

SHIP Worksite Wellness Initiative

Final evaluation report

Prepared for Blue Earth County Public Health as part of their SHIP grant evaluation

Blue Earth County Public Health collaborated with nine organizations in their service area on the Minnesota Department of Health's Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) Worksite Wellness Initiative. The focus was to promote healthy weight and healthy behaviors in the workplace in an effort to improve employee wellness. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota (Blue Cross) and the Lake Crystal Area Recreation Center (LCARC) were contracted to provide consulting services for the participating organizations in this initiative.

This report provides information on the overall impact of this initiative, with emphasis on reporting for the most recent evaluation period (January 2011 through June 2011). Blue Earth SHIP, Blue Cross, and LCARC compiled existing data and collected original data as part of this evaluation, using tools developed by Wilder Research as well as their own evaluation tools (e.g., Organizational Assessment tool utilized by Blue Cross).

Reach

Blue Earth County Public Health's service area includes a workforce of approximately 37,848. Blue Earth SHIP, Blue Cross, and LCARC worked with nine worksites in the county. In total, these worksites have 3,288 employees, which is over 8 percent of the total workforce.

Worksite	Number of employees
Blue Earth County	385
City of Mankato	267
Dotson Company	140
Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial School District	100
Mankato Area Public Schools	1000
Mankato Clinic	710
Maple River School District	170
MRCI	321
Schwickert Company	195
Total	3,288

Activities

As a part of this initiative, Blue Earth SHIP, Blue Cross, and LCARC worked with participating organizations to advise them on how to put best-practice workplace wellness policies and practices into place. Blue Cross and LCARC also assisted worksites with developing organization-specific action plans, guidance on implementation tasks, and conducted post-measurement activities.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield activities

Blue Cross worked with seven employers with the goal of guiding them to create a sustainable workplace wellness initiative primarily focused on policy, systems, and environmental improvements. This project was titled *Blue Earth County: Healthier Workplaces, Healthier Workers* (Healthier Workplaces). The project took place from August 2010 (recruitment of employers) through June 2011.

Through *Healthier Workplaces*, each participating organization received education and coaching on evidence-based best practices. At the formal project commencement (September 2010), Blue Cross conducted a pre-organizational assessment. A post-project assessment was conducted during May/June 2011. All seven participating organizations completed the pre- and post-assessments. Findings from the assessments indicated that all of the sites established a worksite wellness committee ranging from 5 to 22 members and with representation from various levels, departments, and/or units within each participating organization. All committees met on an at least a quarterly basis. Most committees established a written worksite wellness vision statement. To create lasting change, the employers modified existing worksite health policies or developed new policies to support healthy behavior. A few committees also successfully advocated for their worksite wellness initiative to be incorporated into the organization's strategic plan. Responsibilities related to the worksite wellness initiative were also integrated into an employee's job description at one worksite.

Other pertinent changes at the Blue Cross worksites

Start of project	Close of project
No organizations fulfilled the best practice for leadership support for worksite wellness	Two organizations have the best practice leadership attributes in place One additional organization is in process of establishing the leadership attributes Three additional organizations have made improvements in leadership support
No organizations had a written worksite wellness vision statement	Five organizations have a written worksite wellness vision statement One additional organization is in the process of writing a worksite wellness vision statement
No organizations report had written goals for worksite wellness and a measurement plan	Four organizations have written goals and a measurement plan Three additional organizations are in the process of developing written goals and a measurement plan
Three organizations have a worksite wellness budget	Of the three that reported having a worksite wellness budget at the start of the project, two of those organizations report an increase in the budget at the close of the project No new organizations added a worksite wellness budget
One organization had a wellness brand	Six organizations have a wellness brand One additional organization is in the process of developing a wellness brand
One organization had a wellness communications in place	Three organizations have a wellness communications plan in place Three additional organizations are in the process of implementing a wellness communications plan
No organizations meet the best practice for wellness committee	Four organizations meet the wellness committee best practice One additional organization is making progress toward meeting wellness committee best practice
One organization had previously implemented a health assessment	Four organizations have implemented a health assessment

For additional information about each participating worksite, please see Figure 1.

Lake Crystal Area Recreation Center activities

After the creation of worksite wellness committees in September 2010, LCARC administered an environmental assessment and employee survey with the two school districts they recruited to participate in the initiative. Findings show that most employees are interested in wellness activities at their worksite and that they support of the adoption

of wellness policies. LCARC also assessed each worksite's readiness to move forward with the SHIP worksite wellness initiative and assisted each site with the planning and implementation of their individualized action plan. LCARC helped coordinate each wellness committee and assisted with reviewing organizational policies, developing and proposing vision statements, both sites successfully came up with a mission statement for their wellness teams. At this point they have come up with a mission statement and have implemented several healthy lifestyle events at each of their worksites.

