

Participating in the CDC's National Healthy Worksite Program

Before participating in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) National Healthy Worksite Program (NHWP), First South Financial had a wellness committee and had put some initiatives into place to support employee health. Still, the organization wanted to do more. Dispersed staff and a need for increased knowledge about how to set up a comprehensive wellness program encouraged First South Financial to apply to the NHWP with the hope that it could increase the effectiveness and scope of its health and wellness initiatives.

Helping Employees, Improving Business

First South Financial 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 in place to address multiple areas of employee health.

First South Financial was committed to improving its employees' health for multiple reasons. Leadership cared about employees' well-being and knew that employees' healthy behavior influenced their families' behavior, extending the reach of the organization's initiatives into the home. First South Financial also knew that its wellness efforts would benefit employees and their families

and be good for business because healthier families mean lower health care costs to the organization. The organization also believed that offering a more comprehensive wellness program would help attract new talent and make the credit union more competitive.

Getting Started

With support and commitment from senior management, First South Financial was able to hit the ground running once it was accepted into the NHWP. One of the first NHWP activities First South Financial completed was a baseline assessment in 2013. The NHWP assessment included employee health surveys covering health conditions, healthy behaviors, and perceptions about the work environment, as well as biometric screenings.

Organization Background

First South Financial Credit Union

- « Established in 1957
- « Member-owned financial institution
- « Industry: Finance
- « Location: Headquartered in Bartlett, Tennessee, with 15 branches in western Tennessee
- « 106 Employees

First South Financial Credit Union is a member-owned, federally insured financial institution based near Memphis, Tennessee. Founded in 1957 to meet the financial needs of military personnel and their families stationed at the Naval Air Station in Millington, Tennessee, First South Financial began with just one office and small deposits. Today, it has a community charter and serves all residents and students in nine counties, as well as employees of companies located throughout the mid-South. First South has grown to be one of the largest credit unions in Tennessee, currently serving over 50,000 members around the world and employees spread across 15 locations.

First South Financial is committed to the financial health of its business, as well as the physical health and well-being of its employees.

Like all of the employers participating in the NHWP, First South Financial 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.

Setting Goals

After receiving the results of the 2013 assessment, First South Financial's wellness committee decided to focus its efforts on weight management through physical activity and good nutrition, with the following specific goals:

- Helping employees lose 5% to 10% of their excess weight through physical activity programs.
- Decreasing the percentage of employees who are obese by 5% to 10%.
- Increasing employees' nutrition knowledge and supporting improved mental and physical health through group challenges.

Using a program planning tool from the NHWP, the committee developed a detailed plan to address these goals through a multifaceted strategy. To help ensure that the plan would be implemented, the committee assigned specific tasks to each member to distribute the workload and hold members accountable. Committee members participated in all NHWP trainings and webinars that addressed the main developmental stages for a wellness program -- assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Committee members also had monthly technical assistance calls with CDC staff to share updates and get advice and information resources.

Program Overview

Olympics Challenge

To motivate employees to participate in weight management and other healthy activities, the wellness committee used what it knew about the organization's competitive culture. It structured its efforts into a year-long 2014 Olympics Challenge, which included events such as the following:

- Fruit and vegetable challenge: Goal was to eat 5 a day, 5 days a week.
- Water challenge: Goal was to drink 64 ounces a day.
- Physical activity challenge: Goal was to engage in 30 minutes of moderate physical activity 5 days week.
- Stress-relief challenge: Goal was to find a stress-relieving activity (e.g., tell a joke, read, spend time with friends, watch a movie) to do 5 days a week.

Another Olympic event required employees to set specific health goals for themselves. The committee provided sample goals and offered advice, and 17 employees completed the challenge. Participants tracked their activities; submitted activity logs to the committee; and won gold, silver, bronze, or honorable mention awards, depending on which activities they completed.

For example, 13 employees completed the "Mix It Up" fruit and vegetable challenge, which included watching a presentation on healthy eating, introducing new fruits and vegetables into their diet, and increasing the amount of fruits and vegetables in their daily diet. The wellness committee awarded seven gold medals, four silver, one bronze, and one honorable mention to employees who completed the competition.

By the end of the 2014 Olympics, the committee had awarded medals to 25% of the staff. All participants were invited to a closing ceremony (which featured a healthy meal) with senior management to recognize the top three medal winners.

"Having the opportunity to learn about health and fitness at work has had a positive change in my lifestyle. I wasn't on this journey alone; I had a whole support system throughout the company to keep me accountable. I'm forever grateful for this change in my lifestyle."

