



## Report to Supporters 2005 in Review

*No time. No time. No time left for health.*

Ask people why they don't exercise three days a week and you are apt to hear that they can't find the time. Ask businesses about wellness programs and you are apt to hear something similar. That is a powerful lesson and one that prompted Heart Healthy Waukesha County to redesign its planned Collaborative on Workplace Wellness in mid-2005. An equally powerful lesson: the "buddy system," which is effective in individual health improvement efforts, may be just as useful for organizations.

### **Time-share for the time-shy**

Heart Healthy Waukesha County (HHWC) opened 2005 preparing to conduct a yearlong Collaborative on Workplace Wellness. It closed the year preparing to retool the collaborative into the equivalent of an organizational buddy system — a user-friendly learning circle and support group for companies engaged in workplace health promotion.

In between, organizers listened to the business community and learned that the original plans for the collaborative asked for more time than area employers thought they could afford. Feedback from business leaders who attended events conducted by HHWC in 2005 revealed that many area employers shied away from committing employee time to worksite health promotion. In response, the retooled learning circle will focus on helping time-shy workplaces share wellness strategies and resources.

HHWC closed 2005 by cooperating with eleven area Chambers of Commerce and the Waukesha County Economic Development Corporation to distribute the Workplace Health Promotion Survey to employers countywide. The results will be used to refine the design of the learning circle.

### **Collaborative emphasis**

The learning circle is the most recent HHWC activity to emphasize organizational collaboration. The multiplier effect that takes place when multiple organizations and multiple sites work together on shared goals continues to make collaboration the centerpiece of HHWC activities. Strategic collaboration is the hallmark strategy that draws community health advocates to the project. Between the inception of Heart Healthy Waukesha County in 2003 and the close of 2005, the coalition had received financial, in-kind and volunteer support from more than 39 organizations.

### **Recognition and thanks**

The coalition's collaborative achievements have not gone unnoticed. In May, the Wisconsin Public Health Association presented HHWC an award for "Special Achievement of a Public Health Partnership," which recognized HHWC's keystone accomplishment, namely its capacity to engage diverse organizations — many of which are competitors in other arenas — in productive collaborative action.

Again in 2005, it was the generous support of individuals like you and the organizations you represent that made HHWC efforts possible. Because of you, HHWC has been able to initiate and support

collaborative efforts on the part of organizations, community groups and individuals to address the “big three” lifestyle behaviors that impact cardiovascular health: smoking, exercise and nutrition.

## **Year in review**

In 2005, HHWC entered the second phase of an initiative to decrease the risk of cardiovascular disease among adults in Waukesha County. Its overarching goal remained the same: *to impact positively three principal behaviors that adults can adopt to improve their heart health:*

- Eliminate tobacco use and exposure
- Exercise 20 minutes or more most if not all days of the week.
- Eat healthy.

Poised to build on its 2003-04 pilot Community Breakthrough Collaborative, the coalition decided to focus on workplaces as a target for improving lifestyle behaviors related to heart health.

In the first quarter of 2005, HHWC designed and conducted a series of efforts to heighten the awareness among business leaders of the positive impact of healthy lifestyles. These activities included a half-day awareness event for some 100 business leaders and mid-managers and two half-day informational workshops for 40 senior wellness leaders. During the same period, HHWC expanded the content and distribution of its bi-monthly *Heart Healthy News* e-letter, adapted training materials used in pilot collaborative for use in a Collaborative on Workplace Wellness and developed two survey instruments (one for employers, one for employees) to assess the nature and extent of workplace wellness programs in Waukesha County.

By May, feedback from the business community indicated that relatively few companies would join the formal collaborative. Many said that they could not afford the loss of employee hours involved in having a three-to-five person wellness team participate in the activities scheduled for the collaborative (i.e., six days off-site plus on-site time for wellness meetings and monthly conference calls).

Armed with this information, HHWC set aside its original plans and began an earnest re-examination of its mission, focus and work plan. In June HHWC conducted a large-group visioning meeting to gather input from its partners and stakeholders. The Steering Committee followed up this activity by soliciting and reviewing stakeholder proposals for future work. In November, the Steering Committee ratified its 2006 work plan and reworded its mission and vision statements.

At the heart of the new work plan is a learning circle that looks a lot like an organizational buddy system, one built on planned collaboration, flexibility, and time-sharing.

## **Constancy of purpose**

As HHWC enters 2006, it remains focused improving the cardiovascular health of adults in Waukesha County by positively impacting behaviors related to nutrition, physical activity and tobacco use/exposure. In targeting workplaces, HHWC has a two-fold goal: increase the number of employees who participate in employer-sponsored health promotion activities and increase the number of organizations that offer employee health promotion programs that include:

- health education,
- supportive social and physical environments,
- integration of the worksite program into the organizational structure, and

- processes for supporting individual behavior change.

Achieving these twin goals of leadership commitment and worker participation will help produce the sustainable, systemic changes in the sociocultural environment of Waukesha workplaces that result in healthier behaviors related to nutrition, physical activity and tobacco use/exposure.

### **Contact information**

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