

Jackson County's proACTIVE Wellness Initiative

Being overweight has hit the majority. 55.5% of the Wisconsin population is considered either overweight or obese. Unfortunately, making lifestyle changes to reduce obesity-related and chronic illnesses is becoming more difficult to fit into some of our daily schedules. Jackson County recognizes that strategies and approaches to overcome preventable health problems can not be developed and implemented by health agencies alone. *It takes an entire community to effect change.* This article summarizes a community initiative that has successfully incorporated the hospital, public health agency, school district and local businesses to build and launch a worksite wellness program that is making a difference. The employers have proven to be an effective agency to encourage healthy lifestyles within Jackson County's rural community. Long-term goals of the initiative include reducing the costs of health care and health insurance premiums to businesses and increasing productivity through healthier employees.

Stemming from Jackson County Public Health's CRUNCH Campaign Committee, a partnership between community health agencies formed to research community wellness needs in 2005. Through this initiative, current behavioral patterns related to nutrition and physical activities were identified. Data was gathered regarding existing wellness behaviors and strategies were developed to promote physical activity and healthy eating. More than 20% of the working population noted no current physical activity with slightly more than 50% of those surveyed not achieving the recommended level of exercise. Results also showed that time, energy, and childcare were most often cited as deterrents to maintaining good wellness habits. In conclusion, programming to accommodate the working population and work-site wellness programs were two of the five needs identified with this initiative.

Strong Rural Communities Initiative Partnership

Because of the findings from the community wellness initiative, the partners were determined to focus on worksites. In 2006, the collaborating partners sought additional members, became the ***proACTIVE Wellness Initiative***, and applied for implementation funds under the direction of Black River Memorial Hospital (BRMH) and the Wisconsin Office of Rural Health (WORH). WORH funded three rural county initiatives: Jackson, Hayward, and Sauk Counties. With these funds, each initiative targeted worksite populations to develop worksite wellness programs. Each was invited to take part in the Strong Rural Communities Initiative (SRCI) so that we might compare our findings, successes, and failures to better encompass and encourage worksite wellness initiatives in rural areas.

Jackson County's ***proACTIVE Wellness Initiative*** designed two unique wellness programs. D&S Manufacturing and Black River Falls School District were the business partners and were prominently engaged in design, implementation, and evaluation of the programs. The planning partners developed nine health and wellness programs which were held at the worksite, providing education and interactive learning opportunities with ongoing goals and objectives for participants. A third site, Hart Tie & Lumber, operated as the control in this project and was instrumental in determining if immediate improvements or changes in behavior were imminent - initial and follow up health risk assessments were performed with no intervention implemented.

In addition to the pre-established CRUNCH Campaign Committee, ***proACTIVE Wellness Initiative Committee members*** have been dedicated to bringing their expertise to the table to make this project a success. Black River Memorial Hospital's Therapy Department provided input for fitness education and programs; Ho-Chunk Nation Department of Health's Nutritional Services Department provided input for nutritional components; BRMH's ER Nurse Manager and Employee Health Coordinator along with Jackson County's Public Health Department provided expertise for the Health Risk Assessments, Screenings and Programming Sessions; a Worksite Wellness Coordinator has assisted in coordinating the project, evaluating and coaching participants for program adherence; BRMH's Business Development Manager has been extensively involved, developing many of the programs and processes, assessing data, and overseeing the activities and progress of the program; the three participating employers allowed employees to participate on work time and committed to assist with

the design and implementation of the program; an outsourced clinical lab and data compilation agency was utilized for the Health Risk Assessments (Healics®); and an outside wellness consultant provided additional resources.

Involvement of the business community and the long-term potential to reduce health care costs was a particular emphasis of this project. Employers were critical to its success, as they committed to promoting primary and preventive healthcare services to their employees in order to support healthier lifestyles. Worksite Wellness Programs were held at work on *work time*.

