

Worksite Wellness in a Small Town

Challenge:

The Worksite Wellness Collaborative in Deer River offered unique challenges and as well as a new perspective on Worksite Wellness. Deer River is a small community of around 900 residents. There is a diverse business community in Deer River ranging from a local lumber company to the local clinic. No matter where the residents work or what service they provide, many of them have one thing in common. They are small businesses.

Small organizations are a unique to work with. Everyone within the organization wears multiple hats, doing more than one job, to make sure everything runs smoothly. There were a couple of the first things I needed to understand as a worksite wellness coordinator was, this collaborative was not going to run like the typical collaborative, if there is such a thing. First, there were going to be few, if any worksite wellness committees within the worksites. Second, this collaborative was focused on how they can benefit the community as well as their worksites. If the benefit couldn't eventually transfer to the community, many were not interested. Finally, all six were interested in helping each other succeed. They were interested in initiatives that benefited not only their own employees but also how they could share or bring in other sites. Smaller communities are unique not only because they inherently have small businesses but also because the people in the communities are always looking out for each other. They have the mind set of how can we not only help our business succeed but also help our community succeed.

The Deer River Collaborative had six organizations become a part of the local collaborative. The five organizations based in Deer River are The City of Deer River, Northern Star/Cenex, Essentia Health-Deer River, Rajala Lumber Co. and ISD 317. The MacRostie Art Center is based out of Grand Rapids. Each of these businesses faced different challenges that are unique to their own organization, however, there

are two challenges that all of the organizations faced. These barriers are time and staff. Because these organizations are small, many of them did not have the time or capability to form a worksite wellness committee. The City of Deer River is a great example. The City of Deer River houses many different departments under the local city government, including the license bureau, public works, the police department, and City Hall just to name a few. However, all of these departments are managed by 16 employees, part time or full time. With all of these departments spread out across the city employees, putting together a worksite wellness committee was just not feasible. To overcome this challenge, the city decided to appoint one person to attend wellness meetings, to communicate the needs of the employees, and to work on wellness within the city. This person was City Administrator, Mark Box. He became the wellness champion for the city. Under the leadership of the Mark Box, the city was able to change that atmosphere of City Hall, inside and out, and change the attitude surrounding health and wellness.

This is how one of the businesses chose to take on the challenges presented. It was also how many others chose to take on challenges within worksite wellness. Appointing one or two people to take over worksite wellness was a great solution in place of the worksite wellness committee; however it did not solve the problem of time. As with any other business or organization, time is valuable, possibly even more so within a small business. All of the employees work on multiple projects every day just to keep day to day activities moving. Adding anything more to that workload is a lot to ask.

Time was one of the biggest concerns when the collaborative started. To address this concern, I asked each of the members if they felt they had one hour each month to dedicate to wellness. Most of the organizations said yes. This was my initial ask to my worksites, to start off dedicating one hour each month to wellness. Everyone in the collaborative was on board with this commitment and was amazed

to see how much they could accomplish in one hour. They were soon able to put in more time and some were able to bring in a few more people. These efforts paid off in a big way for everyone.

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Solution:

Be Timely. Be Flexible. Be Creative. Be Patient. These are the four guidelines that helped this worksite wellness collaborative succeed. When working with smaller organizations many cannot afford the extra time it takes to step out of the office for an extra meeting. This means that the traditional collaborative meetings may not work for everyone. Being creative and flexible is crucial in making sure that everyone can be successful within the collaborative. As a result, one on one meetings became the go to for this collaborative. Like the City of Deer River, many of the workplaces appointed one or two people to head up wellness within the workplace. Meeting with these people from each site at least once every month in the beginning of the collaborative and once every two months towards the end, was a great way to keep everyone motivated and a way to check in with their goals. Maintaining the communication was a fantastic way for the members of the collaborative to express their needs outside of group meetings and a way for me to provide personalized resources depending on those needs.

While communication is great and needed within the collaborative, finding the time to meet can often be difficult. Kaitlin Box, Community Health Coordinator/ Worksite Wellness Coordinator at Get Fit Itasca commented on this task. "There are times when it seems like we are all playing phone or email tag trying to find a time that works. I know how valuable my collaborative member's time is and I want to respect it. When they give me a date and time that would work for them, I always make it work. Working around or rearranging my schedule is much easier, than trying to communicate through phone

or email or playing tag for weeks. So much of the message can be lost through an email, so finding the time for face to face communication as well as creating a space where each member of the collaborative feels comfortable. Sometimes I can learn more about the organizations wellness needs in a 5-10 minute conversation, than in a 2 hour long group meeting.”

Being able to obtain information and then use this information to make the worksite more successful is a great tool and an amazing resource not only for the initial worksite but also for other sites that may be struggling in the same manner or situation. It is important for all of the organizations to see they are moving in the right direction and they are having success in their efforts towards wellness. This maintains momentum and more importantly, motivation to keep going.

