

## THE WORK WELL PROGRAMME AT KNOCK TRAVEL

### 1. Organisation involved

Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland  
Knock Travel

### 2. Description of the case

#### 2.1. Introduction

The Health Promotion Agency (HPA; recently renamed the Public Health Agency) developed the 'Work Well' programme (HPA, 2004).

The 'Work Well' programme is a comprehensive workplace health programme, which provides organisations with the information, guidance and tools to assess and address organisational- and individual-level issues that may negatively impact the health and well-being of employees.

The primary aim of the programme is to promote healthy workplaces and healthy workers within Northern Ireland. This programme seeks to promote all facets of employee health, including mental health and overall well-being.

The programme was specifically designed to address the unique needs and requirements of small and medium sized companies. This was viewed as a priority by the Public Health Agency as 99% of businesses in Northern Ireland employ less than 50 employees (HPA, 2006b), while just 830 companies employ more than 50 people.

This programme was intended and tested to be a 'whole organisational' or 'whole systems' approach to address the health and wellbeing of employees. The programme is underpinned by three facets of workplace health: health and well-being, leadership and management, and physical environment (see figure 1).

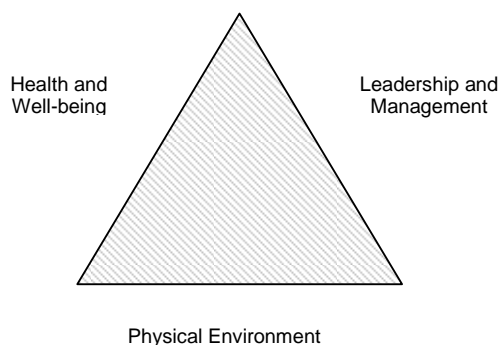


Figure 1: Three pillars of Work Well Programme

The theme examining the health and well-being of employees seeks to implement strategies and actions aimed to increasing managers' and employees' knowledge of health-related issues and behaviours.

# CASE STUDIES

The theme on leadership and management seeks to develop company policies and practices to create a healthy and supportive workplace for employees; promoting the development of positive working relationships and employees' knowledge, skills and resources.

The final theme, physical environment, seeks to develop, assess, and improve the physical working environment in order to promote the safety and health of employees. This theme encourages employers to continuously review and improve the environment people work in and the health and safety aspects of the workplace.

The Work Well programme process and procedure are detailed in a guide with accompanying toolkit. The guide and toolkit are freely available from the Health Promotion Agency ([www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk/resources/workwell](http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk/resources/workwell)). The developed guide provides practical information to assist small companies in developing and putting healthy workplace programmes into action. It is structured according to the following topics:

- What makes a healthy workplace;
- The benefits of developing a healthy workplace programme;
- What sort of actions you can implement as part of a healthy workplace programme;
- The process of developing a healthy workplace programme, including action planning and self-evaluation against healthy workplace quality criteria.

It also provides a series of tools which an organisation can use to:

- evaluate where they currently stand as a healthy workplace provider;
- identify the areas that can be improved, and
- create a health action plan for the organisation to put into action.

The content of the Work Well programme was piloted by the HPA in 2004 in 20 small businesses (i.e., 10-50 employees) in a variety of occupational sectors in Northern Ireland. Knock Travel was selected to be one of twenty companies in the United Kingdom to participate in the 'Work Well' programme.

## **2.2. Aims**

The primary aim of the 'Work Well' programme is to small business practical guidance and advice on how to:

- assess their organisation and employee health needs,
- write a health action plan;
- systematically implementing it;
- and evaluate the developed programme.

## **2.3. What was done, and how?**

Knock Travel provides travel services for business travellers and for the leisure market; with a particular emphasis on niche market holidays. Knock travel is a successful small sized company consisting of 22 staff members, with two agencies located in Bangor and Ballyhackamore. The workforce is 60% female and 40% male.

### **What is the Work Well Process**

The Work Well programme uses a systematic step-wise approach to the development of a healthy workplace and seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of employees (see Figure 2).

