

ICAA Champion: introducing Dayna Stoddart



Dayna Stoddart assesses a Ballantrae resident's aerobic endurance using the Senior Fitness Test. Image courtesy of Dayna Stoddart

In 2011, the International Council on Active Aging® launched ICAA's Changing the Way We Age® Campaign to promote positive views of aging and the value of aging actively. ICAA Champions serve as role models and advocates.

"Exercise is medicine has been my platform for many, many years," says self-described fitness fanatic Dayna Stoddart. After studying kinesiology for two years at the University of Guelph, Stoddart earned a bachelor's degree in physical therapy at the University of Western Ontario, Canada. She spent the next 10 years as a licensed physical therapist in long-term care as well as other healthcare settings in Chicago, Illinois. These years heavily influenced her career.

"I was frustrated observing the vicious cycle of repeat hospitalizations and long-term placement due to poor lifestyle choices, inactivity and overprescription of medications," Stoddart comments. Witnessing the impact of lifestyle on her patients' health and quality of life, she was profoundly affected when her beloved

grandmother went down the same path. "It sparked my passion to promote healthy lifestyle behaviors and disease prevention strategies as we age," she shares.

When Stoddart returned to Canada in 2004, the time was right for a career transition. "I was ready to take on a proactive role," she states. The opportunity arose at Ballantrae Golf and Country Club (BGCC), a gated active-adult lifestyle community in Stouffville, north of Toronto, where she became recreation director at the BGCC Recreation Centre. The position has since evolved into wellness director, and Stoddart mentions that her vision for this role initially led her to join ICAA.

The Ballantrae community is also evolving. Stoddart explains that first-stage homeowners are now advanced ages (80s and 90s), with more cognitive issues and life-partner losses occurring; new homeowners are largely Boomers, many of whom still work. Through her efforts, Stoddart aims to increase everyone's awareness of the value of a healthy, active-aging lifestyle—a message she emphasizes as an ICAA Individual Champion.

"Active aging is being autonomous for our health, no matter our chronological age," Stoddart comments. "The more healthy-lifestyle choices we incorporate into our day-to-day life, the more we can decrease risks of chronic disease, which impacts our quality of life and our biological age." She adds, "Active aging also means doing things that feed our soul or that we are passionate about and bring us joy, as well as having a positive mindset."

Stoddart says that, as wellness director, she strives "to offer a variety of programs that will optimize the health and well-being of all Ballantrae residents, no matter their level of ability. Offering programs that are inclusive of all wellness dimensions is key."

Each quarter, the BGCC Recreation Centre publishes a Lifestyle Guide created by Stoddart, which outlines upcoming well-

ness programs, activities and events. To help residents better understand the benefits of embracing an active lifestyle that supports wellness, she features messages about health and wellness in the guide, along with resident testimonials describing the impact of specific programs. The lifestyle message is also part of her complimentary assessments, fitness room orientations and group classes.

Other avenues that Stoddart uses to inspire residents include her "Health and Wellness" column in *Home on The Green*, a community-oriented magazine produced by residents; and Active Aging Week®, the annual ICAA-led health promotion campaign for which she plans and delivers local events. Stoddart also showcases "role models who have the 'can do' spirit and go after their passions." When residents share stories about continuing to pursue their passions, "the message stands strong and clear that age is just a number."

Stoddart's natural affinity with older adults fuels her passion to change society's perceptions of aging. A close relationship with her grandparents, especially her grandmother, gave her "a special appreciation for the wisdom and experience of older adults," she says. At Ballantrae, Stoddart feels at home and fulfilled in her work. "The residents and community inspire me," she states. "So do my parents—they are extremely positive role models."

The active-aging advocate reveals that her father plays hockey, golf and tennis ("He's the president of BGCC's Tennis Club," she says), and her mother takes daily walks and does regular cardio and strength training. "Their biological ages are definitely many years younger," Stoddart shares. "I love that my three children are witnessing firsthand that age really is just a number." 🍷

Thanks to Atria Senior Living, founding partner of ICAA's Changing the Way We Age® Campaign, for supporting the ICAA Champions program. Visit www.changingthewayweage.com to enroll.