



Promoting staff health & wellbeing within colleges

November 2016

Introduction

Association of Colleges Employment, Policy and Services team published guidance for managing sickness absence, which included the importance of preventing sickness absence and promoting health and wellbeing.

Following a positive response and queries regarding this publication, the employment team has collaborated with AoC Sport to highlight a series of case studies of college staff health and wellbeing initiatives and useful tools that are available to colleges to help promote a healthier lifestyle to staff.

This resource includes an in-depth insight of how Great Yarmouth College positively changed the culture of the college by focusing on staff health and wellbeing, a number of shorter college case studies that demonstrate how individual colleges have positively used staff physical activity and health initiatives, and a series of tools designed to help organisations including colleges to improve staff health and wellbeing.



Staff health & wellbeing

Insights into Great Yarmouth College

Why did the college place staff health and wellbeing high on the college agenda?

Great Yarmouth College has invested heavily in students' and staff wellbeing, particularly over the last two years. The college is currently involved in a merger with a neighbouring college and Stuart Rimmer, CEO of the college acknowledged there are high levels of pressure and insecurity in the sector, and at the college. Stuart focused on protecting staff wellbeing, whilst enabling honest conversations about what is possible, realistic and desirable to support colleagues within a values-based framework. For students, there has been a great deal of attention on skills and qualifications, which clearly are important, but Stuart believes that focus should also be on supporting people to live grounded, meaningful lives.

Stuart, from his own personal journey, recognised that happy staff are more productive, resilient and less susceptible to absence, and he wanted staff to have fulfillment not just at work but in their wider lives too. Improving staff wellbeing inevitably leads to better staff recruitment and retention, which in turn is likely to lead to improved success for students.

The leadership team developed a "Happy Balance Model" for students – and what is good for students is good for staff. If the college expects their staff to teach the model, it needed to invest in staff to expect them to use it to guide students appropriately. A great deal of importance is also placed on ensuring staff have a good work-life balance. The college focuses on getting the best out of their staff and students by helping them to achieve this. The college considers wellbeing as a moral duty and the college supports staff to be better-rounded and happier people.

Overall the college has worked hard to provide better mental health support, resilience and wellbeing training, and is looking hard at how they support people to be responsible and accountable for results, whilst ensuring that colleagues do not feel threatened by a culture of constant change and observation.

What initiatives did the college introduce?

Partnership working with Action for Happiness. Initiatives introduced for students included:

- » Happiness Action Pack
- » Student Wellbeing Survey
- » Happy Café – encouraging students to socialise outside their classrooms

Initiatives for staff included:

- » Staff training in teaching 'happiness'
- » Implementing a new college wellbeing strategy, incorporating training in wellbeing within the strategic college plan
- » Setting Key Performance Indicators for wellbeing of staff and students
- » Training leaders in wellbeing and mindfulness

- » Introduced mental health first aid training
- » Small staff group sessions, open to all staff to attend, are led by the Principal using life coaching models. Discussions are focused on finding out what staff really want from life. These have been well received from staff at all levels. As a Senior Manager, the Principal opens up and talks about his own wellbeing, allowing staff to feel more comfortable to discuss theirs, experiences are shared and the forum allows people to use appropriate vocabulary in relevant contexts. It has been noticed that staff are now using this vocabulary around the college to students and to other staff
- » Staff model positive behaviours of senior managers and leaders demonstrating the college's commitment to work-life balance e.g. where senior members of staff leave work on time, it attempts not to put pressure on others to work late
- » In addition to the usual business-related objectives in the staff appraisal process, the college introduced mandatory wellbeing objectives in all staff appraisals – objective(s) to be determined by employees. Examples could include, leaving five minutes earlier from work to collect children from school or more extreme objectives such as running a marathon. This was included to increase work-life balance and is proving successful
- » Promoted healthy eating by revising the food offer within the college
- » Invested in a new Sport and Wellbeing Centre (opened in January 2016). Staff and students have complimentary access to use the full range of facilities on offer
- » A successful staff retreat day was organised and held in 2016 in support of the college's "Happy Balance" programme. The retreat day was an opportunity for staff to take time out to reflect and refresh from daily life. Staff that participated in the day found it hugely beneficial to pause and take time out from the 'present' and to be more mindful and self-aware - techniques that staff have brought back to the college are being practiced and passed on to others. Due to its popularity, the college is looking to hold future staff retreat days
- » Team-building and activity days with partner organisations
- » Engaging a local sport therapist to work on-site
- » Self-referral counselling system with an in-house counsellor, and partnership working with NHS Mental Health services for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) referrals
- » Introduced an employee assistance programme
- » Utilised local occupational health services, some based on college premises
- » Revitalised college environments, including public areas
- » Improved staff/student accommodation and physical working/studying environments, e.g. ensuring that light and heating controls were conducive to a productive working and learning environment
- » Provided quiet workspace and break-out space for staff
- » Proactively managing absences
- » Using the college values more as part of the recruitment process. This will be particularly important in the post-merger environment
- » Introduced a staff guide to wellbeing brochure, helping them find their "Happy Balance" through a range of activities, guidance and resources aimed at improving mental, physical and social wellbeing