# CASE STUDIES

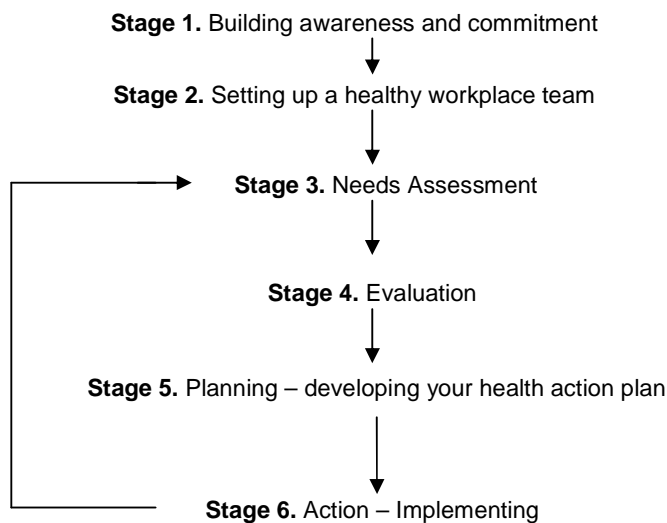


Figure 2. The Work Well Process (adapted from 'Healthy Workplace Guide'; 2006a)

## Stage 1: Building Awareness and Commitment

As a preliminary step to the Work Well process it is advised to consult with two main groups: senior management and employees. Senior Management should fully commit to the work well process and communicate their commitment to the staff. Additionally, clarification of what a healthy workplace is, how a healthy workplace will be developed, and how it will benefit employees' health and well-being should be communicated to all employees.

## Stage 2: Setting Up a Healthy Workplace Team

In stage 2, a healthy workplace team or working group is established to help develop and drive activities for the healthy workplace programme. The healthy workplace team is responsible for overseeing the Work Well process and implementing the whole Work Well programme. This working group should include the Executive Director or a member of senior management, and employees who are representative of the organisational structure. The establishment of this working group has the added benefit of encouraging a shared sense of ownership, where both management and employees work together and are responsible for different actions.

## Stage 3: Needs Assessment

There are two key actions at this stage of the Work Well process. The first action involves completing an organisational health assessment. The second action requires asking employees, through a questionnaire, what they need and want from the developed healthy workplace programme. The organisational health assessment tool, which is provided in the Work Well toolkit, helps to assess where the gaps relating to healthy workplace practices may be within the organisation. This assessment tool should be filled out by a healthy workplace adviser with assistance of staff members who have extensive knowledge and understanding of the existing workplace policies and practices. This questionnaire only needs to be completed once in the initial phase of the Work Well process. The employee questionnaire assesses the health needs of employees. The employee questionnaire assesses various facets of health and wellbeing: including mental and physical health. The employee questionnaire is included in the Work Well toolkit. The collected information helps to target and tailor the workplace action plan to the particular needs of employees in the given organisation.

# CASE STUDIES

## Stage 4: Evaluation

The evaluation stage of the Work Well process involves a self-assessment within the organisation: particularly in relation to current strengths and future opportunities. This is accomplished through a meeting of employees, who are asked how they feel about the organisation and its policies and practices. The collected information is used to develop key actions in the health action plan.

## Stage 5: Planning your health action plan

From the evaluation stage and the needs assessment, a number of key actions are identified. These actions points are translated into the health action plan. The development of the health action plans requires several key steps.

- The action points identified during the evaluation stage are prioritised, from those areas in the workplace that need the most improvement, and the action strategy is developed and outlined.
- Discussion with the working group has to be conducted on who is going to be responsible for what action.
- Discussion about the development of a realistic timescale for the implementation of each point of action plan is needed; ideally this would be over a 12 to 18 month time period.
- It is recommended that more sensitive topics, like bullying or sexual harassment, may be better addressed later in the programme. By doing this, employees may be less suspicious of the programme and more receptive to any changes or activities.
- The developed health action plan should then be communicated to employees and should be discussed with them by supervisors/managers.
- A review of the developed health action plan should be conducted on a regular basis. Additionally, the established working group should meet no less than every three months to review and update the health action plan.

## Stage 6: Action – implementing your health action plan

There are several recommendations for the successful implementation of the health action plan.

- The employees need to see action swiftly following the needs assessment and evaluation period; if not this may decrease their commitment and interest in the programme.
- Continuous communication to the employees in relation to the progress of the programme should be given.
- The action plan should remain flexible, where it is possible to response to changing employee requirements or organisational needs.

At the end of the implementation period, organisations should evaluate and review what has been achieved. This should be done by repeating the employee questionnaire and evaluation process. By repeating this process, this allows organisations to further refine or update their health action plan.

### **The work well process at Knock Travel**

A working group was established and involved the company proprietor, the head of the 'Cut Our Waste' Committee (an already established employee group with the primary aim of decreasing the company's impact on the environment), and three other members of staff.

