

Buddy system

Early in 2006 Heart Healthy Waukesha County (HHWC) conducted a Worksite Health Promotion Survey to better understand the nature and extent of workplace wellness programs within the county. By the close of the year, 22 organizations from around southeast Wisconsin had formed the first cohort of the HHWC Learning Circle — an organizational buddy system through which member organizations share information, learn about evidence-based interventions and collaborate on wellness activities.

To build the Learning Circle, HHWC invited wellness experts from four area healthcare systems and the Wisconsin Wellness Council to help design a program that would shorten the learning curve for new wellness coordinators and help time-shy managers share strategies and resources. As part of the effort, the Learning Circle became a test site for Wisconsin's new Worksite Wellness Resource Kit.

Collaborative emphasis

The Learning Circle is one more example of how HHWC focuses on planned collaboration to carry out its mission. The strategy continues to demonstrate that the common good is best realized when like-minded people and organizations find common ground for working together. Since the inception of Heart Healthy Waukesha County in 2003, the coalition has worked with more than 70 area organizations and has received financial, in-kind and volunteer support from more than 50.

Special thanks

Heart Healthy Waukesha County is particularly proud of the continuing support provided by the W. Edwards Deming Institute. In May, the project received its fourth grant from the Institute, an international organization founded by management legend, Dr. W. Edwards Deming. Since 2001, the Deming Institute has donated \$45,000 to support efforts to apply Dr. Deming's management methods to community improvement initiatives in the county. In announcing the grant, Diana Deming-Cahill, chair of the Deming Institute, said: "Heart Healthy Waukesha County's aim to use community resources in an effort to develop programs that will improve the life of its citizens provides an excellent format for the employment of Dr. Deming's theories."

However, it is the generous local support of individuals like you and the organizations you represent that make HHWC work possible. Because of you, HHWC is able to initiate and support collaborative efforts that address the "big three" lifestyle behaviors that impact cardiovascular health: smoking, exercise and nutrition.

Worksite survey

The Worksite Health Promotion survey consisted of an online questionnaire constructed by the research department at Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC), which also provided statistical analysis of the responses. Survey questions were based on the 1999 National Worksite Health Promotion Survey. Thirteen business associations (eleven Waukesha County chambers of commerce, the Waukesha County Economic Development Corporation and the Wellness Council of Wisconsin) helped distribute the survey announcement to businesses of all sizes and all geographic areas of the county.

HHWC also examined data from surveys conducted by Wellness Council of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Physical Activity and Nutrition Partnership, and the Greater Milwaukee Lifestyle Committee. Added to the results of the HHWC survey, as well as anecdotal evidence and information from two focus studies with business leaders in 2005, the data suggested that there was considerable room for improving worksite health promotion activities in the county.

The questionnaire developed for the Worksite Health Promotion Survey subsequently was modified for use as an evaluation tool for the Learning Circle project.

Building a Learning Circle

In March, Heart Healthy Waukesha County began planning a Learning Circle that would provide area businesses with a means to share best practices in workplace wellness. The Circle would build on program materials developed for the 2003-2004 HHWC pilot Collaborative. Patricia Kashmerick of Community Memorial Hospital and March Jacques, HHWC project coordinator, co-chairs of the Collaborative, agreed to co-chair the Learning Circle.

To create a Learning Circle that would maximize the county's worksite wellness resources, HHWC invited representatives of various organizations that provide wellness products and services to business to serve as an Advisory Council. This included, first and foremost, representatives from organizations that had supported the HHWC coalition since its inception —Aurora Health Care, Community Memorial Hospital, ProHealth Care, and Wheaton-Franciscan Healthcare (formerly Covenant Healthcare) — as well as a new partner, the Wellness Council of Wisconsin, and an independent wellness coach. Creation of the Advisory Council enhanced HHWC's capacity tremendously. Its members played a major role in the Circle's preliminary success

Advisory Council Members

Vicki Dallmann-Papke, ProHealth Care
Kathi Elder, Aurora Health Care
Theresa Islo, Wellness Council of Wisconsin
March Jacques, Heart Healthy Waukesha County
Pat Kashmerick, Community Memorial Hospital
Kim Peck, Community Memorial Hospital
Karin Peterson, Lifestyle Management Consultant
Susan Quantrell, ProHealth Care
Deb Seyler, Wellness Council of Wisconsin
Jan Simon (original member), Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare

Learning Circle status and plans

The Learning Circle officially got underway in October 2006 with a cohort comprised of 24 members from 22 organizations. The initial series of monthly Learning Circle meetings will run through September 2007. Current members include representatives from four healthcare providers, five manufacturing firms, two municipalities, five insurance/benefit providers, three service companies, two utility companies and one educational institution.

Besides providing members the opportunity to share ideas, the Learning Circle has a strong educational component that focuses on best practices for planning and managing health improvement initiatives. The overall emphasis is on helping members (1) navigate between system-level interventions and individual-level

interventions, (2) use data to identify opportunities and measure progress and (3) develop collaborative relationships both with each other and with community organizations that promote healthy lifestyles.

Constancy of purpose into the future

As HHWC enters 2007, 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. By 2010, HHWC leaders envision the Learning Circle as an expanding network of worksite cohorts committed to providing members with interactive learning experiences and multiple opportunities to collaborate more effectively to improve the health of workers in southeast Wisconsin.

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In the Learning Circle, HHWC tackles 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 wellness program into the organizational structure, and
- policies and processes that support behavior change.

The social ecological model so familiar to health educators reflects the essence of the systems approach that is the intellectual foundation Heart Healthy Waukesha County. Achieving the Learning Circle's twin goals of leadership commitment and worker participation will help produce sustainable, systemic changes in the sociocultural environment of workplaces that result in healthier behaviors related to nutrition, physical activity and tobacco use/exposure.

Contact information

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