

At Open Hand, It's about More than a Meal. It's Wellness at Work: Case Study



Participating in CDC's Work@Health® Program

In 2012, Open Hand began taking steps to improve worksite wellness. Jess Parsons White, senior vice president of Good Measure Meals™, was in charge of these efforts, which she described as “ragtag.”

With training and effort, employers of all sizes and types can plan and implement a workplace health program. Employers can learn from the experiences of employers like Open Hand about how to plan strategies and anticipate implementation challenges.

Although Open Hand had a volunteer wellness committee and had conducted some successful activities, such as walking challenges, health fairs, and lunch and learn sessions, Parsons White felt the program was too informal. She and a coworker, Alissa Palladino, signed up for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) Work@Health® program,

which provided hands-on training in Atlanta, Georgia in June 2014. She and Palladino hoped to learn how to develop a more structured wellness program at Open Hand.

The [Work@Health®](#) program is designed to teach employers how to improve the health of their workers (and workers' families) by using prevention and wellness strategies that focus on chronic health conditions. Well-designed, science-based, and comprehensive workplace wellness programs can improve the health of individuals and companies, lower health care costs, and increase worker productivity.

After the June training, participants received 6-10 months of technical assistance in the form of coaching, webinars, and interactions with peers. Parsons White said she was initially unsure about applying to the Work@Health® program because Open Hand had an established wellness committee and some ongoing activities. But the training taught her and Palladino how to make Open Hand's wellness program more structured, sustainable, and appealing to staff. For example, although the wellness committee had done needs assessments to guide its efforts in the past, Parsons White discovered that they weren't asking the right types of questions. The training also helped

Organization Background

Open Hand

- « Established in 1988
- « Private nonprofit
- « Industry sector: Health care and social assistance
- « Location: Atlanta, Georgia
- « 130 Employees
- « 51% women, 49% men

Open Hand is a nonprofit organization that provides comprehensive nutrition care that combines home-delivered meals and nutrition education for a diverse population of men, women, and children with unique nutrition needs. Its programs and services are designed to help clients meet their personal goals for good health. Open Hand also helps clients and health care providers identify nutrition-related illnesses early so they can be prevented or treated. By empowering people to live healthier, more productive lives, Open Hand seeks to eliminate disability and premature death from nutrition-related chronic disease. Good Measure Meals™ is a social enterprise business unit of Open Hand that provides gourmet meals that meet the dietary needs of people with diabetes and related hypertension with 100% of its profits directly supporting Open Hand's services to the community.

Open Hand set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound) goals and develop a plan to address employee needs as well as provide them with more ideas about how to make its wellness program appealing to more employees.

Program Overview

After the training, the wellness committee decided to focus its efforts on heart health, stress management, and tobacco cessation. Parsons White and her team applied for and received seed funding from the Work@Health® program, which the committee used to achieve its goals and make it easier for staff to participate in wellness activities. They bought two blood pressure cuffs that employees can use anytime; an automated external defibrillator (AED); customized “health passports” to encourage and track participation in health fairs; and yoga mats to increase participation in yoga and other fitness classes held on-site. They also bought industry benchmark reports, which allow them to evaluate their wellness program against industry standards and continue to build a program grounded in evidenced-based strategies and best practices.

Setting SMART Goals to Demonstrate Progress

The Work@Health® training prompted Open Hand’s wellness committee to develop SMART goals and measurable objectives for its wellness program. The wellness committee had already developed a broad mission statement for the wellness program, but now would get more specific. The committee used baseline data to set three broad goals and several program objectives related to awareness, participation, responsiveness, programming, strategy, and health metrics. Examples of these objectives included the following:

- More than 75% of employees report being aware of the availability of the wellness program.
- More than 60% of employees report participating in at least one wellness activity.
- More than 75% of employees report that Open Hand’s worksite wellness program reflects their needs and interests.

The new objectives have also helped increase leadership support for the wellness program. Parsons White said she has had “a much easier time justifying

Employers selected to participate in Work@Health® were assigned to one of three models, all of which delivered the same comprehensive workplace health curriculum.

1. The hands-on model was an on-site, instructor-led, one day training workshop held in one of six regional locations.
2. The online model allowed employers to move through the curriculum independently over several weeks using a web-based learning platform.
3. The blended model included a combination of hands-on and online learning strategies.

what they are doing and asking for the resources now that [the wellness program] has measurable objectives.” She always brings data to her meetings with senior leadership, and she believes that the wellness program has gotten more support since the Work@Health® training because the program is more formal.

