

Participating in the CDC's National Healthy Worksite Program

In the past, many of the events sponsored by Golden Empire Transit (GET) catered to either unionized employees or administrative staff, rather than bringing all staff together. Staying healthy is challenging for many GET employees because of the sedentary nature of their jobs, their varying work shifts (overnight, variable, and split shifts), and the limited healthy eating options at work. Diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, and tobacco use were prevalent among employees. The organization also experienced high employee turnover, making

GET applied principles of implementing a comprehensive workplace health promotion program learned during the NHWP by putting in place a combination of programs, policies, and environmental supports to address multiple areas of employee health.

it difficult to build a culture of health. GET was interested in setting up a worksite wellness program that would unite employees around the common goal of increasing healthy behaviors, with the ultimate goal of improving health outcomes.

GET applied to join the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) National Healthy Worksite Program (NHWP) with the

hope of learning a structured approach to setting up new wellness initiatives. Health and wellness coach Bryan Haver realized that putting health promotion strategies and activities in place at GET would be challenging. Many of the organization's employees are bus drivers who spend most of their time on the road, not sitting in a centralized office. Once GET was accepted into the NHWP, the organization received technical assistance to help it identify and address its unique needs.

Setting Goals

One of the first NHWP activities that GET completed was a baseline assessment in 2013. The NHWP assessments included employee health surveys covering health conditions, healthy behaviors, and perceptions about the work environment, as well as biometric screenings. Like all of the employers participating in the NHWP,

Organization Background

Golden Empire Transitt

- « Established in 1973
- « Industry: Public transit, special district
- « Location: Bakersfield, California
- « 330 Employees

Golden Empire Transit (GET) provides public transportation to the Bakersfield metropolitan area in Kern County, California. It operates 16 bus routes serving Greater Bakersfield. Since 2005, the entire bus fleet has been powered by compressed natural gas. GET is committed to preserving not only the health of the planet, but also the well-being of its community, including one of its most valued resources—its employees. GET employees include about 100 non-unionized administrative staff and 230 unionized drivers and mechanics.

GET also completed the [CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard](#), a validated organizational tool designed to help employers assess the extent to which they have implemented evidence-based health promotion interventions.

After receiving the results of the 2013 assessments, GET set the following goals and objectives:

- Goal: Physical Activity.
 - Objective: Increase the percentage of employees who get regular physical exercise by 16%.
- Goal: Healthy Eating.
 - Objective: Increase the likelihood that employees would eat a more balanced and nutritious diet by improving their knowledge and the availability of healthy, practical food choices.
- Goal: Stress Management.
 - Objective: Reduce employees' stress by sponsoring enjoyable social activities.

With support from management and direction from Haver, GET developed a plan for a comprehensive program strategy to meet these goals.

Program Overview

GET kicked off a "Jumpstart Your Health Campaign" with an event that included a trivia challenge, snack bag giveaway, and raffle. Employees were encouraged to sign up for the initial health assessment in 2013. GET used multiple strategies to build employees' awareness of the organization's health and wellness activities and their knowledge about health.



*Golden Empire Transit (GET) bus.
Photo from GET Facebook page.*

Working to Increase Awareness and Participation

To establish an ongoing source of information and increase program visibility, GET added a "Health Corner" section to its quarterly employee newsletter. For example, one issue offered tips on how to make healthier choices at fast food restaurants. This information was particularly useful for GET's drivers, who have limited time and options for eating during working hours. GET also added information about the wellness program into its orientation materials and trainings for new staff. This approach ensured that employees knew about the wellness program from the beginning, which the organization hoped would increase participation.

GET also organized lunch-and-learn sessions on healthy eating and other wellness topics, like physical

activity and summer safety. These sessions were led by a wellness professional and sponsored through GET's insurance provider. They included a 30-minute lesson followed by Q&As. Employees were also able to follow up with the instructor by phone or e-mail. Participation ranged from 10 to 20 attendees per class.

Focusing on Healthy Vending Choices

GET's nutrition goal was to encourage all employees to eat a more balanced and nutritious diet. Because the organization does not have a cafeteria, it focused on increasing the number of healthy options in its onsite vending machines. Before GET's participation in the NHWP, about 20% of vending machine options were healthy. By the end of the program, healthy options had increased to more than 50%. Healthy options were also labeled with green stickers and placed at eye level to increase their visibility. In addition, GET put posters on vending machines that read, "The right choice for a healthier you, look for the green tab" to encourage employees to choose the healthy options.

Promoting Physical Activity

One of GET's goals was to increase the percentage of employees who get regular physical exercise and meet CDC recommendations for physical activity. The first step was to educate all GET employees about CDC's recommended level of physical activity and how to meet it.

To help employees increase their physical activity level, GET set up programs and promoted environmental supports. For example, it began promoting its on-site gym, reminding and encouraging employees to use it. The company also offered exercise classes led by certified instructors. When employees had to pay a fee to participate, attendance ranged from 3 to 10 participants per class. Attendance tripled when GET covered the cost for employees, but the organization did not have a budget to continue paying for the classes.

GET also put up a bulletin board that featured a rotating exercise of the month, with information on how to perform each exercise safely and effectively. It tailored the program to drivers by including several ways to “busercise.” Because only about one-third of GET employees have regular access to e-mail at work, a physical bulletin board in a high-traffic area was an effective way to communicate to the most employees.

