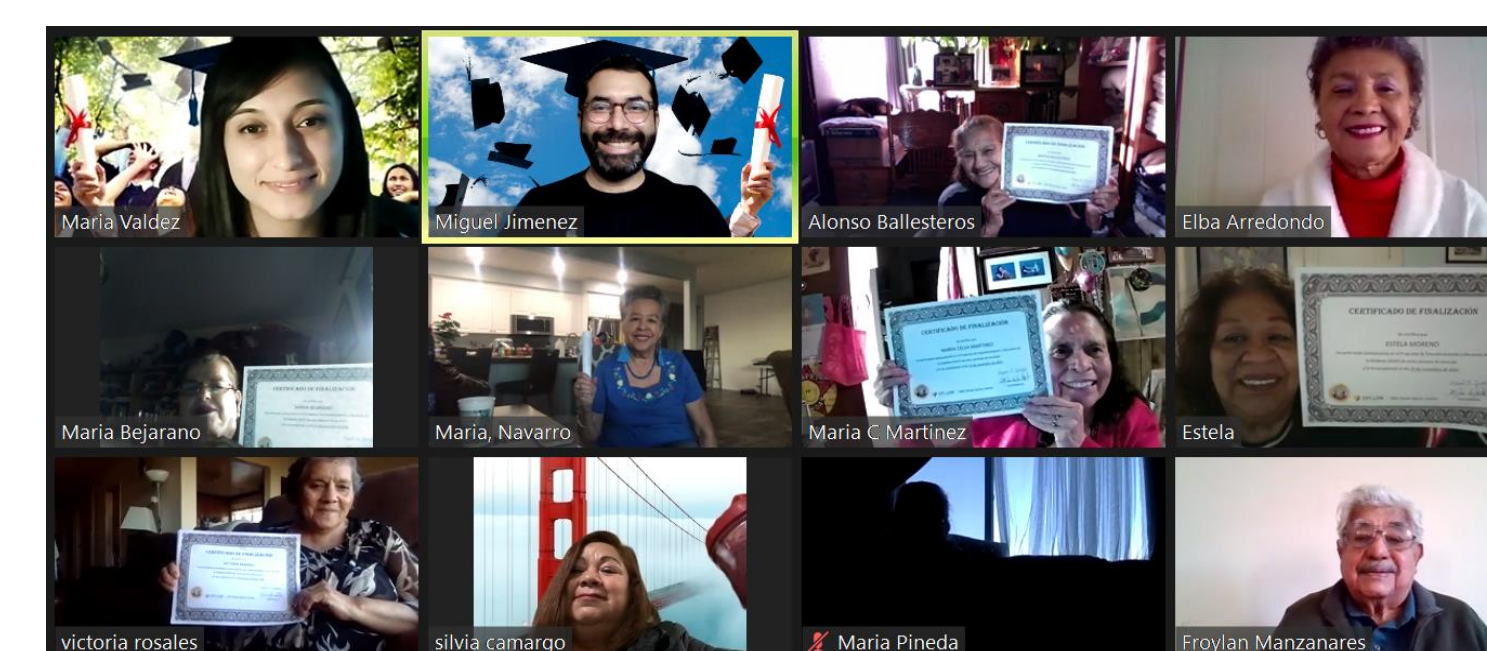
How did we support technology use? Reducing isolation

- One-on-one training by phone to participants to install zoom and access online classes in Spanish, English, and Cantonese
- "Health hour", talks between HP staff and participants to promote workshops and teach zoom use
- Weekly emails with information on how to access the class by zoom, and links to zoom tutorials
- Mailing of elastic bands and health workbooks
- HP staff member was assigned as "tech support" during zoom classes to call participants if they experienced problems
- Weekly reminder calls about the workshop schedules

- Time allowed for socialization before each class. Interaction between participants who lived in different parts of the city
- Greeted every participant by name, allowed for introductions to each other and their pet companions
- Conversations about the background featured in the class
- Virtual celebration of birthdays at the end of the month
- Sharing of videos created by HP staff to mark important holidays



Participants at a tai chi on-line class



Diabetes workshop graduation

Participants testimonials:

"A person told me about Always Active. That saved the day! The excellent exercise in combination with the sense of community the virtual program provides has become essential to me." (2021)

"I look forward to expanding my tai chi practice, and hope On Lok will continue to offer it on-line. The instructor was easy to understand and follow, and her set-up (room, camera, lighting, and sound) was pleasant." (2023)

Lessons learned

HP staff responded promptly to the COVID-19 shelter-in place mandate by adapting the existing programs curriculum to the online format. Online and hybrid programs continue to have high demand among our participants, up to 60% prefer online programming.

HP staff modified the curriculum to offer activities and use of props online, trained workshop leaders to transition their teaching skills online, and implemented 1:1 follow up sessions to support them. Exercise leaders adapted the teaching curriculum to address fitness levels. They increased verbal and physical cues, lowered and modified intensity levels, adapted teaching curriculum to address fitness levels in both Always Active and Fall Prevention.

HP staff implemented simplified data tracking by using online tools such as google sheets and mind-body software to complete registrations, assessments, surveys, and attendance sheets. They provided this format to participants and site partners to align monthly reports.