Using Results to Get Resources

The Work@Health® training gave Parsons White the idea to approach Open Hand’s insurance provider, Kaiser Permanente, for help. The insurer provided \$15,000, which the wellness committee used for a variety of activities, including health fairs, tobacco cessation services, free yoga classes, and biometric screening for employees that included measures of heart health like cholesterol and blood pressure levels. Activities were chosen based on



Open Hand employees attend an on-site yoga class. Photo provided by Open Hand.

previous needs assessments and biometric screening results. The insurer also gave staff access to an online health assessment tool and online healthy living classes that are tailored to address individual health needs identified by the assessment.

Using Staff Dietitians to Promote Employee Health Promotion

Open Hand gave employees opportunities to check their blood pressure and meet with staff dietitians to talk about strategies to manage or improve their numbers. The dietitians shared tips on how to improve heart health and hosted lunch and learn sessions to explain heart health and showcase cooking techniques and recipes that focus on low sodium and preservative-free foods.



*Healthy meal demonstration at Open Hand.
Photo provided by Open Hand.*

Improving Health at a New Location

In 2014, Open Hand moved to a new campus, which finally allowed most of its employees to be at the same site. This new campus made it easier to reach all staff with wellness activities, like kickball games and yoga classes, and environmental changes, like a hydration station. A vending machine with healthy food and drink options is located in a central area accessible to all employees.

Promoting Tobacco Cessation and Stress Management

In 2015, Open Hand made its campus tobacco-free. It offered a variety of resources to help staff stop using tobacco, including wellness coaching over the phone, an online healthy lifestyle program, and a “Quit Smart” program that meets weekly for 4 weeks and includes

a self-hypnosis CD, cigarette substitute, and vouchers for nicotine patches through the organization’s insurer. To help employees manage stress, Open Hand bought yoga mats and offered free classes on campus. It also sponsored two on-site sessions on stress management that focused on mindfulness and breathing techniques.

Using Tools for Assessment and Evaluation

The wellness committee used support from its insurer to provide access for both members and non-members to an online health assessment tool and online healthy living classes tailored to address individual health needs based on the assessment. To evaluate the organization-level program, Open Hand purchased industry benchmark reports. These reports helped the committee compare its wellness program against industry standards and continue to build a program grounded in evidenced-based strategies and best-practices.

Promoting Healthier Habits for Off-Site Employees

One of Open Hand’s greatest accomplishments is the wellness initiative it set up to reach its off-site staff—the delivery drivers who distribute nearly 4,500 meals out to the community every day. Data from the drivers’ GPS trackers showed they were stopping often at gas stations when they did not need gas. The drivers said they were stopping to buy soft drinks or refill super-sized soda cups.



*Open Hand delivery driver with a water bottle.
Photo provided by Open Hand.*

In response, the wellness committee sought donations for water bottles and created tips on hydration that included recipes for infused water. They also put a filtered water cooler in the campus break room next to the time clock so drivers could fill up their water bottles between trips. Parsons White said the drivers were very receptive to this effort because it made them feel included in the wellness program.

Program Success

Like all of the employers participating in the Work@Health® program, Open Hand used the [CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard](#) to assess the extent to which they had evidence-based health promotion strategies in place before and after the program. The ScoreCard is a free tool that employers can use to assess their health promotion and disease prevention programs, identify gaps, and set priorities across health topics. Strategies assessed by the ScoreCard include health-promoting counseling services, environmental supports, policies, health plan benefits, and other worksite programs shown to be effective in preventing heart disease, stroke, and related health conditions.

Open Hand doubled its total ScoreCard score from 102 to 205 out of a possible 264 points. It increased the number of evidence-based strategies it offered that focused on high blood pressure and high cholesterol, stress management, and tobacco control. It also increased its score in the Organizational Supports module, which assesses the extent to which

organizations have a foundation in place to support and maintain a worksite health promotion program.

Examples of evidence-based strategies that Open Hand put in place during their Work@Health® training using the ScoreCard that it did not have in place in 2014 included:

- Having a written policy banning tobacco use at the worksite.
- Providing opportunities for employee participation in organizational decisions regarding workplace issues that affect job stress.
- Providing free or subsidized blood pressure screening followed by directed feedback and/or clinical referral when appropriate.
- Providing educational seminars, workshops, or classes on preventing and controlling high cholesterol and blood pressure.
- Conducting ongoing evaluations of health promotion programming that use multiple data sources.

CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard Overall Score
In Wellness Programming, 2014-2015



“Work@Health® helped us put our resources and time into things that really were going to change the health of the campus.”

—Jess Parsons White, senior vice president of Good Measure Meals™

Learning from Work@Health®

In a survey after the Atlanta training session in 2014, all of the participants said they understood how to apply what they had learned and that they would be able to use what they had learned at their jobs. After they completed the technical assistance portion of the program, participants were asked to list the top three lessons they had learned. Parsons White said she had learned the following:

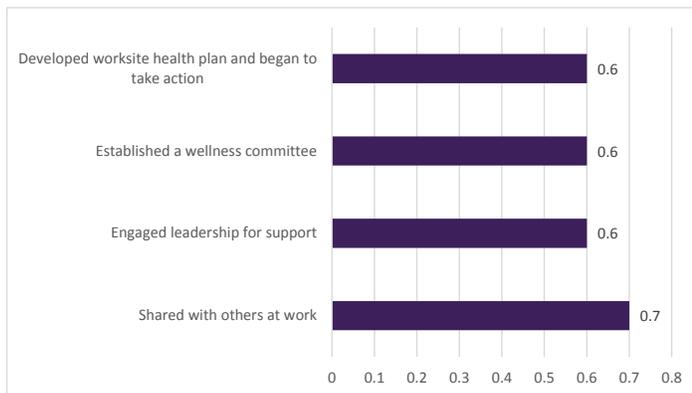
1. What resources are available, the wide variety of them, where to look for these resources, and how to evaluate them.
2. How the Total Leadership Model, presented in the curricula, could help build support from middle management and increase participation and engagement by staff.

3. How it takes time to assess, build, and evaluate a worksite wellness program. The training gave her the tools to educate her organization about the importance of working in phases and addressing critical questions individually.

At the end of the program, participants were also asked what they had done with the information they

had learned in the training. Seventy percent said they had shared it with others in their organizations, 60% had engaged their leadership for support, 60% had set up a wellness committee, and 60% had developed a worksite health plan and were starting to take action.

How Work@Health® Trainees in Atlanta, GA Hands-On Model are using the Information They Learned in the Program



Open Hand employees enjoy a farm-to-table meal. Photo provided by Open Hand.

Challenges

Creating a program that provides activities that could engage and appeal to Open Hand’s diverse workforce is a challenge, but one that Open Hand has made a priority to address. Parsons White made sure the wellness committee included employees from different backgrounds. When the committee got too large, she rotated members on and off to keep energy and enthusiasm levels high. As she explained, “We had some people that wanted to be on it who weren’t wellness experts, but they brought expertise on how we could communicate, and [they] were the champions within their own departments. They were leaders and brought value to the team.”

Open Hand found it challenging to use all parts of the Work@Health® curricula because it already had an infrastructure and did not want to start over. Parsons White and her colleagues had to think carefully about how to integrate the Work@Health® model into Open Hand’s existing program. They focused on applying what they had learned to create new opportunities for staff working off-site and on finding ways to more effectively track improvements among the off-site staff, who had less access to on-campus activities. Subject matter experts in the Work@Health® program helped connect Open Hand with employers with similar challenges through technical assistance.

What's Next?

Over the next 12 months, Open Hand is planning the following activities for worksite health promotion:

- Continue assessing the wellness needs and interests of employees to design effective programs.
- Continue offering creative, appealing incentives.
- Continue to leverage community partnerships to expand wellness activities, like free, on-site healthy cooking and nutrition classes and an onsite farmers' market that offers fresh, local produce at a discounted rate.
- Work with its insurer to bring free fitness classes, health screenings, and lunch and learn sessions to campus and to provide incentives for completing the online health assessment and participating in the healthy living classes.
- Identify wellness champions in each department to increase staff engagement and participation.
- Use data each year to assess changes in rates of obesity, smoking, high blood pressure, and chronic diseases, as well as health risk indicators like blood sugar, A1c, and cholesterol levels.



The Work@Health® employer-training program is an initiative of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to promote workplace wellness through employer education, training, and technical assistance. Work@Health® training provides employers with knowledge and tools through a comprehensive curricula to promote good health in their work places to prevent or reduce chronic illness and disability, and improve productivity.