How was buy-in sought from leaders, managers and staff?

Leaders were enrolled onto a compulsory training programme, exploring their personal styles via "Colourworks" personal profiling. Yellow Brick Road Solutions Ltd. explored a comprehensive programme examining personal wellbeing and the benefits of finding a happy balance on an individual, team and organisational level.

This provided insight and encouraged buy-in from the leadership team ready for cascading to, initially, teaching staff in order that they could implement the student wellbeing initiatives in the new academic year.

What challenges did the college encounter?

All too often HR intervene at the point of crisis and the college wanted to promote HR services to change the culture to enable a more fluid interaction between staff and the HR team. Staff were not fully aware of the range of facilities being run and the extent of the resources they had access to, and work needed to take place to make the cultural shift.

Some managers who were trained in wellbeing and mindfulness did not at first understand the full value of tuning into one's emotional state and the importance of wellbeing. However, after explaining the importance to them, it then allowed them to be much more engaged, enthused and committed.

Some staff were also skeptical about some of the initiatives introduced to keep staff more healthy and fit and they perceived this to be solely about the college driving staff to work harder.

Having given freedom, permission and space to staff to talk about mental health, the college noticed pockets of areas where staff were making comments, for example that workload was bad for their own wellbeing and that staff felt 'stressed', particularly at the start of the new academic year. The college appropriately responded to such comments by differentiating between feeling the 'pressure' and feeling 'tired' and putting it into the context in which they were working, e.g. as it was a particularly busy time of the year. Feelings of 'good stress' can be beneficial, motivating and can alleviate boredom and combat under-stimulation.

What lessons did the college learn and what could have been done differently?

A lot of the focus initially went towards student wellbeing. Staff noticed this imbalance and wanted to ensure the college was supporting them too. On reflection, the college should have focused more on the staff resources available and on signposting to relevant resources.

What success did the initiatives have?

- » Student success and happiness
- » Confidence changes
- » Sports and volunteering participation
- » Improving staff survey results
- » Retention improvements of both staff and students

Stuart's insights and future plans to promote the wellbeing agenda

Stuart provides his personal insights on how other colleges can ensure that staff health and wellbeing is on top of the college agenda, and his plans for the future to continue to promote the wellbeing agenda.

Senior leaders need to build optimism, talk more about the issues and understand them to be able to devise better ways of doing things. If leaders are fully engaged and approach college life in a solutions-focused way, staff are likely to follow suit and model these behaviours. Responsibility for staff wellbeing lies in the hands and minds of both individuals themselves and their employers.

Staff are at their best when:

- » They are well informed and equipped with the resources they need to do their work
- » They have balanced, stimulating and manageable workloads
- » They have a strong sense of individual purpose and clear yet challenging and achievable goals
- » Individuals experience change as positive and well-managed
- » They hold some control and influence in how work is done
- » There are supportive and encouraging work relationships in their teams

College leaders and staff should be able to “think better and think differently”. College management should be able to give staff the tools they need to help them live smarter, grounded lives and be able to grow and develop to reach their potential.