—Allyssa Turpin, First South Financial 1st place Olympic Medalist

Encouraging Physical Activity

In addition to the physical activity challenges incorporated into the Olympics competitions, the wellness committee used several other initiatives to encourage employees to be more active. For example, one of First South Financial's senior leaders began running a boot camp exercise class twice a week at the credit union's largest location. About 16 staff members attended regularly.



First South Financial's team Bluff City Bankers at the Gibson Guitar 5k.
Photo provided by First South Financial.

The committee also entered the Arthritis Foundation's [Walk with Ease](#) program through the NHWP. This low-cost, 6-week program is built around walking, but also includes health education, strengthening and stretching exercises, and motivational strategies. One-quarter of First South Financial's employees participated. Most employees used the self-guided option, but several did guided walks together, led by a wellness committee member.

In June 2014, First South Financial sponsored employee teams to participate in the Gibson Guitar 5k race in Memphis. Thirty employees, including six senior leaders, signed up and set a goal to finish with an average time of under 45 minutes. The group's average finish time met its goal. The credit union published the names of the top 10 finishers, helping to motivate participants through recognition.

The wellness committee also kicked off an 8-week walking initiative called "Walk Across First South" in September 2014, challenging employees to walk the 146 miles between the branch locations. The committee bought 24 pedometers for participants and organized four teams that included senior leaders. Team members recorded the miles they walked and reported them to their team captain

every 2 weeks. Participants earned points for miles walked, and the committee awarded incentives, such as reimbursement for lunch and the popular "Jeans Day." On Jeans Day, employees are allowed to dress down at work. Employees really enjoy this incentive, and it does not cost anything.

Promoting Healthy Eating

Like many workplaces, First South Financial does not have on-site cafeterias at any of its locations. However, the wellness committee was still able to make positive changes to the food environment to influence employees' eating behaviors. The committee created healthy eating maps, which show where employees can buy healthy lunches within walking distance of each location. The committee also promoted monthly healthy potluck lunches to give employees a chance to share their own healthy recipes with coworkers.

Weight-Loss Challenge

To encourage healthy weight loss, the wellness committee organized a weight-loss challenge. Twenty-one employees participated in the 12-week competition. Participants completed private weekly weigh-ins and only reported the percentage of their weight lost, which helped them feel more comfortable with the process. The committee built in activities along the way, like squat and plank challenges, to help maintain employee engagement through the 12-week period. Participants lost a total of 128 pounds.



First South Financial's Healthy Brunch Potluck.
Photo provided by First South Financial.

Program Success

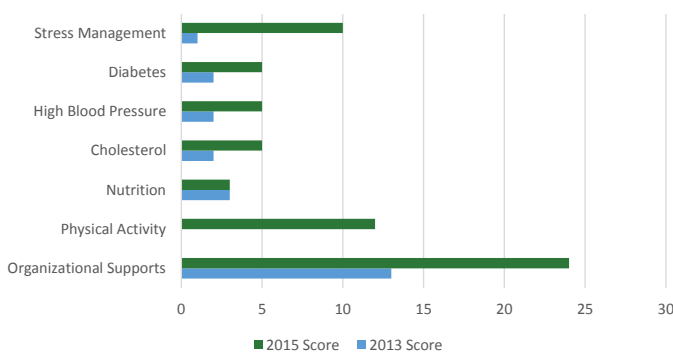
After it finished the NHWP in 2015, First South Financial completed the CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard again as part of its follow-up assessment. The credit union increased its total ScoreCard score from 61 to 105 out of a possible 264 points. It made improvements in several areas, including its use of evidence-based interventions for its goal area of physical activity, as well as for stress management, blood pressure, diabetes, and cholesterol.

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

- Implementing group physical activity programs (e.g., organizing group participation in 5Ks).
- Providing training for managers on identifying and reducing workplace stressors.
- Offering free blood pressure screening, cholesterol screening, and body composition measurements, followed by directed feedback and clinical referrals when necessary.
- Providing employees with printed and online materials (e.g., newsletters) that address the benefits of physical activity.

First South Financial made the largest gain in its score in 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. It now offers health risk assessments, uses competitions to support employees' behavior changes, has an annual health promotion budget, and sets annual organizational objectives for health promotion while maintaining the strong leadership support it has had all along.

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



In 2013, a total of 73 employees completed the baseline health assessment. In 2015, a total of 44 employees completed the follow-up assessment, including 29 of the original 73.

