The start of a new semester usually means meeting new people, but a team of dietetic students didn’t expect to make over two dozen new friends, all old enough to be their grandparents. But several months and one figurative trip around the world later, that’s exactly what happened.

Twelve Utah State University dietetic students created and implemented a health and wellness program at a Logan retirement center as a part of their capstone projects. Twice a month during spring semester the students visited their “grandfriends” at the Williamsburg Retirement Community and taught topics relating to self-care and longevity. The students were led by Tamara Steinitz, a professional practice professor in the Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Sciences Department.

“I jumped at the chance to lead this project because it teaches the students practical skills while also giving back to the community,” Steinitz said.

Titled “Living Life in the Blue Zones,” the presentations focused on the lifestyle and the environment of the places where the longest-lived people are found. With inspiration from towns designated as “Blue Zones” like Sardinia, Italy, and Okinawa, Japan, the students taught about the habits and diets that lead to longer, healthier lives. The “grandfriends” had the chance to practice relaxation and mindfulness techniques, discuss the importance of having a “tribe,” practice creativity and sample food from around the world.

“What these students are teaching fits perfectly with our mission of health and wellness here,” said Rachel Bott, the recreation therapy director at the Williamsburg Retirement Community. “We always look forward to having them visit us. They’ve really instilled a sense of community here.”