

Healthy Workers – Healthy Futures

Case Study: ac. care

“I wondered why somebody didn’t do something—then I realised I am somebody”

1978 unknown.

The Approach

ac.care employs 200 staff and provides integrated support services for rural people across nine different sites in the Limestone Coast, Riverland and Murrayland communities. ac. care supports clients through a range of services including housing, homelessness support, emergency relief, financial counselling, Aboriginal services, youth services, foster care and family support services.

ac. care recently implemented healthy catering guidelines and developed a standard procedure for all catering to be ordered via administration, rather than an ad-hoc approach that differed between sites and among programs. Healthy snack guidelines have also been developed and implemented to improve the healthfulness of snacks that are available for sale at sites. There are strict no alcohol and no smoking on-site policies.

ac. care recognises the importance of work-life balance and offers genuine support for staff to manage their busy work and home lives, through; flexible work hours, opportunities to work from home and on specific projects, dependent on an individual’s role. Staff receive five weeks annual leave and time off in lieu is available to allow staff to take time to attend activities during the day such as school assemblies. ac. care is a child friendly workplace and supports breastfeeding and gradual return to work post-maternity leave.

In addition, ac.care supports 10 minute de-stress neck massages for staff who contribute to the cost, offers yoga sessions for foster carers, mindfulness sessions and many sites host lunch time walking groups. Group entry to the Blue Lake Fun Run is covered by the organisation and a review is currently underway to identify events at other locations and provide ac. care branded t-shirts to participants.

ac. care actively challenges staff on sustainable practices. Environmentally friendly and non-toxic cleaning products are provided across the agency. Areas of concern in regard to personal issues are addressed speedily and Safety Data records maintained at all sites.

Fit with organisational core values/vision/mission

ac.care's mission is to provide the best integrated support services for rural people to have opportunities to participate in their community and achieve their life goals. Staff wellness is an important component in ac.care’s values: of compassion; accountability to clients, staff, funders and communities; provision of a positive workplace climate and equity of access that values and utilises the contributions of people of different background, experiences and perspectives.

ac. care has an ongoing and proactive commitment to support staff health and wellbeing, and work-life balance. ac. care recognises that creating a supportive, health promoting work environment can have positive impacts on staff productivity, retention and commitment to the organisation, as well as re-engaging staff that have worked elsewhere or take extended leave such as maternity leave. Additionally a commitment to a wellbeing culture promotes our organisation as an employer of choice.

The Rationale

ac. care programs assist people who are often in crisis. The emotional and physical storage bank of staff can become sorely depleted in this challenging environment. ac. care recognises it’s duty of care in supporting staff wellbeing and ensuring the delivery of high standard quality support programs for regional communities.

Through the review and implementation of staff programs ac. care strives to provide support, encouragement, tools and opportunities that enhance staff health, wellbeing, quality of life and satisfaction. The Health and Wellbeing initiative is a great platform to share tips and information to staff, that will enhance not only their own health, but through role modelling, the health of their families, ac. care clients and the broader community.

The Process

While staff health and wellbeing has been on the agenda for quite some time and included a number of ad-hoc site-specific approaches; the organisation-wide approach began more recently through



engagement of the SACOSS Healthy Workers Adviser. Once leadership support was obtained, a number of ac. care staff attended a workshop on healthy catering, this prompted the implementation of healthy catering guidelines and a change in catering ordering procedures.

Two staff have since attended Healthy Workers Healthy Futures Champion Training through Aged and Community Services SA & NT, which is providing the skills, tools and resources required for them to embed health and wellbeing strategies across the organisation.

Positives and Achievements

With the change to catering guidelines it was expected that there would be a significant push back. It didn't happen! Staff have embraced the concept and welcomed the change to healthier food choices.

Self-initiated smaller walking groups have started, getting away from desks at lunchtime and really having a break. Staff are enjoying increased camaraderie and morale that comes with this, without the heavy load of bad food and inactivity.

The more information the organisation provides in easy bite size chunks, the more the staff sponge absorbs. This indicates that people truly do want and appreciate a health promoting workplace.

Overcoming the Challenges

As a not-for-profit Community Service Organisation ac. care are budget restricted and this is by far the biggest challenge. The majority of ac. care funding is granted for client service delivery, not staff health and wellbeing development. Bringing to the fore initiatives that fall within budget requires ingenuity and effort.

Having no dedicated job description around health & wellbeing, it comes down to persistence and desire from the team leader and champions. With a pleasing proactive and team oriented response from staff, ac. care has been able to make small changes with big impact.

Recognising the substantial diversity of the workforce, ac. care ensures culture, relevance and flexibility is included in the planning of new initiatives.

Delivery to all staff and volunteers in a relevant and useful format, utilising email and face-to-face workplace champions has made the desired outcomes a reality.

The Future

ac. care recently accepted the opportunity to attend Healthy Workers Healthy Futures Champion training and have engaged with the Healthy Workers Adviser. The organisation is currently establishing how staff health and wellbeing approaches can be embedded across the organisation to ensure sustainability and developing links with other organisations with the same ethos in regard to Health and Wellbeing including SACOSS. As part of ac. care's health and wellbeing approach specially designed, timed email alerts are being developed. These will arrive in staff inboxes regularly and provide tips on healthy food, easy recipes, exercise types, as well as up to date information on smoking and the benefits of quitting. These updates will also remind staff about opportunities such as the availability of the Employee Assistance Program.

Another key component in future planning will be improved milestone recognition for staff who attain a major work achievement or have been with the organisation for a long period of time.

Duration and resources

Health and Wellbeing is deeply embedded in ac. care future planning. It is recognised that community sector staff are at a higher risk of putting the needs of individuals and the community before their own needs. The commitment from ac. care Board and Management ensures ongoing improvement and sufficient provision of resources for staff.

We must be resolute in ensuring how we follow through with Health & Wellbeing initiatives and to empower our staff to make good choices for themselves and for their families.

This case study was prepared and submitted, in collaboration with ac. care by SACOSS under the Healthy Workers Healthy Futures Initiative

Find out more about how you can create a healthy workplace; find a Healthy Worker Advisers for your sector, or to submit your own case study:

Healthy Workers Healthy Futures Initiative
Email: healthyworkers@health.sa.gov.au
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/healthyworkers