

Healthy Workers – Healthy Futures

Case Study: City of Marion

Think Safe Live Well

The City of Marion has embedded a comprehensive workplace health, safety and wellbeing program, Think Safe Live Well, in its culture, systems and leadership. Seeking to continually improve the health of staff at work and home, the program underpins the organisation's commitment to being an employer of choice.

The Approach

The City of Marion is a local government area in the southern suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia. It is one of 68 councils in SA and employs about 380 staff. There are a similar number of volunteers that help out in libraries, neighbourhood centres, cultural centres and the Administration Building. Staff undertake a wide range of roles, including management, clerical, manual labour, and community development.

Think Safe Live Well was launched to all staff at a special event in October 2012 with 'Zero Harm' as the key message. This followed extensive staff consultation and discussions with senior management about the best ways of improving safety and wellbeing. The roll out was backed by an intensive communications campaign. The campaign is ongoing and key messages and practical tips are reinforced at staff meetings, on posters and on the intranet.

Think Safe Live Well can be seen across the whole organisation, including in:

- The development of organisational policies on healthy catering, sun safety and smoke free workplaces.
- Monthly staff meetings cover health themes and include guest speakers and discussions
- Staff numbers at voluntary annual health checks rose from 70 to 110 this year. The checks are provided by a private organisation through the Local Government Association Workers Compensation Scheme and provide people with an assessment of their health, including fitness, diet and cholesterol levels and tips on how to improve
- Council subsidises programs including Weight Watchers at Work, a weekly lunch time body balance session at a local gym, quit smoking support, discounts to a swimming pool. It also supports Corporate

Cup participation, meditation classes and healthy barbecues

- Tips for safety and injury prevention in the workplace have been provided to staff and these will be expanded
- Ways of improving wellbeing are discussed at weekly team meetings. An aim of Think Safe Live Well is that people leave work feeling better than when they arrived
- Promotional materials and information on injury prevention and health education is provided in staff newsletters, on the intranet and in the corporate induction program. This is reinforced with practical tips and demonstrations at staff meetings
- The presence of Obesity Prevention and Lifestyle program (OPAL) in the workplace has created change to healthy food options and increased optional light exercise at events
- The Healthy Communities initiative has also gained prominence and is making staff, and the community, more aware of the benefits of growing healthy food
- An Employee Assistance Program and flexible working arrangements are promoted to staff to improve wellbeing.



City of Marion Health and Wellbeing program logo



The Rationale

While the City of Marion has actively worked to improve the health and wellbeing of staff since 2001, the CEO and directors, with the support of the Mayor and elected members sought to revamp its approach.

This was driven by a number of factors, including the organisation's culture which includes a commitment to developing a constructive, safe and efficient workplace. Statistics also showed the number of days lost to injury was high compared to councils of a similar size.

Claims statistics from the Local Government Association Workers Compensation Scheme show a marked decline in the City of Marion's lost time injuries from 13 to 8 in the year following the launch of Think Safe Live Well (2011-2012). This placed the City of Marion's lost time injuries below average compared to councils of a similar size.

To support the new Work Health and Safety Act 2012, the Executive Management Group undertook training along with the Wellbeing, Health and Safety Committee, and further training is being planned.

The new legislation has a strong focus on improving the health and safety of workplaces from a continuous improvement perspective, which closely aligns with the aims of Think Safe Live Well.

Reducing lost time due to injuries and staff turnover and improving health and wellbeing are key factors in the City of Marion being an employer of choice.

Fit with organisational core values

The City of Marion Strategic Plan 2010-2020 sets out council's commitment to a comprehensive approach to organisational excellence with Employer of Choice identified as one of seven key directions. This complements the theme of Community Wellbeing which emphasises healthy lifestyles and communities. Strong leadership in creating an organisational culture that supports participation and communication and nurtures and grows a constructive humanistic culture, is stressed. The plan includes the following strategy:

Ensure our workplace:

- Provides safe systems of work

- Fair treatment
- Appropriate reward and recognition
- Values diversity
- Embraces a healthy work/life balance

Intention to stay and a 90 per cent retention and turnover target indicate how this will be measured.

“As an organisation we will better serve the community when our staff are safe and happy in their workplace. We want employees to leave work at the end of the day with a greater sense of wellbeing than when they arrived.”

Mark Searle, CEO.

The Process

Following broad agreement from council to introduce Think Safe Live Well, the Risk Unit (which incorporates Work Health and Safety) determined the best format for the program based on the evidence, cost, needs and feasibility.

Think Safe Live Well was formally launched by the City of Marion CEO at an all-staff breakfast event alongside the new Community Plan in October 2012, giving it considerable profile and significance.

Three professional development workshops were held with all management to help engage the “hearts and minds” of organisational leaders. These sessions focused on:

- Risky Business – towards Zero Harm
- Beyond Safety - The Evolution of a Wellbeing Culture
- Think Safe Live Well.

Following the launch, key staff from across the organisation helped articulate the Think Safe Live Well vision and directions and key program performance data.

A staff survey was conducted using the Healthy Workers Healthy Futures needs assessment template with some adaptations to the Marion Council environment.

Health and Safety and Equity and Diversity Officers helped draft the survey and 100 responses were achieved out of 380 staff; an encouraging 26 per cent response rate. The survey helped engage

staff as well as identify needs and areas of interest for 2014 and evaluated work to date. This information was used to program activities for 2014.

In addition, needs are determined by information from annual health checks; input directly from staff; advice from the Health and Safety representatives and the Wellbeing, Health and Safety Committee and general knowledge about key health and wellbeing issues.

Positives and Achievements

The drive and commitment of senior management to ensure the success of Think Safe Live Well has been a major contributor to its success.

The pre-launch consultation encouraged many staff to adopt a healthy lifestyle and in 2012 City of Marion won the Weight Watchers Workplace of the Year for Australia and New Zealand after 36 staff collectively lost 207kg in six months.

This success drew coverage in South Australian media and was used to highlight the benefits of healthy living through internal communication channels, including the staff newsletter, intranet and at events.

One staff member changed his diet, lost weight and persuaded his family to adopt healthy eating. Staff who have had success at Weight Watchers and through gym programs have also become 'health champions', proactively supporting Think Safe Live Well.

Staff from different work units now come together to participate in health and fitness activities, which helps break down barriers and form friendships

Overcoming the Challenges

Turning the vision of enhanced wellbeing and zero harm into reality has been supported by strong leadership and clear support from the CEO, directors and Mayor.

A continuing challenge is the question of "what offers best value for money" in workplace health and where funds should be invested for best returns? As knowledge of workplace health continues to grow, it is expected increased research will lead more data being available.

One of the key performance measures is lost time injury frequency rate, and while it is decreasing, there is still room for improvement. Ongoing education and support for new and established employees will continue to address this.

The Future

The program will continue as it is integral to City of Marion's values and strategic directions. New initiatives are planned, including yoga and sessions on 'mindfulness', the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on the immediate experience.

An externally conducted survey targeting specific health issues, including consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables, is being considered.

A staff cultural survey is undertaken every two years and includes measures on 'intention to stay' and 'perception of stress'. Monitoring these trends will give another indication of how well Think Safe Live Well is functioning.

Duration and resources

Think Safe Live Well is the City of Marion's Work Health Safety System. While responsibility for the initiative sits in the Governance Division along with risk management and other work health and safety responsibilities, the program seeks to empower staff to care for themselves at home and work, 24/7.

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

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