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Results:

This collaborative had many successes despite the barriers faced. All six organizations were able to achieve and exceed goals set in the beginning of the collaborative. The achievements made by the members of the collaborative included walking routes indoor and outdoors, water challenges, weight loss challenges, self-affirmation goals, and healthy eating initiatives just to name a few. Essentia Health-Deer River had made tremendous strides during the worksite wellness collaborative and continues to do so. They have had amazing success with many of their initiatives. One of the ideas that developed from the worksite wellness committee at Essentia was Take Charge Tuesday.

Essentia-Deer River was one of the six organizations that was able create a worksite wellness committee. They decided to have representation from each department at the table. This worked well for them. They were able to have a diverse group of people and a wide range of ideas come to the table.

The Worksite Wellness Committee at Essentia -Health Deer River was quick to recognize the need of having healthy options available not only during cafeteria hours but also when the cafeteria was closed. One of the first things they did was create and send out a survey to employees to get others opinions and wants regarding the topic. The results of that survey turned out to be valuable. One of the members of the worksite wellness committee was the Chris Giersdorf, Director of Food Service. She was a key player in implementing Take Charge Tuesday. She was able to work with her staff and the worksite wellness committee to determine if Take Charge Tuesday would be possible and to what scale. After several months of planning, Take Charge Tuesday was ready for its debut. Employees could choose from a large or a small salad, both a flat rate. It was received with rave reviews. Take Charge Tuesday started as a monthly menu item but as demand increased for the fresh salads, it has now become a weekly staple in the Esstentia- Deer River Cafeteria. This is what Amanda Reed, Essentia Health Deer River Employee and member of the Worksite Wellness Committee, had to say about worksite wellness and the community, "I appreciate the accountability Get Fit Itasca provides and how the program keeps us on task! I learn a lot about what other worksites are doing at the collaborative meetings and I find value in working directly with other community members. As a healthcare facility we need to take part in encouraging healthier standards within the community by setting the example within our own facilities."

Essentia-Deer River is just one example of a worksite having amazing results. All of the worksites were able to set goals and show results. MacRostie Art Center was also able so show great results. MacRostie Art Center has 5 employees within their building. They all wear multiple duties and often forgot to take a break for hours on end. The MacRostie Art Center is centrally located downtown and the employees wanted to take advantage of this. Katie Marshall, Executive Director of MacRostie Art Center had this to say about the worksite wellness experience. " In a small nonprofit, worksite wellness – like personal wellness—is all too often placed on the" back burner" as we scramble to keep up with our day –to-day project and responsibilities. Being a part of the Worksite Wellness Collaborative created

the space for our organization to consider the health of our employees and visitors and how our workplace is having a positive or negative impact on wellness- or no impact at all. The Worksite Wellness Collaborative also provided time and resources for us to make changes to improve our policies, physical space, and program delivery to be more intentional about encouraging wellness to our staff, members, and visitors.” As Katie stated, all of the employees, members, and visitors are benefiting from the tool, resources, and skills learned because of the worksite wellness collaborative. Many employees work hard to remind each other to take breaks, go for walks around the block if the weather is nice and to stand up if they have been sitting for long periods of time. Not only do they help each other with verbal reminders, the MacRostie Art Center was able to apply for a worksite wellness mini grant to invest in sit-to-stand work stations and they also invested in a Mothers Room. Over the past year, everyone at MacRostie has been invested in creating a space where wellness is welcomed and encouraged by every employee, member, and visitor.

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Sustaining Success:

There has been much success within the Deer River Worksite Wellness Collaborative and all of the sites strive to keep this success going. The Deer River Collaborative ended in May of 2017 and transitioned in to an alumni collaborative. With this transition the worksites wanted to make sure they still were able to keep the worksite wellness movement alive and well within Deer River. They all knew they wanted to keep meeting but they also needed a facilitator for these meetings. As has been the case for entire collaborative, the want is there it is just finding someone who has the time and is willing to do the job.

Essentia Health-Deer River has been an involved member of the collaborative since the start a little over a year ago. Hannah Daniels and Amanda Reed, two members of the Essentia Health Worksite Wellness Committee, thought the idea of taking over or facilitating the Deer River collaborative aligned perfectly with the goal of engaging the community. Molly McCann, SHIP Coordinator had this to say about the sustainability of this collaborative. “The leadership of the Essentia Health-Deer River, specifically with Hannah Daniels and the worksite wellness committee has been amazing. They have had great success during the collaborative and are eager to continue their work. I am excited to see how they continue to work with the other businesses throughout the community and show the passion for the Deer River area they have displayed all throughout the collaborative. This truly is a model for success and sustainability.”

With Essentia Health Deer River taking on the responsibility of facilitating meeting for Deer River Collaborative and other members committing to continue to meet and engage in wellness, the Collaborative members are creative a sustainable model for the future. Not only to do they have the goal of sustaining for the future, they also have the goal of being able to bring in more organizations and continue spreading worksite wellness to all businesses throughout the Deer River area.

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Get Involved:

We are in the process of recruiting organizations for our next worksite wellness collaborative. We are looking for businesses in the Bigfork area as well as the Coleraine/ Nashwauk/Keewatin area. If your business or organization is interested in worksite wellness or would like to learn general information about worksite wellness please contact:

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