The following is a list of some of the programming activities and events that the worksite wellness committees developed and/or that LCARC worksites participated in:

- **Mapped walking and running trails:** In partnership with mapmyrun.com, all three schools in Maple River mapped walking trails within their facilities. The LCWM district used a wheel to map out the mileage available at the schools. At the moment, the number of students and/or staff using the mapped trails is unknown.
- **“Walktober”:** a 4 week program that consisted of logging staff walking mileage with the prospect of winning prizes for those with high mileage logs. It is estimated that about 27 staff participated at the Maple River and about 6 in the LCWM worksite.
- **6 Weeks to Heart Health:** an activity that focused on disseminating health information to employees for a period of 6 weeks with a focus on healthy heart options, exercise, and information.
- **6 Weeks to Healthy Holidays:** a wellness activity that focused on generating and disseminating health tips for employees to implement between the Thanksgiving holiday through New Year's day. It is estimated that about 25 employees participated at the Maple River worksite and another 6 the LCWM worksite. Both worksites implemented a similar activity, 12 Habits for Healthy Holidays, which focused on relating healthy tips and strategies for employees to use during the end of year holiday break.
- **Five-A-Day program:** A nutritional challenge that focused on eating 5 fruit/vegetables a day for 1 month. Employees were awarded points for eating healthy. Those with the most points received a prize. Approximately 28 employees participated in the challenge at the Maple River worksite.
- **April Fools (healthy food potluck):** An event implemented at Maple River with the focus on changing current practices by introducing health food options at work.
- **National Start Walking Day!:** A wellness physical activity event that encouraged employees to wear their tennis shoes to work and increase their daily walking activity. It is estimated that about 8 employees participated at the LCWM worksite and another 26 at the Maple River worksite.

- Last Day 5k walk/run: A wellness physical activity hosted during the last that of school at Maple River with a total of 38 participants.
- Fitness classes: Maple River hosted a 6 week intense aerobic exercise program which included journaling exercise and eating intake, and introduced health eating tips and strategies. A total of 17 participants at Maple River participated in the event.
- Groove campaign: A wellness activity that included the use of the school's intercom throughout the school year to communicate health tips and strategies to staff and students at the Maple River school district.
- World Cancer Day awareness campaign: An awareness campaign that focused on disseminating health information related to cancer throughout the schools. Students and staff were encouraged to wear pink in support of the campaign. Those that did wear pink were given cancer awareness campaign memorabilia with cancer tips. Both schools participated in the campaign. The campaign also included the creation of cancer awareness posters.
- Walking buddies campaign: Approximately 40 participants at Maple River were encouraged to walk with a buddy and encourage others to increase their walking activity.

For additional information about each participating worksite, please see Figure 1.

1. Worksite Wellness Actions

Action taken	Wellness Worksite								
	Dotson Company	Mankato Clinic	Schwickert Company	City of Mankato	Mankato Area Public Schools	MRCI	Blue Earth County	Maple River School District	Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial School District
Worksite Wellness Committee in place	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
How often committee meets	Monthly	Quarterly	Monthly	Quarterly	Quarterly	Quarterly	Quarterly	Every 6 weeks	Quarterly
Number of departments and/or members in the committee	5	5	10	15	22	5	12	13	8
Full or part-time staff is exclusively devoted to worksite wellness	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Committee has its own worksite wellness goals, objectives, work-plan	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	In progress	Yes	In progress	In progress	In progress
Written vision statement developed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	In progress	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Organization's wellness initiative is branded	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	In progress	Yes	Yes	In progress	No
Evidence-based practices are used as a basis for planning	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not Sure	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Organization has measurable goals and objectives for worksite wellness	In progress	In progress	Yes	Yes	In progress	In progress	Yes	Yes	In progress
Organization adopted new written policies that support physical activity, nutrition, or reduce tobacco use by employees	Yes	No	In progress	In progress	Yes	In progress	No	Yes, to a degree	Yes, to a degree
Worksite wellness incorporated into the organization's strategic plan	In progress	In progress	Yes	Yes	Yes	In progress	No	No	No

Policy, systems, and environments

One of the goals of SHIP is to change policies, systems, and environments to make the healthy choice the easy choice and to ensure sustainability beyond the end of any one particular program or funding stream. In the case of the Worksite Wellness Initiative, it means specifically changing policies, systems, and environments in the workplace to support and generate new opportunities for healthy behaviors among employees.

