

# HEALTHY HABITS & WORKSITE WELLNESS

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## THE PROBLEM

Chronic diseases are costing employers in the United States. 7 out of 10 deaths are chronic disease related. \$2.5 trillion is spent on annual medical care. Family and personal health problems cost employers big time each year. There is a clear need for prevention.

Fayetteville Public Library's Problem: The library began it's Healthy Habits Program in Fall 2015 for their staff to encourage worksite wellness. The program had some success but it was not maintained.

The solution: As a Recreation Management Intern, I am working to create a written, all-inclusive Corporate Wellness plan for Fayetteville Public Library (FPL) staff. This plan will establish FPL as a leader in worksite wellness and as an educational resource for employers in Northwest Arkansas.

## THE PROJECT

For this project my role was to be the expert in wellness. Wellness programs create a culture of well-being, increase employee productivity, improve employee health status, and boost acquisition and retention. I decided it would be best to implement an existing program, while customizing it for FPL. I chose the Arkansas Department of Health's Community Healthy Employee Lifestyle Program (CHELP), which is a worksite wellness intervention design and is free to all Arkansas non-profit, for-profit, and local government worksites. The mission is to create a worksite culture that supports healthy choices for employees.

The program is designed to make those who participate more aware of:

- Making appropriate nutritional choices
- The importance of maintaining a healthy weight
- The benefits of regular physical activity
- The need to reduce/cease tobacco use
- The importance of regular medical screenings

The CHELP initiatives allows employees to earn up to three annual wellness days off for the successful participation in this program.

FPL has begun the CDC's Worksite Health Scorecard. This will be used assess health promotion programs, identify gaps, and prioritize high-impact strategies to prevent heart disease, stroke, and related conditions.

Motivation is a major component of a wellness plan. Twice weekly emails are sent to staff with Healthy Habits- including healthy eating, healthy sleeping, healthy heart, and healthy moving tips. Annual, monthly, and weekly events will be held for FPL employees and families. For example, I sent out a healthy heart tip then encouraged participation in the American Heart Association's Go Red Day to raise awareness about heart disease.

FPL is participating in the annual Arkansas Department of Health and Arkansas Blue Cross Blue & You Fitness Challenge. This has given staff a way to begin recording healthy behaviors online.

To encourage regular exercise, I contacted local fitness centers, yoga studios, and other exercise facilities. Terri Honeysuckle from Yoga Gypsy was kind enough to come and offer weekly classes at the library during the month of March for our employees.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Wellness is directly related to sustainability. More specifically, sustainability in the social system. Chronic disease did not become a major problem in the United States by chance, it became a problem because of lifestyle choices. By educating FPL employees on wellness, we are not only bettering their lives but the lives of those around them. I hope to see the Healthy Habits Program at FPL grow to not only benefit the library employees but also their friends and families and eventually the Northwest Arkansas community as a whole.

Wellness also brings forth economic savings. By investing in a wellness program, employers not only have the ability to save money but also the ability to save lives. Each person that is made aware of a disease they have through a screening or begins a new exercise routine through a wellness program is going to save money on healthcare for themselves and their employer in the long run. More importantly-it could save their life.

The research I have done and the experience of creating a written Corporate Wellness program for FPL has been invaluable. The importance of wellness has been reaffirmed in my life. By educating people on wellness, FPL has a chance to create an even better community in Northwest Arkansas. Wellness is not just for health benefits and saving money, it is an investment in sustaining and bettering the quality of life for our future generations.

