

## Integrating Staff Wellness into Agency Culture: A Win, Win, Win

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According to Officevibe.com, 78 percent of Americans describe their jobs as stressful. In discussing this with colleagues, the feeling was that this figure was a bit high. However, as we moved on to discuss an informal contest of who had the most webinars to watch for the week, it was quickly apparent that this figure may not be high enough, particularly within the behavioral health sector. We are so focused on providing quality care, learning new initiatives, implementing needed changes in our organizations, forming partnerships, and understanding regulations that we lose focus on keeping a healthy body and mind for ourselves and for our overall staff. This article will address some of the reasons why an organization should implement an employee wellness initiative and will highlight some steps that have been taken at Putnam Family and Community Services.

There is significant research available on the internet that clearly shows decreases in medical costs for corporations that have a wellness program. As per officevibe.com, medical costs fall by about \$3.27 for every dollar spent on wellness programs. Within PFCS as well as other non-profits, each year is a struggle to re-



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negotiate rates for health insurance and while there are many factors that impact the negotiation, a decrease in employees' medical costs can improve a bargaining stance. Of course, reduced medical costs can also equate to less use of sick time/absenteeism.

Following the "golden thread," a healthier body and less sick time leads to increased productivity. Taking it one step further, increased productivity leads to feelings of accomplishments and enhanced worker engagement. Aside from

wanting the population to be healthier in both mind and body, the ultimate goal of business wellness programs is to cultivate a workforce who is passionate about their work and who can help the agency grow and become better. It is an engaged workforce, both administrative and direct care, which promotes innovation and creativity to achieve the desired outcomes.

It is clear that having a wellness program for employees is an essential function of any business operation. The challenge within PFCS and for most non-profits is how to do this when both time and money are scarce. Over the past 2 years, PFCS has chosen to target wellness initiatives on increasing the employee's sense of belonging within the agency. A wellness committee was formed from volunteers throughout the entire agency. The members of this committee, which includes the Human Resource Director, researched and introduced a number of health initiatives designed to promote lifestyle changes as well as fostering some friendly competition. The first was a 55 day challenge that had components relating to diet, exercise, water intake, and taking vitamins/health supplements. Twenty percent of the staff at PFCS signed up for this challenge. Each day, the participants added up the total number of points they earned and entered the scores onto a group log. There was also a poster board next to the log in the staff lounge so that the participants could support one an-

other and share tips. Overall, the group as a whole lost over 30lbs and many report sustaining significant life changes such giving up candy and drinking more water.

Another challenge that was distributed to staff focused on fitness and exercise. Though there are some exceptions, a large percentage of the staff at PFCS have jobs that do not require any physical activity. The thirty day fitness challenge was comprised of daily exercises that were done in individual offices or empty conference rooms. For example, one day the exercise was twenty wall pushups and two minutes of arm circles.

All in all, each daily routine could be done in ten minutes but those ten minutes of activity can impact the rest of the day in terms of alertness and motivation. Once again, about 20 percent of the staff signed up for this challenge and supported each other throughout the weeks. When the 30 day fitness challenge ended, a meditation challenge was distributed to give the calming of our minds equal attention.

These challenges certainly raised the staff's awareness of the importance of self-care but they also began to impact the overall culture of the agency. The staff room is typically filled with cakes, donuts and cookies, but now fresh fruit and garden fresh vegetables are also being left for staff to help themselves. The Wellness Committee sends out articles on stress

management and self-care, particularly around the holidays. Recently, a staff member, who is a certified Yoga instructor, offered a free introductory class. Another staff member was able to get her local gym to offer a free fitness class to PFCS employees. All of these things, whether utilized by staff or not, pave the way to keep wellness on the agenda.

It has always been true in Health and

Behavioral Health Care but particularly now as there is so much change, that our jobs have many challenges, stressors and traumas. In order to meet the challenges, agencies, regardless of size and resources, can implement multiple strategies to address practitioner, management, and organizational wellness. It takes time to implement but no steps are too small.

*Please visit Putnam Family and Community Services at our new website at [pfcsinc.org](http://pfcsinc.org).*