To introduce the program and elicit employee participation, the pAWI Director held meetings during paid work time, presenting the opportunity as a “pilot program” to help determine the future of wellness programming in Jackson County and noting the following goals of the wellness program:

- 1) Reduce chronic illness and disease by identifying health problems,
- 2) Provide educational and instructional information to encourage early detection and reduction of preventable chronic lifestyle-related problems,
- 3) Provide motivational support and encourage behaviors that improve health and wellness indicators, and
- 4) Allow employees time to invest in their health - making it fun and sustainable!

Wellness surveys developed by Black River Memorial Hospital were completed by interested employees at these introductory meetings, and based on their responses, an array of individuals were randomly selected to make up the 25 funded participants. Following selection of participants, pAWI staff came to each site to conduct Health Risk Assessments (HRA's) which were coordinated with an outside agency – Healics®. The HRA's and Wellness Surveys were instrumental in determining health indicators and providing measures for improvement in behavioral habits relative to fitness and nutrition. The HRA's included a complete Health Risk Screening Exam, measuring weight, body composition/body mass index, body temperature, blood pressure, pulse, respiratory rate, and drawing of blood for Total Cholesterol, Triglycerides, Glucose, Nicotine, GGT and Chemistry Panel. A Health & Wellness Evaluation was also conducted by an Employee Health Nurse to review and evaluate Health History (personal and family history, medications, and allergies) and perform an overview of body systems. At the time of the HRA's, food and exercise diaries were provided for participants to track their current activity for a week. Shortly after the HRA's, private consultations were held with each participant, discussing results and setting realistic goals to overcome any noted deficiencies. Referrals to a primary care physician were issued to individuals when certain high-risk conditions were noted or there were other health issues.

Upon signing a pAWI commitment form along with a release to participate, nine weeks of programming was held at the worksite on *work time*. The pAWI selected health education areas with a variety of well-versed speakers to cover motivational topics, and provided guidance, materials, and incentives to encourage participation. These weekly sessions lasted 45-60 minutes, were videotaped for future reference, and covered a wide range of areas:

- 1) Nutrition: Reading Labels and Understanding Portions;
- 2) Lifestyle Changes and Weight Loss;
- 3) Great Grilling the Low-Fat Way (*food samples provided*);
- 4) Exercise and You (*with exercise demonstrations*);
- 5) Cardio vs. Strength Training (*with exercise demonstrations*);
- 6) Hazards of Tobacco (*with carbon monoxide demonstration*);
- 7) Managing Stress;
- 8) Dealing with Depression (*one-on-one private consults were also provided by the EAP professional currently contracted with the worksite*);
- 9) Wellness and Resources for Everyday

Related challenges and incentives were proposed each week. Participants were encouraged to work on these simple activities on their own time and if they committed to doing so, they were eligible for a prize drawing the following week. Many other handouts were provided as they applied to the topic at hand.

Weekly one-on-one coaching and weigh-ins with pAWI's Worksite Wellness Program Coordinator was an option for all participants to evaluate progress, applaud successes, and address challenges. Many participants took advantage of this opportunity; others did not feel the need, and some reported schedule conflicts. One participant's comment: "It made me feel better to talk about the hard things and it felt rewarding to discuss the successes." Blood pressure checks were offered monthly.

Both business locations took part in "POWER UP," a voluntary 2-month challenge that enabled participants to form teams to compete against each other by tracking their activity in the form of points with an option to also track weight. The idea of being accountable to a team captain and potentially winning an award seemed to be encouraging to most participants. Some participants made amazing modifications – parking farther away, walking during their 20 minute break, and getting their families involved in more activities. Many were eating more salads, fruits and vegetables; switching to diet soda, drinking more water, and cutting out the high fat, high calorie foods from the vending machine. One team from D&S lost 37 pounds and one from the school district lost 32 pounds. During the pre-holiday months, D&S also implemented a "Holiday Challenge", a program developed and shared by Black River Memorial Hospital. The challenge was available to all employees and the goal was to get through the holidays without gaining weight.

About five months after the initial HRA's, follow-up HRA's and Wellness Surveys were completed to help determine whether the educational programming, challenges, incentives, and coaching had a positive impact on behaviors and health status. These HRA's included the same screenings and surveys with the exception of the Health & Wellness Evaluation (i.e., health assessment with an overview of body systems) due to the repetitive nature of information provided. Once again, participants also tracked their eating and exercise habits for one week and these were compared to pre-program diaries so that any changes in behavior could be further quantified.

