

## Changing behaviour to reduce sick time

**HEALTH/WELLNESS PROGRAM AWARD  
(<1,000 EMPLOYEES): DUFFERIN CHILD  
AND FAMILY SERVICES**

A few years ago, Jennifer Moore, manager of HR and organizational development at Dufferin Child and Family Services (DCFS), noticed a spike in casual and short-term sick leaves among the agency's 80 employees. "In any given year, about 12% of our staff were off on short-term sick leave," she says. "This is a small organization, so you really notice when staff are away."

Moore realized that it was time to tackle the issue of workplace wellness and hired Employee Wellness Solutions Network (EWSNetwork) in 2009 to facilitate and co-ordinate the program. An internal wellness committee made up of volunteers from various DCFS departments sat down with EWSNetwork to design a wellness program based on feedback from on-site health consultants and the wellness committee and results from an employee health risk assessment. With the goal of optimizing healthy behavioural change, the program was designed to take various learning approaches into consideration such as individual meetings and group participation.

For the past two years, DCFS employees have had access to free 30-minute individual wellness appointments—with monthly follow-up appointments—to discuss a range of issues, from customized meal plans to exercise prescriptions and stress management strategies. Group initiatives include lunchtime seminars on healthy eating and exercise classes. To raise health and wellness awareness, the agency now holds health fairs, demonstrations, walk-arounds and challenges for staff. "We reach even more people through our virtual initiatives, which include monthly newsletters, monthly wellness challenges, recipe campaigns and email campaigns,"

says Moore. "I get comments all the time from people who say they love getting the emails.

"Although some people were enthusiastic, we also got a lot of questions about why we wanted to spend money on wellness," she continues. "But it was a conscious decision that we were able to back up with a business case one year after implementation. At the time, we'd had a 17% funding cut from the government, and we had to look carefully at everything we were spending money on. We emphasized that keeping people at work and engaged is really important."

In an environment like DCFS, stress can be a major issue. "It's challenging, and people often find it hard to carve out time for themselves," Moore says. "Our program gives them permission to look after themselves, and participation has continued to grow each year. We plan to continue to offer more variety."

The results are impressive: staff now take fewer sick days, short-term disability rates are down, and risk factors related to fitness, nutrition, stress and weight are noticeably reduced. Over time, more people have shifted from just thinking about changing their behaviour to actually practising and managing healthy behaviour.

"Even smaller organizations like ours can focus on wellness," says Moore. "It's been really important for us to make the connection between our agency's values and the wellness program. We recognize the need to care for our employees, and this is one way we can accomplish this." ❁



JENNIFER MOORE

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