



**Organization**

Giving Back®

**Program**

Giving Back® Fall Prevention Project

**Partners**

Kaunoa Senior Services  
Maui District Health Office

**We tend to think of people** over 65 as being alike—we call them all “seniors.” In fact, seniors are a very diverse group. There are 65-year-old seniors and 95-year-old seniors—and because individuals age very differently, there’s no telling which of them will be more alert and energetic. Genes matter, of course, but lifestyle choices also play a big part in how one ages.

Giving Back® Fall Prevention Project works on the assumption that staying socially engaged and physically active are key to making one’s sunset years vital and rich. Giving Back® recruits and trains active seniors to mentor frail, at-risk elders in movement exercises that enhance balance, vision, coordination and cognitive functions. In general, the frail elders set the pace, with mentors adapting the movements to fit the level and capabilities of participants in the program.

Kaunoa Senior Services refers frail elders to the Fall Prevention Project’s movement classes at 16 different community meal sites it operates on the island of Maui. The Maui District Health Office provides funding and independent evaluations of the project.

The project keeps active mentors healthy and engaged in their communities, and gives frail elders an effective way to prevent injuries due to falls, which are the leading cause of fatalities and injury-related hospitalizations among Hawaii residents age 65 and older. All the seniors involved benefit and have the opportunity to make new friends and have fun together.

Giving Back® Fall Prevention Project currently serves 750 seniors. It has been shown to improve balance, coordination, focus, concentration and memory, all of which help prevent injuries. Giving Back® has published a training manual for Fall Prevention Project mentors and aims to open four new project sites each year for the next three years. Giving Back®’s goal is to replicate the program in Hawaii and the mainland U.S.

“Our society worships youth and discards the elderly. I’d like to see that change,” says Karen Peterson, founder and executive director of Giving Back®. “This program is about honoring our elders, keeping them healthy and fit so they can *give back* their gifts to the community.”