To complement these efforts, Haver organized an 8-week weight-loss challenge. Participants were given a tracking log and optional counseling sessions during weekly weigh-ins. The challenge encouraged a “slow and steady” approach, with a goal of losing 1 pound a week. Participants received a gym towel if they lost 1 to 5 pounds, a water bottle if they lost 10 pounds, and a gift card to a sporting goods store or

grocery store if they lost 15 pounds. The program was so successful that GET drivers began another weight-loss challenge among themselves after completing the initial challenge.

GET also tried to start a bike-sharing program, but not enough employees participated. Haver speculated that the program might have generated more interest if it had provided enough bikes to allow employees to check them out for longer periods. GET also tried to implement “10 Minute Recess,” which encouraged coworkers to take a break and engage in a playful activity like hula hooping together. However, because of its multiple shifts, the organization could not find a good time to make this initiative work.

Building Social Support and Teamwork to Manage Stress

One of GET’s most popular new activities for employees has been a monthly bowling night. About 20 employees have been participating. Bowling night has helped employees relax together, and it has improved morale. Best of all, this event brings together employees from throughout GET, including drivers, administrative staff, and mechanics. The energy and team-building momentum that bowling night has generated can help make other health and wellness initiatives successful in the future because employees are more likely to feel comfortable participating and supporting each other.

Program Success

After it finished the NHWP in 2015, GET completed the CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard again as part of its follow-up assessment. The organization increased its total ScoreCard score from 104 to 164 out of a possible 264 points. It made improvements in several areas, including its use of evidence-based interventions for its goal areas of physical activity and nutrition, as well as for other ScoreCard modules (e.g., blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol). GET’s 2015 score on the Stress Management module declined because of the elimination of some programs and training.

Some examples of the evidence-based strategies that GET received points for in its 2015 ScoreCard that it did not have in place in 2013 included the following:

- Making sure that most (more than 50%) of food and drink choices in vending machines, cafeterias, snack bars, or other purchase points are healthier food items.
- Providing organized individual or group physical activity programs for employees (other than the use of an exercise facility).
- Making blood pressure monitoring devices available with instructions for employees to conduct their own self-assessments.
- Providing free or subsidized self-management programs for cholesterol or lipid control.
- Providing brochures, videos, posters, pamphlets, newsletters, or other written or online information that address the risks of diabetes.

**CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard Overall Score
in Wellness Programming, 2013-2015**



GET increased its score for the Organizational Supports module, which assesses the extent to which organizations have a foundation and infrastructure in place to support and maintain a workplace health promotion program. GET now has an annual health promotion budget and annual organizational objectives for health promotion.

In 2013, a total of 73 employees completed the baseline health assessment. In 2015, a total of 16 employees completed the follow-up assessment, including 7 of the original 73. Due to small numbers, follow-up assessment data is not reported.

**2013 Employee Health Issues and Lifestyle Risks Profile
(Employees = 73)**

Self-Reported Health Assessment Survey	
Health care provider diagnosed high blood pressure	30%
Eat at least 5 daily servings of fruits and vegetables	4%
Engage in little or no physical activity	85%
High stress	47%
Biometric Screening	
Elevated blood pressure (systolic >140 mmHg or diastolic ≥90 mmHg)	26%
High cholesterol (≥240 mg/dL)	12%
Prediabetes (100-125 mg/dL)	26%
Diabetes (≥126 mg/dL)	15%
Overweight (Body mass index 25.0-29.9)	33%

Challenges

Some GET employees did not receive the results from their 2013 health assessment early in the NHWP program, which made it difficult to convince them of the value of participating in program activities or in the follow-up health assessment. The wellness committee worked to build employee confidence in GET’s wellness program by conducting some of its own surveys to assess employee interest and needs. The committee made sure to follow through and report results back to employees any time it asked for data.

Because GET has a mobile workforce and only about one-third of employees have regular access to work e-mail, effective communications about the wellness initiatives were a challenge. The wellness committee collected non-work e-mail addresses from employees and sent messages about wellness activities to these accounts. GET also used creative ways to get messages out, like banners, posters, streaming video, word of mouth, and break room postings. The most

successful modes of communication were flyers and other materials posted in high-traffic areas like break rooms and areas where employees clock in or clock out.

To overcome the challenge of multiple shifts, GET offered programs at varying times to give all employees the opportunity to participate during their working hours. GET also offered educational resources that employees could access at any time.

Another major barrier to the successful implementation of the wellness program was a 35-day work stoppage by 250 bus drivers in 2014. The work stoppage occurred in the middle of the weight-loss challenge, bringing the program to a temporary halt. It was also likely a contributing factor to the increased stress levels reflected in the 2015 assessments. Fortunately, when it was over, the drivers resumed participation in GET’s wellness initiatives and used the program as an area to rebuild trust.

What's Next?

GET is committed to continuing to improve employee well-being and to applying what it learned while participating in the NHWP. Specifically, GET plans to do the following:

- Collect feedback from employees on a regular basis. The organization plans to survey employees annually and provide wellness programs based on the results.
- Share results every time information is collected from employees to maintain employee trust.
- Continue providing health information to help foster a workplace culture of health. GET will continue featuring health information in its quarterly employee newsletter and plans to add a separate newsletter focused on health and wellness.



The National Healthy Worksite Program was designed to help employers put into action science- and practice-based disease-prevention and wellness strategies that would lead to specific measurable health outcomes to reduce chronic disease rates. From 2013-2015, each participating employer received support, training, and technical assistance to put in place a combination of program, policy, and environmental interventions to support physical activity, good nutrition, and tobacco-use cessation.