

what's working

plan, engage, change!



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by | **Robbie Hartman**

A well-run, well-timed wellness program takes strategic planning, engagement and, well, a regular wellness check of its own to make sure it continues to meet its goals.

As the story of the City of Kelowna Wellness Committee has shown, a proper introduction for a wellness program includes definitions of success and an analysis of available resources. The next chapter centers on engagement from key constituents among all stakeholders. And getting the wellness program up and running is only part of the story—a story without a simple conclusion—because wellness programs require continual review to maintain interest and meet changing needs.

Plan for Success

Kelowna, a city of 125,000 people in British Columbia, started its wellness committee way back in the last millennium—1999, to be exact—and made it operational in 2000. The foundation for its longevity began with the planning process.

Strategic planning for a wellness program begins with determining what the organization wants to achieve, said Pamela Philippot, Kelow-

na compensation and benefits manager, human resources. This is the time to define key components and desired results as well as identify gaps.

“In order to help employees achieve a healthy work-life balance, the wellness committee was established to provide the needed tools, support and information to promote healthy lifestyles,” Philippot said. “The strategic planning process was led by our strategic performance manager and included our wellness committee and human resources director.”

For Kelowna, key components of wellness include physical, nutritional, emotional, preventive, financial and social programs. The planning process included a review of education, resources, services, accountability, marketing and branding as part of a SWOT analysis. *SWOT* stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and the analysis helps a wellness program determine its core tenets.

The wellness committee came up with the mission statement to “promote the health and wellness of staff through education and initiatives that support employees to be their best by increasing awareness of factors and resources contributing to well-being, inspiring and empowering individuals to take responsibility for their own health and encouraging habits of wellness.”

Engage With Your Audience

With its mission clear, the wellness committee focused on engaging key constituents.

“The wellness committee is a joint committee made up of employees consulting in a cooperative spirit to identify and deliver health and wellness initiatives for all employees in support of the City of Kelowna Health and Wellness Program,” Philippot said. “We serve a number of work loca-



Participants enjoyed a family tubing event at Big White, the local ski hill.

tions: City Hall, Fire Department, Police Department, Water and Wastewater Facility, Public Works, Parks and Recreation Department, Glenmore Landfill and Kelowna International Airport.”

“We see the best success when we bring wellness initiatives right to staff,” says wellness committee member Sandra Follack. “It’s a challenge for firefighters to attend wellness programs during work hours. By bringing seasonal flu shots or the Heart at Work program to the fire station, they can easily and actively take advantage of the programs that will keep them healthy.”

The committee utilizes team members like Follack to become wellness advocates at each location—a practice Philippot recommends for other wellness programs. “Find staff members who have an interest in wellness and are willing to engage their colleagues,” Philippot said. “Create position descriptions that define roles and expectations.”

Philippot also recommends regular communication from a committee to support and encourage advocates. For Kelowna, this includes e-mails, training and an annual meeting.

Kelowna also touts intangible benefits as incentives for committee members and wellness advocates to participate. “We promote committee work as a great option for members to improve their resumés and gain experience,” Philippot said. “We host an annual luncheon for the committee and department advocates.”

In a union environment, finding the right mix of management and union members is crucial, as is support from the executive level. “It is important to lead by example from the top down,” Philippot said. “The HR director is the sponsor to support my area. In our terms of reference, the senior executives are acknowledged, and staff are permitted time away from their positions to promote the program.”

Taking part in the wellness committee are a representative from the human resources department, a manager from the recreation department and representatives from each of the three unions. Most meetings and planning sessions occur during work hours, and Philippot said the city



Tim Light, platoon captain at the Fire Department, received \$100 and the Quit Smoking Award.

is improving its process to have staff apply for committee positions.

Change Is the Only Constant

One of the big takeaways from the longevity of the City of Kelowna Wellness Committee is that wellness programs aren’t static. The definition of success has evolved since the committee started, Philippot noted.

“Originally, the program was focused on work-life balance, and we initiated a number of improvements—flex days off, an increase in staff ability to bank time for additional leave and a bigger budget. Then the program mainly focused on providing prizes,” Philippot said. “Since the program transferred to my area, we have been working toward taking a preventive approach, increasing the number of events and having a wellness advocate in all areas of the organization.”

“Incentives help increase participation and can benefit your organization too,” said wellness committee member Lori Angus. “Last year, we gave out 100 staff punch cards to the city’s fitness facility and pool. Staff who completed a card were entered to win a free six-month pass. The result was a measurable increase in staff fitness activity and participation at our city facility.”

As part of its approach to help employees become responsible for their own health, the wellness program makes use of data and provides resources and information to city employees.

“We provide wellness information via e-mail and posters and will occasionally bring in guest speakers at the luncheon,” Philippot noted.

To take a preventive approach, Philippot said, “I track the types and number of disability claims and focus our activities based on the top disability reasons—For example, based on the number of heart and cancer claims, we increased the health check and activity challenges.”

The wellness program also uses nonidentifiable information on prescription drug usage for elements such as antidepressants, diabetes and blood pressure to focus on relevant health concerns. The wellness committee also aligns its programs with other health organizations from the community.

“We connect with the BC Cancer Agency for topics like diet, smoking and sun exposure; the Canadian Mental Health Association for informational resources and better awareness and recognition; and the cardiac unit at Kelowna General Hospital for diet, cholesterol and blood pressure.”

As part of its continual review, the wellness committee will track staff participation in wellness events and attendance at health checks. It also will use feedback from events to change and improve these elements moving forward.

“We are seeing more activity, including departments integrating walking into their breaks and departments whose entire staff have quit smoking,” Philippot said. “We have also seen improved attendance in several areas.”

The Story Continues to Unfold

The story of the City of Kelowna Wellness Committee is one of a wellness program that continues to examine new ways to succeed nearly 20 years after its inception.

It takes planning, from senior executives to managers, union leaders and employees, and it takes commitment, including financial investments and staff time.

It takes engagement. Philippot advises other organizations starting wellness programs to “include all areas of the organization in the committee, especially if there are different employee groups and unions, and have wellness advocates at all participating work locations.”

And it takes continual self-assessment, with a review process that seeks new tools and ways to improve.

The payoff for taking these steps is active participation in a wellness program that can lead to healthier and happier employees and a more engaged workforce.



The Parks Department fielded the winning team for the 2016 Walking Challenge.

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