



Small Business Worksite Wellness in Indiana



The places where we live, learn, work, and play influence how we eat and move. Indiana ranks high on the obesity scales in the United States, with adults leading the charge. In 2011, two-thirds of Indiana's adult population was considered overweight or obese. For decades, people have received education on how to make healthier decisions. However, education can only go so far if the environments, as well as policies, do not support healthy behaviors. For example, if an employee is trying to be healthier, but the worksite only has unhealthy food options available in the cafeteria and the stairs to access the cafeteria are not clearly marked, the employee is not encouraged to make healthier choices.

Problem and Background

Despite many challenges, worksites present an ideal venue to create lasting changes, including improving health and preventing overweight, obesity, and other chronic diseases, for Hoosier adults. Adults spend a significant portion of their day at work. In 2010, approximately 2.9 million people were employed in Indiana. Some of Indiana's largest employers include manufacturing, government and government enterprises, retail trade, and health care/social assistance.

To help improve their bottom line, employers are finding that implementing obesity prevention strategies can lead to reduced health care costs, lower absenteeism, and increased productivity. They see the multiple benefits that can come from having a successful wellness program that includes policies, environmental supports, and activities. Even small businesses (2-100 full-time employees), which often face a lack of resources and personnel, are finding the ways and means to have a successful employee wellness program.

Successful Solutions in Indiana

Valley Screen Processing in Mishawaka/South Bend started a wellness council in early 2012 that consisted of 6 employees meeting monthly to discuss activities for wellness challenges, policy changes, and suggestions from other employees. This evolved into a formal wellness program. A walking challenge was implemented in May of 2012, in which the wellness council posted a map in the break room and marked progress each week. Instead of a planned Bike to Work Week Promotion, Valley Screen purchased a bike rack for employees who can ride to work. Most employees embraced the new wellness program. A few people did express negative comments, stating that they were "pushing" too much wellness. However, the positives far outweighed the negatives.

King Mechanical Specialties in Evansville created a formal "No-Smoking Policy" in early 2012. They had been participating in a pilot wellness program funded by the Welborn Foundation that included monthly meetings with a wellness nurse, screenings, and tobacco cessation education and aids. They also began paying half the cost of a gym membership for employees who wished to join a gym. The no-smoking policy was implemented when they introduced their wellness program, as was the offer of paying a portion of gym membership costs. The goal was to promote healthier habits among the employees, reduce absenteeism, and increase productivity.

In 2012, two of five employees that had smoked have stopped. Also, five employees have taken advantage of the discounted gym memberships. In early 2013, King Mechanical converted a small storage room into a fitness room that includes free weights, kettle bells, an upright bicycle, and other accessories. The feedback on other aspects of the program has been positive, such as communication and promotional methods. Both management and employees have followed through on their promise to continue the program.

The Area IV Area Agency on Aging in Lafayette started a Healthy Food Sharing program in early 2012, in which they served a healthy breakfast at the quarterly all-staff

meetings, which the employees really enjoyed. In the fall of 2012, they conducted a nine-week 'better weight' challenge for staff. Thirty staff participated in the challenge, which included individual fitness evaluations, a weekly health and nutrition newsletter, tracking of successes, incentives, and an end-of-challenge celebration. The staff wrote letters of appreciation, smiled a lot, and self-reported their successes. Area IV also created a policy that birthday celebrations must include a healthy snack choice. The staff had positive feedback and loved the fresh fruit choices.

Importance of Partnerships

Partnerships can greatly enhance any wellness program. Valley Screen partners with IU Health Goshen and participates in their Get Fit, Get Healthy Campaign which tracks points for healthy behaviors. King Mechanical partnered with the Welborn Foundation in their area to provide some of the funding for tobacco cessation, screenings, and a wellness nurse. Also, by partnering with a local fitness center, worksites can provide discounted rates on gym memberships in return for

advertising on materials or even to generate more memberships and community engagement. Since small businesses are often looking for the best return on investment, partnering with other organizations can expand wellness offerings in the worksite.

Future Directions

A major concern of wellness coordinators is the sustainability of activities and the wellness program itself—how to keep employees engaged, interested, and involved. That is not always easy, but that's another benefit of partnerships. Creating a sustainability plan from the beginning, either with funding or keeping abreast of employee feedback, can be very helpful. Also, short, intermediate, and long-term goals can help sustain the program.

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned by these small businesses include having patience, as building a wellness program with a small employee base takes time. Evaluating successes and failures can be important in moving forward. One business stated how important it is to let participants in the wellness program make the decision to participate at their own pace, a strategy which they believed

improved their rate of success. Other lessons learned included being mindful of the worksite culture changing, continuing to encourage and remind staff regularly, and to not be afraid to ask permission to make changes.

Tips for Success

"We are providing a healthy breakfast at our quarterly staff meetings and offering a healthy snack choice for our birthday celebrations. We have had positive feedback from the staff in giving them healthy options." Pattie Hall, Area IV Agency on Aging

For More Information

Please contact:
Michele Jurkaites, Valley Screen Processing,
Michelej@valleyscreen.com

Madonna Yancey, King Mechanical Specialties,
Madonna.yancey@gmail.com

Pattie Hall, Area IV Agency on Aging,
Phall@areaivagency.org

Or visit:

The Indiana Healthy Weight Initiative:
www.inhealthyweight.org



Indiana State
Department of Health