

Health care group takes care of the caretakers

Fellowship
Health Resources, Inc.

Creative Solutions for Rebuilding Lives and Restoring Hope

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 460

CEO (OR EQUIVALENT):

Debra M. Paul, president & CEO

A Healthy Thought:

"Healthy employees make for productive employees."

JENNIFER MCKENNA

benefits and wellness adviser

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Practicing what it preaches is perhaps one of the most valuable tools in the employee-wellness campaign of Lincoln-based Fellowship Health Resources Inc.

A nonprofit agency providing clinical and support services to people with mental illness and other life challenges, Fellowship declares that its health programs are as important for its employees as they are for its clients. The company states, "Our leadership team makes it a priority to ensure that these caretakers do not lose sight of taking care of themselves."

It is well documented that people with persistent mental-health problems die earlier than people without these problems. This fact inspired Fellowship to initiate its comprehensive health program and make it part of its company culture.

In 2009, former President and CEO Joseph Dziobek hitched the company's employee physical health component to its primary mental-health services. He was inspired in this integration by his wife's battle with cancer, and he put his full support behind exercise and wellness education for his employees. Benefits and Wellness Adviser Jennifer McKenna said that Dziobek "understood that healthy employees make for productive employees."

In the past year, Fellowship has furthered its programs and monitoring of its staff by committing more resources to raise the ante in its culture of healthy living. Incoming CEO and President Debra M. Paul noted that artist "Henry Moore said, 'What's important is finding out what works for you.'" As a result, she added, "We offer our employees various programs to live a healthy lifestyle."

The offerings are extensive, including continuous updates through monthly email bulletins called BeneBuzz, along with the company's Intranet and the various social media channels, enabling Fellowship to distribute information about a variety of wellness programs to employees and their families.

Since July 1, employees have had access to a new Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island portal that they can use to monitor weight and stress levels, and to get customized information on medical concerns. Fellowship is planning to introduce new requirements for a premium discount for the upcoming year on this portal as well. Currently, nonsmoking families receive a wellness discount.

This is the fourth consecutive year Fellow-



PBN PHOTO/FRANK MULLIN

WHEN CONTAGIOUS IS GOOD: The seamless implementation and significant participation of a comprehensive health program has made a major impact at Fellowship Health Resources. Demonstrating one aspect of the communication tools in the program are, from left, Jennifer McKenna, benefits and wellness adviser, President and CEO Debra M. Paul, and Director of Finance Stephen Duggan.

ship has been actively involved in ShapeUp Rhode Island and that program's multitude of fitness practices. These directives and their positive value for the general well-being of staff members have drawn further recognition. Fellowship recently received the Blue Cross Blue Shield Healthy Worksite Award. It's more than a good start, but it certainly is just the beginning.

According to Director of Corporate Media Mike Ratté, the success of this cultural shift and mindset can be credited to leadership commitment. "None of this would have been as effective if it weren't for Joe Dziobek, followed by a seamless transition to Debra Paul. They have provided a tremendous support system," he said.

The executive team also has gotten on board. Chief Operating Officer Pamela Daisey achieved a major personal success by using ShapeUp RI's diet and fitness regimens. "I lost 90 pounds and feel so much better. I have more energy, mental and physical. I believe that if I'm going to preach it, I must practice it as well."

For a company that is decentralized the way Fellowship happens to be, with 450 employees scattered throughout seven states, the onus placed on teamwork and helping one another attain healthier goals is vital. By forming teams like Pound Busters and Mission Slim Possible, employees get into friendly competitions that can help push the agenda. The team aspect also adds to office camaraderie.

"Several months ago, our regional director in Maine, who's a runner, caught wind of an employee who also liked to run," Ratté said. "Before you knew it the two of them had started running together. That's support. That's the power that

this type of culture can have on health. That kind of communication and extending of oneself would have never happened if they were sitting in front of each other across a desk."

The creative implementation of some group activities also has brought people into the fold. "We organize group Wii-fitness tournaments and have charity events that involve all kinds of sports," added Daisey. "By adding another component to the act of exercising, it becomes more about having fun; that's what draws people in."

The costs of being healthy have been absorbed by the company, which believes that dividends from the effort are entirely tangible. Director of Peer Recovery Services Bob Rousseau said, "The savings to the state whenever a person doesn't use the emergency-room services or crisis centers is huge. Multiply that by our staff and you've got some serious savings."

"We allow employees to attend to their health during work hours," said McKenna. "It's all there in front of them. We've made it easy, and perhaps when you have to go outside your normal routine things like health are harder to consider."

But something as far reaching and extensive as a company-wide culture shift doesn't happen overnight. To succeed, a culture shift must be authentically embraced by the people involved. And health is something that must be practiced routinely, not in a stop-and-start fashion. "Right now, Joe [Dziobek] is riding across Iowa in some 500-mile bike race," said Ratté. "He's a huge outdoors guy, and he does it because it's contagious."

In this new culture that's been the motto: contagious is good. ■

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