All of the nine participating worksites created a worksite wellness committee to specifically work on ways to introduce healthier choices in the workplace and to explore opportunities to create and/or update worksite policies related to physical activity, nutrition, and tobacco. Based on the organizational assessment conducted by Blue Cross and the environmental assessment conducted by LCARC, seven of the nine worksites have developed an effort that is **mostly sustainable** by attaining support from their upper leadership, successfully engaging workers in the process, and making several significant long-term steps in in changing their work environment by advocating for the integration of a worksite wellness component into their long-term organizational strategic plans and creating the platform for adopting future health policies. The wellness effort of another worksite working with Blue Cross appears to be **somewhat sustainable**, as they have made several practice changes at their workplaces by increasing awareness of healthy lifestyles and generating opportunities for employees to engage in physical activity. This worksite will likely need additional support to help them maintain momentum and to assist them with making policy changes in the workplace. Last, one of LCARC worksite's efforts appears to be **unsustainable**, as the worksite has lost the interest and support of their leadership in the initiative and has had difficulty engaging employees.

As a result of this project, **policy changes for the worksites working with Blue Cross include:**

- Tobacco-free worksite policy
 - Two organizations had the best practice policy in place when the project started (policy pertaining to all forms of tobacco, prohibiting use in buildings and vehicles and on grounds that includes enforcement protocol).
 - At the end of the project, five organizations report that they have the best practice in place and the remaining two organizations are in the process of enacting the best practice policy.

■ Healthy foods worksite policy

- At the beginning of the project, none of the organizations had a healthy foods policy.
- At the close of the project, one organization has enacted a policy (foods served at meetings and events includes a healthy choice) and five other organizations are in the process of developing a policy.

■ Physical activity worksite policy

- At the beginning of the project, none of the organizations had a physical activity policy.
- At the close of the project, five organizations are in the process of developing a policy (components may include – dress code conducive to getting in activity during the day, using break time for physical activity, increase break time if using break for physical activity).

As a result of this project, **environmental changes for the worksites working with Blue Cross include:**

- Addition of a fitness center (one organization)
- Maps posted on company Intranet site (one organization)
- Promote active commuting/Bike to Work day (one organization)
- Bike racks (two organizations)
- Onsite fitness classes (one organization)
- Increase the amount of healthy foods in vending (one organization).

As a result of this project, **environmental changes *in progress* for the worksites working with Blue Cross include:**

- Mapped walking routes (3 organizations)
- Bike racks (1 organization)
- Bike to work day event/active commuting promotions (4 organizations)
- Increase the amount of healthy foods in vending (3 organizations)
- Food served at meetings and events always includes a healthy option (5 organizations)
- Catering guide is available to help administrative staff/managers order “better choice” foods for meetings and events (7 organizations)
- Healthier snacks (such as fruit bowls) are encouraged on employee desks, in break rooms in conference rooms, or in reception areas (4 organizations)

Significant accomplishments among all worksites for this initiative include:

- All worksites formed a wellness committee and disseminated information about reducing tobacco use, physical activity, and nutrition.
- Most committees developed their own worksite wellness goals, objectives, and work-plan, branded their wellness initiative, and enacted their own vision statements.
- Wellness committees met several times, usually a quarterly or monthly basis.
- One of the wellness committees inspired the creation of a Wellness Team committee (a similar committee with a similar role and goals) for one of the school districts.
- Most worksites began to use evidence-base best practices as a basis for planning worksite wellness priorities.
- Some worksites modified their existing tobacco policies.
- Neither of the LCARC sites made any new policy changes

Longer-term impact

Each worksite achieved several of their proposed goals, including the creation of a wellness committee as a way to build support and increase employee participation in the SHIP worksite wellness initiative. Budget limitations, time availability, and the lack of a full or part-time staff member devoted to the site's wellness initiative are a few challenges that many of the worksites experienced as they implemented these efforts. However, by engaging worksite leadership and employees and taking the steps toward policy change, worksites have increased their ability to overcome those barriers.

Moving forward, each worksite in the BCBS Healthy Workplaces project received guidance for future goal-setting, including suggested goals to consider when updating their action plans and incorporating additional strategies within existing resources (human resources, vendor relations, facilities, walking paths, etc.). Worksites should consider using these and other similar resources in their planning in order to improve employee wellness without spending significant resources.

Through the work of Blue Earth SHIP, Blue Cross, and LCARC, these worksites have made significant changes in their social norms and working environment, which has led to an increased awareness of healthy lifestyles and an increase in the number of employees engaging in healthy behaviors. Ultimately, if this initiative is sustained and developed at these and other worksites, it will result in improved health for employees and a reduction in chronic diseases related to poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, and tobacco use throughout Blue Earth County.



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