Subsequently, the priority actions for the healthy workplace programme were identified with those employees who were already on the 'Cut Our Waste Committee' and through the Work Well employee questionnaire, which all employees anonymously completed.

A number of priority actions were identified: reducing stress in the workplace; implementing new policies on health and wellbeing, eliminating sexual harassment and bullying, enhancing mental health; increasing levels of physical activity among employees, encouraging healthy eating and weight loss where required, and updating the return to work policy for breastfeeding mothers as well as updating the health and safety policy.

# CASE STUDIES

Several actions were implemented in order to address the identified areas for improvement. The following section will outline the strategies implemented as part of the health action plan.

## Mental health and stress in the workplace

These strategies focused on developing company policies and providing training to employees.

- The employee handbook was amended to include new and revised policies on health and safety, stress and mental health, return to work after maternity leave, harassment and bullying, and good health wellbeing.
- An awareness session on stress management was held. The primary aim of this seminar was to enhance the knowledge of employees in relation to: what is stress? How can it affect my mental health and wellbeing? Additionally, employees were taught coping strategies and relaxation techniques that can be used to effectively manage psychological distress.
- A private health policy was provided to all staff members, and their family members. The treatments covered included: counselling services, medical, dental, eye treatment & tests, and alternative therapies.

One of the key aims of the healthy workplace programme in Knock Travel was to promote supportive environment and sense of community in their workplace. This was accomplished by having a company barbecue for all staff members and their families. This event offered a range of actions, including water skiing and speed boat rides. The event provided an opportunity for management and employees to continue to build positive relationships, and a sense of team spirit.

## Workers wellbeing

Several strategies were implemented to promote a more general sense of employee wellbeing through diet and exercise.

- A seminar on nutrition and diet was organised with the support of the 'Work Well' initiative. All staff members attended this seminar. The seminar showed the benefits of healthy eating to employees' health and wellbeing.
- Knock Travel took part in the 'Work Well' step-o-meter challenge. Each member of staff was given a pedometer to count the number of steps they walked every day for a month. The company offered a prize for the person who had taken the most steps. As a result of this action many of the staff members have continued to walk at lunchtime or in some cases before work to increase their personal fitness levels. The additional, indirect, benefit of this programme was the development of better relationships between staff members, an overall supportive workplace environment and overall team development.
- The head office of Knock Travel is located in a three storey building. Signs were made letting staff know that at 852m high Slieve Donard is the highest peak in Northern Ireland and that walking from the bottom to the top of the stairs every day for a year is the equivalent of climbing to the top of Slieve Donard six times! The primary goal of this action was to encourage employees to incorporate more physical activity into their working day.
- Knock Travel arranged for each member of staff to have a 15 minute neck and shoulder massage at work. The aim of this was to increase relaxation, to promote a sense of well-being, to show possible ways of exercising, to increase energy, and to make employees more aware of the importance of a healthy posture. This event was repeated due to its popularity with staff.
- Several healthy eating weeks were organised. During 'fruit awareness week', Knock Travel provided a different piece of fruit each day for all staff members, along with a small information leaflet indicating the benefits to be gained from eating fruit. A similar week focused on the benefits of different vegetables, and their importance in maintaining a healthy diet and lifestyle. These events raised awareness about healthy eating by promoting a healthier option to other snack foods, and highlighting the positive benefits of eating fruit and vegetables to physical health.

# CASE STUDIES

- Staff attended a special health fair where they could have a free health check provided by registered nurses and other health professionals. Information and practical demonstrations were provided on various topics: including diabetes, cholesterol, hearing, reflexology, massage, fitness, drugs and alcohol.
- Information on a variety of health-related topics is now posted on the staff notice board on a regular basis.

## **2.4. What was achieved?**

The benefits accrued from the 'Work Well' programme were measured by using staff feedback forms on events held in the office: for example, the stress management seminar or fruit or vegetable week.

Several benefits of the 'Work Well' programme in Knock Travel have been observed:

- The actions undertaken, and staff participation in them, have increased morale and interaction between departments, creating a supportive working environment. This benefits both employees and the company in terms of better relationships and communication.
- The established working group continues to be active and involved in staff health and staff issues.
- The increase in staff awareness of the benefits of healthy eating has resulted in a noticeable change in staff eating habits. Lunches are healthier and many employees have lost weight.
- Staff realise the importance of breaks and use this time wisely. Following a walk at lunchtime, employees are refreshed and ready to start work again.
- Employees are proud of their achievements and there is a noticeable 'BUZZ' around the office.
- The managers report that they have observed a reduction in staff absenteeism.