2013 Employee Health Issues and Lifestyle Risks Profile (Employees = 73)	
Self-Reported Health Assessment Survey	
Health care provider diagnosed high blood pressure	21%
Eat at least 5 daily servings of fruits and vegetables	7%
Engage in little or no physical activity	77%
High stress	32%
Biometric Screening	
Overweight (Body mass index 25.0-29.9)	27%
Obese (Body mass index ≥ 30)	40%
Elevated blood pressure (systolic >140 mmHg or diastolic ≥ 90 mmHg)	8%

2015 Employee Health Issues and Lifestyle Risks Profile (Employees = 44)*	
Self-Reported Health Assessment Survey	
Health care provider diagnosed high blood pressure	9%
Eat at least 5 daily servings of fruits and vegetables	2%
Engage in little or no physical activity	64%
High stress	41%
Biometric Screening	
Overweight (Body mass index 25.0-29.9)	25%
Obese (Body mass index >30)	39%
Elevated blood pressure (systolic ≥ 140 mmHg or diastolic ≥ 90 mmHg)	16%

**Percentages include all employees who provided data in 2015, including those who did not complete the 2013 assessments.*

Although First South Financial did not achieve its objective of reducing the percentage of employees who were obese by 5%-10%, the percentages of obese and overweight employees were lower in 2015 than in 2013. The credit union did meet its objective of increasing employees' nutrition knowledge and supporting improved mental and physical health by conducting several group challenges. More than 80% of employees who completed the 2015 assessment said that the nutrition health education materials they received were informative and useful.

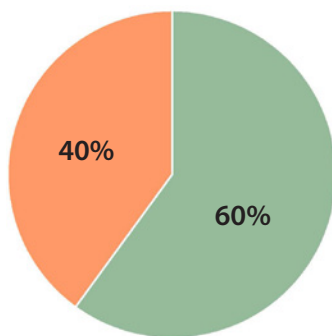
A higher percentage of employees in 2015 agreed that First South Financial provided the opportunity for them to be physically active (from 71% in 2013 to 80% in 2015). As a group, employees took advantage

of these opportunities and increased their physical activity levels. Among the 29 employees who completed both assessments, the percentage who generally got no or little exercise decreased from 79% in 2013 to 59% in 2015.

For employees who have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, keeping those levels in a healthy range usually involves lifestyle changes and taking medication. Increasing the number of employees who comply with their doctor's instructions to be treated with medication increases the number of employees with their conditions under control, reducing the risk for health problems and complications.

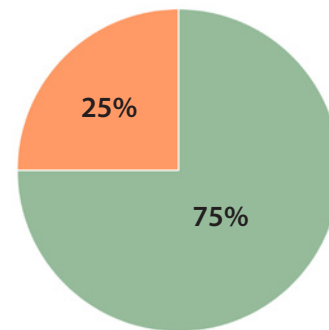
The percentage of employees treating diagnosed high blood pressure with medication was higher in 2015 than in 2013.

Percentage of employees treating diagnosed high blood pressure with medication in 2013



- Diagnosed and currently taking high blood pressure medication
- Diagnosed and not currently taking medications

Percentage of employees treating diagnosed high blood pressure with medication in 2015



- Diagnosed and currently taking high blood pressure medication
- Diagnosed and not currently taking medications

Nearly all employees (95%) said they supported the environmental changes that create a safe and healthy culture at First South Financial worksites. All employees who completed the 2015 assessment agreed that they were well informed about the health and wellness opportunities at First South Financial, and 88% agreed that the worksite health program had a positive effect on their health. The wellness committee is getting the message about health and wellness out to employees, and many are starting to change their physical activity behaviors. But some health outcomes, like weight loss, are difficult to change and maintain.

"We are committed to the physical and mental well-being of our staff and take pride in the strides our employees have made in living healthier lifestyles. It's wonderful to see, and we are very glad we were selected to participate in this initiative."

—Craig Esrael, President and CEO, First South Financial

Challenges

First South Financial has 15 worksite locations spread over several counties, making it difficult to create and maintain momentum for organizational wellness programs. The wellness committee worked to overcome this challenge by offering employees a variety of activities and incentives to motivate them—like recognition for their successes and a half-day of vacation on their birthday.

First South Financial also faced challenges in maintaining employees' interest and participation in the various wellness initiatives throughout the

duration of the NHWP. These types of hurdles are common when implementing any workplace intervention, but the wellness committee developed some strategies to keep employees engaged. For instance, they formed a four-person team of wellness champions or cheerleaders to support employees in reaching their fitness goals at four locations. This team plans to recruit and mentor four new champions who can eventually assume the responsibilities of the original team members.

What's Next?

The wellness committee plans to continue building its program and is developing a plan for the upcoming year based on the results of the 2015 assessment. First South Financial is also hiring a staff person to focus on program planning.



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 participant 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.