It is important to ensure everyone takes time out for social and personal development and to focus on reflection activities. All staff are leaders and coaches and there is a vital role for values, being in touch with our emotional states and finding space to reflect and act with mindfulness.

Stuart’s final comment: “Overall wellbeing will be a cultural shift, not a management movement”.

Further information

The Association of Colleges Eastern Region (ACER) has been developing more resources on wellbeing, including further insight into the work carried out by Great Yarmouth College and a case study written by Stuart himself in Wellbeing in Further Education. Other college case studies from the region are also included within this paper which will be published in November 2016 and available from the ACER website.

Other related articles:

- » GYC – Boost happiness and your results are sure to follow
- » Happiness lessons for students at Great Yarmouth College

College employee physical activity & health case studies

CS

Burnley College

The College Sport Maker at Burnley College introduced a ‘passport to fitness’ programme for staff. The programme involves an initial assessment of height, weight, strength, aerobic capacity and flexibility. Over a 12-week period, staff are encouraged to attend college-organised activities and to track their activity levels both in and outside of college. In addition to this, participants complete a Level 1 health and fitness booklet to educate them on the importance of keeping healthy to subsequently make their progress long-term. At the end of the 12 weeks, another assessment is taken to evaluate their progress.

CS

The College of West Anglia

The College of West Anglia promote the Workplace Challenge with more than 40 staff regularly recording activities. The success from this initiative has inspired the creation of a staff badminton club, rock climbing, fitness classes and a tennis tournament. One staff member that relocated from the Isle of Wight recognised that the sessions helped her to make friends and settle into the area, which as a result has made her happy in her new job.

CS

East Riding College

East Riding College purchased 40 pedometers and conducted a step challenge among staff across the college - it was so popular that they had to run two waves. Each wave had eight groups of five staff members who competed for four weeks to get the most number of steps. Following the two waves, the staff were so keen to continue that a ‘step off’ week was introduced between the top four teams from each wave.

The challenge was popular among both support and teaching staff from a range of departments which resulted in improvements to their health. One member of staff even gave up smoking because they wanted to walk more steps and felt that smoking was impacting their fitness levels. A number of staff also recognised and reported weight loss during the challenge. The teams that made the ‘step off’ were walking more than 15,000 steps each a day with the winners reaching over 20,000 each.

CS

Hartpury College

Hartpury College promote the Workplace Challenge to staff and during summer 2016 organised staff activities to encourage staff to move away from their desks during lunchtimes. The activities included badminton, tai chi, circuits, running and legs bums and tums classes.

In addition to the above, the college organised a ‘summer shred programme’ with a local personal trainer. The programme was self-funded by staff and it had a great uptake as staff appreciated having access to exercise on-site. The feedback for the programme was so positive that the personal trainer is returning to deliver weekly circuit sessions.



Truro and Penwith College

Staff at Truro and Penwith College have had the opportunity to join the 'Weigh-to-go' programme. Participants were supported to become active and signposted to regular free activities available as part of the college's health, wellbeing and sport enrichment offer. They were given access to free online weight management tools and offered weekly weigh-ins to help keep track of their progress towards losing excess pounds and inches. Of the 18 participants signed up, both male and female across varying age ranges, by half-term the total weight loss of the group was 4.5 stone and waist measurement losses totalled 24 inches. One staff member Louise, who is a PA to senior management and has a very sedentary job, joined the programme and during the past 18 months has lost over five stone. Louise is now a Health, Wellbeing and Sport Activator and leads a lunchtime running club for staff and students

In addition to the 'Weigh-to-go' programme Truro and Penwith Health, Wellbeing and Sport (HWS) team have also worked with Get Active Cornwall to deliver the 'Step into Spring' programme to staff. A bespoke website was created for staff to input their activity levels which were converted into miles and, in teams of three, they competed to 'travel' as far as they could around the Cornish coastline. Pedometers were provided to count their steps but they could also include any other activities that they participated in. More than 80 staff members were involved and were motivated to move more both in and out of college to increase their steps.