Participating Worksites

D&S Manufacturing specializes in plate metal fabrication and welding, producing a broad spectrum of large and weighty components. Out of approximately 150 employees, **over sixty** expressed interest in participating. In a twist of strong support, the company decided to fund the additional employees over the funded thirty. This was a fantastic opportunity for the pAWI to work with two groups and gather more enhanced findings. The majority of the participants were male and many participants had not seen a physician for an annual exam. About two-thirds of the participants had fairly physical jobs (machinist, welder, painter, line worker/programmer, or maintenance) with the remaining in office positions. 74% completed the entire program.

Black River Falls School District provides educational needs from K-12 for Black River Falls and surrounding communities. Twenty-six employees signed up for the program. The majority of the participants were female. Most participants had fairly sedentary positions, with a little over one-third of the participants working for the bus garage and the remaining in office or teaching positions. 85% completed the entire program.

Hart Tie & Lumber (*The Control Site*) specializes in wholesale hardwood lumber production, drying and preparing a variety of hardwoods for large cabinet companies.

A control site was determined and selected in order to further validate the effectiveness of the pAWI worksite wellness program. The intent was to provide health screenings and assessments to employees interested in their health. Private consultations were provided to review test results and concerns; however, there was no programming or other intervention provided. Out of approximately 45 employees, twenty-three signed up. The majority of the participants were male and many participants had not recently seen a physician for an annual exam. About two-thirds of the participants had fairly physical jobs (assembly line worker with lifting requirements, machinist, or maintenance) and the remaining in office positions. 91% took part in the follow-up Health Risk Assessment.

Introductory meetings were made mandatory for D&S and Hart Tie, which helped increase the resulting percentage of interested participants.

Outcomes

The proACTIVE Wellness Initiative achieved objectives as originally stated:

- 1) Expand and enhance the access to primary and preventive health services through the collaboration of local health agencies, schools and businesses.
- 2) Educate and encourage the Jackson County population to establish and maintain healthy lifestyles using supportive employers as an effective agency.

pAWI saw some significant individual behavioral changes and improvements - and had two major “catches” as two participants did not realize how ill they were, followed up with their healthcare providers and experienced significant results. The pAWI also had an impact on some of the tobacco users at D&S Manufacturing, with at least six participants quitting or attempting to quit.

When comparing high and extreme test values, all results either stayed the same or improved except for one - the control site’s cholesterol levels. The overall HRA test scores for the two program sites did not show significant improvement in the four to six month period; however, when individual screening tests and survey results are reviewed, improvements can be verified, showing that behavioral impacts were made and pAWI programs made a difference. Addressing behavioral changes was vital and positive influences on spouses, family, co-workers and students was a secondary benefit.

Participating employers also recognized the importance of prevention. Through this program, they, along with other area businesses, became more cognizant of the benefits of a healthier workforce, increased productivity, and reduced turnover and lost work days due to chronic illness and fatigue. A critically important long-term outcome for employers is that healthier employees will reduce the burden of health care costs and health insurance premiums, which in turn improves the viability of the business, which in turn improves the economy in the community. This project is supporting this claim and educating community members of its effect.

Successful Partnerships

Jackson County’s *proACTIVE Wellness Initiative* has met with the collaborations from Hayward and Sauk Counties, and each has shared program details, challenges, and successes. The WORH and SRCI are utilizing the Center for Health Systems Research & Analysis (CHSRA) to evaluate all three initiatives along with others to gather data, monitor and evaluate their coalitions. CHSRA’s results are pending; however, because of this project, partnerships with public health and other health agencies and area businesses have been developed and enhanced, employers are becoming more involved in promoting health, and a liaison between health care services and the community is strengthening. In the communities’ eyes, these partnerships are being formed not only to benefit from each other’s resources, but to benefit them. This is a win-win situation for everyone involved.

The pAWI continues their work with two new worksites in 2007: Regal Beloit Motor Technologies and another division of the Black River Falls School District, and looks forward to another year of improvements.

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