

Creating Workplace Wellness: Session S3, Saturday, April 18 2009

By Natalie Fouquette.

An organizational focus on employee wellness benefits workers and employers, as healthy employees enjoy higher levels of workplace engagement and morale, increased productivity, and reduced absenteeism. In this session, Jennifer Douglas and Earla Legault, both employees of the Fraser Valley Regional Library, presented some of their organization's wellness initiatives.

Jennifer and Earla work on FVRL's Wellness in the Workplace subcommittee of the Occupational Health and Safety Committee. They selected 7 types of workplace wellness on which to focus: Physical, Occupational, Social, Intellectual, Emotional, Psychological and Spiritual Wellness. A workplace wellness strategy should ideally find ways to address all seven kinds of wellness.

The speakers gave FVRL's Alive program as an example of an organizationally supported employee wellness initiative. Employee participants record daily fitness activities, and at landmark accumulations of hours they submit their activity logs to receive incentive prizes. The program encourages fitness and regular, balanced amounts of exercise and helps employees build activity into their daily lives. Session participants looked at the different incentives offered in the program, from water bottles and pedometers to clothing. Demonstrated benefits of FVRL's Alive program include a reduction in the use of employee sick days and an increase in employee buy-in and participation over the 5 years the program has been offered.

Employee wellness programs do not have to feature expensive rewards or big programs to be effective. In the last part of the session, the participants discussed wellness initiatives that they could realistically create and sustain in their own organizations. Many of the resulting ideas could be put in place with ease, with minimal or no expense.

Participant ideas for wellness initiatives:

- Create a *Wellness Incentive Program* with rewards like pedometers and water bottles
- Mark walking routes near work and keep track of the distance
- Ask your municipality for staff fitness discounts at your local leisure centre
- *Staff Development Day* – include wellness workshops as part of the agenda
- Include staff in planning for a new library or renovations
- Plan monthly *Fun Days* - potlucks, 'bring your dog to work' day
- Offer tea with treats after each long weekend - it can be a busy and enjoyable shift to work
- Bring a cake for your birthday to share with staff
- Create secret staff appreciation opportunities
- Hold a 7-minute meeting each morning – communicate the day's activities to staff
- Building trust with management – create a 'we' environment
- Hang *Catch a Star* and/or *Funnies* bulletin boards in the staff room
- Offer a *True Colours* personality type awareness workshop
- Find opportunities to offer mini wellness workshops such as yoga and meditation
- Encourage staff to volunteer together.

Participants in the *Creating Workplace Wellness* workshop took with them new ideas for inspiring a healthy workplace in their organization.

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