Additionally, Knock Travel has received several awards and recognition for their workplace health programme. Knock Travel entered the "BBC's Big Challenge to Promote Healthy Workplaces" and won the national award for "Healthiest Small Employer" (HPA, 2006b). In addition Knock Travel was nominated for a Travel Trade magazine award. This has resulted in the indirect benefit of increased positive publicity for the company, and has enhanced the company's image, reputation, and profile.

Generally, staff have enjoyed and benefited from the activities provided. Employees are now more determined to engage in activities and behaviours, which promote their mental and physical health.

Activities continue to take place on a regular basis so that employees' interest is maintained, and to ensure that employees know Knock Travel is committed to their mental and physical health and well-being.

One of the observed challenges, during the implementation of the Work Well programme in Knock Travel, was finding the time and resources to implement these strategies and to engage all employees in the programme continuously.

Knock Travel highlights that the vast majority of employees were supportive and enthusiastic during the initial implementation of the programme; and continue to actively support the workplace health programme. Knock Travel addressed the aforementioned challenge by continuing to communicate the importance of the programme and used the established working group to build interest and raise enthusiasm in the office.

Building on the success of the programme to date, Knock Travel has several future plans to further develop their workplace health initiative.

- Continue to hold seminars to raise staff awareness on a variety of health topics; including the impact of alcohol on individuals' health and wellbeing.
- Knock Travel is seeking to implement an on-going personal professional development programme for all staff members.



# CASE STUDIES

- Additionally, Knock Travel has joined up with its suppliers and other smaller companies to conduct similar events together.

## **2.5. Success factors**

There were several observed success factors that facilitated the effective implementation of the Work Well programme in Knock Travel and, moreover, enhancing the health and well-being of its employees:

- Knock Travel is committed developing a healthy workplace over the long-term. It has done this by using the continuous development cycle, as outlined in the Work Well process.
- The staff has been continuously involved in various stages of the programme. The company continues to be responsive to their needs and is proactively in implementing strategies to address these concerns.
- The regular application of the staff questionnaire enables easy identifying of successful interventions and of recommendable changes.

## **2.6. Further information**

Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland

18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast BT2 8HS

Tel: + 44 (0) 28 9031 1611

Fax: + 44 (0) 289031 1711

[www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk](http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk)

Mrs Doreen McKenzie

Head Office

Knock Travel

251 – 253 Upper Newtownards Road

Belfast - BT4 3JF

Tel.: +44 28 9047 1125

Fax.: +44 28 9047 1903

## **2.7. Transferability**

As aforementioned, the 'Work Well' programme has been successfully implemented in 20 small companies from a wide of variety of occupational sectors: both the private and public. The companies in the initiative were all small or medium sized companies. A toolkit and employer-directed implementation/evaluation guide has been developed by the Health Promotion Agency. This provides employers and managers with the necessary tools to evaluate their workplace and the health of their employees in a stepwise and systematic manner. The developed toolkit and guide were develop intentionally to be adaptable to a variety of occupational sectors; and is currently being trailed in large organisations.

### 3. References, resources:

- Toolkit and guide on Work well programme:  
[www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk/resources/workwell](http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk/resources/workwell)
- Health Promotion Agency. 2004. Help us make your health a priority. Retrieved from: <http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk/Resources/workwell/workwellleaflet.htm> on 22nd September 2009.
- Health Promotion Agency. 2004. Work Well: Baseline survey findings 2004 (2004). Retrieved from: <http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk/Resources/workwell/workwellsurvey04.htm> on 22nd September 2009.
- Health Promotion Agency. 2006a. Work Well Guide: Healthy Workplace Guide Retrieved from: <http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk/Resources/workwell/workwellworkplaceguide32006.htm> on 21st September 2009.
- Health Promotion Agency. 2006b. Work Well: Summary evaluation of the Work Well Initiative (2006). Retrieved from: <http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk/Resources/workwell/workwelleval2006.htm> on 22nd September 2009
- Health Promotion Agency. 2008a. Promoting positive mental health at work: A guide for employers (2008). Retrieved from: <http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk> on 21st September 2009.
- Health Promotion Agency. 2008. Work Well Guide: Health workplace guide (revised addition,). Retrieved from: <http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk/Resources/workwell/workwellworkplaceguide2008.html>. on 22nd September 2009.