Case Study: Inner West Business Enterprise Centre

The Inner West Business Enterprise Centre (IWBEC) is a host agency for the Healthy Workers Health Futures (HWHF) initiative working with small to medium businesses in the inner west of Adelaide. It is the only geographically based HWHF Host Agency. The HWHF Healthy Worker Adviser (HWA) obtained agreement from the IWBEC Board and other staff to become a healthy workplace and to trial healthy workplace strategies in their own agency, while introducing them to local businesses.

The Approach

IWBEC is a not for profit organisation of four staff established to assist local businesses in the creation, retention and development of small business opportunities, including import and export. It promotes local employment initiatives that lead to job creation and/or retention. The four staff undertake management, consultation, training and administrative roles, both in the office and in the community.

The IWBEC is implementing a range of strategies in their own organisation whilst engaging with local businesses. The initial focus at IWBEC is on healthy eating and physical activity. These topics are viewed as positive changes, riding on the community interest in food and weight. Healthy catering was an early priority and as well as changing their own menus, IWBEC conducted a survey with local businesses about catering. Healthy options were identified as the second most important thing behind price in choosing catering suppliers. The Adviser approached a number of local catering firms with this information and they have responded by ensuring a supply of healthier products is now more readily available. Underpinning this change was the requirement to be cost neutral and feasible for busy staff. A simple healthy catering guide, developed with the West Torrens OPAL program, assists staff at IWBEC and beyond to order healthier options.

In November 2013 a healthy breakfast for 120 people was hosted by IWBEC, OPAL and the City of West Torrens. Attendees included businesses and stakeholders in the City of West Torrens who were interested in creating a healthy catering policy in their workplace as well as networking. This also helped promote the HWHF program and catering choices.

The Rationale

In 2012 the Board of IWBEC made a commitment to improving workplace health in local businesses in applying, successfully, for Healthy Workers Healthy Futures funding. The Healthy Worker Adviser supports small and medium businesses in the inner west of Adelaide to become healthier workplaces. The Board acts as the reference group to the project and supports the Adviser in planning and implementing the initiative as a whole.

The Board and Management agreed it was important that the host organisation trial and put into practice the types of strategies being suggested to other small organisations by the...
Officer – leading by example. Other Centre staff were also supportive.

Fit with organisational core values
IWBECE is a small non-government organisation established to assist and develop successful businesses. The HWHF initiative has shown the importance of having a healthy workplace to improve productivity, morale, staff engagement and business success. The HWHF initiative aligns with IWBECE’s vision to be a ‘premier provider of innovative and dynamic assistance to small business.’

The Process
In agreeing to trial different healthy workplace strategies within their own service the HWA began by developing a Health and Wellbeing Policy in February 2013. This was succinct and practical, included small achievable milestones and acts as a template for other businesses.

A formal needs assessment was not considered necessary at IWBECE given the small number of staff. Needs are assessed in an ongoing fashion through conversations with staff, from observations and general understanding of the workforce health needs. The policy will be reviewed in November 2014.

Positives and Achievements
Changing the menus at the Board breakfast meetings and training sessions from high kilojoule muffins and croissants, schnitzel sandwiches and cakes to healthier options has been very well received, especially given the lower cost. The Catering Guide is also excellent for IWBECE staff planning training and events and has been provided to other workplaces in the area.

Individuals are making changes in their own lives and for their families and Board members are promoting the concept of healthy workplaces in their own organisations.

Overcoming the Challenges
Adapting mainstream healthy workplace strategies to a smaller workplace can be challenging but approaches can be individually tailored to the specifics of the site and people. Working with external partners allows increased scope.

Measuring change requires consideration. Whilst activities can be documented, with a small staff, measuring changes in morale, sick days and productivity is difficult. Nonetheless, anecdotal evidence suggests the workplace environment has changed for the better.

The Future
IWBECE is located in a precinct with other businesses and there are plans to implement a communal vegetable garden as well as hold lunchtime tai chi classes. The IWBECE has identified the importance of creating a healthy workplace in small business and are working towards a goal of building healthy workplace strategies into their training programs.

Creation of healthy workplaces is viewed by IWBECE as an important complement to support local and small business to succeed.

Duration and resources
The HWA is based at IWBECE until August 2015, where time and funds are spent assisting local small businesses to implement healthy workplace strategies.

“The HWHF program has been fundamental to the increase in productivity and job satisfaction here at IWBECE. The healthy changes we have made in our workplace have influenced our entire client base.”

Susan Devine, IWBECE Manager

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

Healthy Workers Healthy Futures Initiative
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