Truro and Penwith College has been nominated for an Active Workplace Award due to the success of the HWS projects in getting staff active.



Peter Symonds College

Peter Symonds College organise a 'staff wellbeing week' during the summer involving a range of enrichment activities, including sports, exercise classes and even a 'bird song walk' to get staff out enjoying the natural surroundings. Similar activities are also available to staff at the college on inset days. Staff members can also access the onsite gym and a number of staff participate in the Workplace Challenge. One staff member commented on how much money and energy consumption she saves through active travel tracked on the challenge.



Swindon College

The HR department at Swindon College has arranged a number of different talks and services aimed at supporting the wellbeing of their staff. These sessions have included financial advice including mortgages, life insurance and pensions. Staff have also benefitted from resilience training, menopause and urology awareness, blood pressure and cholesterol checks, meditation classes and talks on stress and wellbeing. The College Sport Maker also organises onsite 'clubbercise sessions' which have enabled staff to fit activity into their working day.



Tools to improve staff health & wellbeing

One You

The NHS has created the One You online quiz which helps individuals assess their overall health levels. The quiz includes a range of lifestyle factors that affect health such as smoking, drinking, eating, moving, sleeping and stress. After completing a series of questions, an individual is given an overall score and different elements are highlighted as green, amber or red depending on their habits. Advice is given to improve anything that is highlighted as red or amber.

Follow-up emails are sent after six months asking the individual how they are and encouraging them to retake the quiz to reassess their health. The One You tool helps provide an informal guide for employees that may want to improve their health but would not necessarily wish to discuss it with a health professional or an internal HR department.

Workplace Challenge

The Workplace Challenge website and app acts as an activity log for employees to record levels of activity. As well as sport or exercise, individuals can include every day activities such as gardening and active travel. Recorded activity converts into points to compete against other organisations to become the most active workplace. National and local challenges take place to try and encourage more activity which unite employees within an organisation to create a more active culture.

Workplace physical activity programmes can reduce absenteeism due to sickness, increase work attendance, reduce job stress and decrease healthcare utilisation. Research by BUPA found that exercise can reduce absenteeism by 23.5% and staff turnover can be reduced by 16%. The challenge also urges employers where possible to allow a degree of flexibility in the workplace to enable their employees to participate in physical activity.

Benefit from Activity

This website highlights why people should exercise including benefits on a range of health conditions such as cancer, mental health, and musculoskeletal and neurological disorders. There is also guidance on how to make changes including a worksheet which empowers individuals to identify why they want to make a change and how they will achieve their goals. In addition to this, there are suggestions of organisations that can help as well as case studies of people who have changed their lives and health by increasing their activity levels.

The Workplace Wellbeing Charter

The Workplace Wellbeing Charter is a statement of intent, showing employers' commitment to the health of their staff. The charter provides a set of standards for organisations to benchmark themselves and develop strategies to improve their staff health and wellbeing. The process is now completed by more than 1,000 employers across England and strengthens the reputation of those organisations to existing and future employees.

Cycle to Work Scheme

The Government Cycle to Work scheme encourages employees to cycle to work and allows employers to reap the benefits of a healthier workforce. The scheme allows employees to purchase bikes and safety equipment as a tax-free benefit.

Further information

- » The Employment, Policy and Services Team are available to assist with employment-related enquiries, including those related to employee health and wellbeing. Do get in touch with the team if you would like further advice, guidance or support
- » AoC Sport can offer support and advice for staff physical activity initiatives. For further information please contact your Regional Policy Officer:

South – Kirstie Hickson

Central – Andy John

North – Matt Rhodes



Contact

 AoC_Sport

 AoC_Info

© AoC Sport 2016
2-5 Stedham Place
London WC1A 1HU
T: 020 7034 9900
E: sport@aac.co.uk
W: www.aocsport.co.uk

© AoC 2016
2-5 Stedham Place
London WC1A 1HU
T: 020 7034 9900
E: employment@aac.co.uk
W: www.aoc.co.uk/employment

