

Employee programs address all aspects of health

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:
"Wellness is part of our strategy
now. ... It's a recipe for success."

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DEBRA PAUL
President and CEO

BY JOHN LARRABEE
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Fellowship Health Resources Inc., a non-profit that provides mental health services, is known for steering clients toward creative activities. The agency's Studio 35 program encourages them to take up painting, music, writing, dance and other forms of self-expression as a way to reduce stress and build a sense of empowerment.

Now the group is adding the program to its employee-wellness program, advising staff members to take up art or music, too.

"We really try to take a multidimensional approach with our wellness program," said Karen Trudeau, Fellowship's human resources director. "We work on the traditional issues – exercise and eating right – but now we've broadened the scope. We look at how a person is doing financially, emotionally and spiritually."

"We've provided programs that address physical health in the past," said Debra M. Paul, president and CEO. "Now we also focus on behavioral health. Of course, when we say we're concerned with how they're doing spiritually, we're not talking about religion. We don't get into those personal aspects. It's about how you're feeling."

Headquartered in Lincoln, Fellowship provides addiction counseling and mental health programs in Rhode Island and a half dozen other East Coast states.

When Fellowship first developed its wellness program in 2009, the focus was on ShapeUp Rhode Island, the fitness program in which employees form walking teams and count the miles they cover to win company walking competitions. More than 200 employees participated, but with staff spread out over seven states, organizing teams proved difficult.

Since then, the agency has set up a wellness portal, through which employees can get information on exercise, nutrition, relaxation and breaking unhealthy habits such as smoking. In addition, employees and their spouses can get telephone advice from wellness coaches on fitness, eating right and other health issues.

"They can look up articles on health needs or exercise or recipes," said Jennifer McKenna, the agency's benefits administrator. "They can log their progress with workouts. There are special programs, like a six-week online class on weight management during the holiday season."

The portal is also where employees can sign up for savings on their health care insurance



PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

THE FULL PICTURE: Fellowship Health Resources has created a wellness program that supports the physical, mental and spiritual needs of its staff, including a new creative self-expression program modeled on what the mental health agency provides its clients. Engaged with the company wellness portal are, from left, Human Resources Director Karen Trudeau, Benefits Administrator Jennifer McKenna and President and CEO Debra M. Paul.

premiums. To qualify, they must fill out a personal health assessment to qualify. They must see their doctor once a year for a physical exam and be a nonsmoker. Those who do use tobacco can still qualify if they sign up for a smoking-cessation program.

The potential savings has made the program a hit with staff.

"I save \$50 with every paycheck," said Leah Babat, Fellowship's director of residential services. "That lets me double my 403(b) contribution. ... I know a new hire who told me the discount was the encouragement she needed to quit smoking."

With every piece of the wellness program, the agency takes pains to ensure there is no intrusion on employees' personal lives. "We put the information out there, and we provide the financial incentive, but it's their choice," Trudeau said. "The individuals who are getting the discount certainly think it's a good thing."

To further encourage workers to give up cigarettes, Fellowship last year made all its facilities entirely smoke free. The policy applies to both clients and employees. "You can't smoke anywhere on our property," Trudeau said. "If someone wants a cigarette, they have to go past the parking lot. Since we've done this, I know two people in our organization who've quit smoking."

To give employees a voice in policies, Fellowship has set up a wellness committee, which includes several people from the Lincoln office and someone from every state where the organization has facilities. Committee members have bimonthly discussions to plan an ongoing calendar of activities, and to offer suggestions and criticisms.

Because Fellowship is in the counseling busi-

ness, it already was doing some wellness training before launching the program. Other companies, for example, use their wellness program to educate employees about healthy eating; Fellowship always has done that. "We train our employees to teach our clients to shop for healthy foods," Paul said.

Most recently, the agency began offering employees some of the same tools they use to help patients deal with stress. That's why Fellowship now encourages staff to get involved with the Studio 35 creative arts program.

"We got it started for people we serve, and now many employees are involved," Trudeau said. "We've had a wellness program for the past four years, and every year we try to raise the bar."

That goal has also spurred the agency to offer employees financial-planning advice. "As we know, finances can be a big stress for anyone today," Paul said. "They now have access to one-on-one sessions with a financial planner. We want our employees to be able to maximize what they're making."

Thus far, the agency has too little data to say how successful the program has been. But according to senior staff, there are plenty of stories. "We've had people quit smoking, and we've had people lose a whole lot of weight," Paul said.

"It's difficult to calculate the return on investment," McKenna said. "We're just committed to helping our employees lead healthy lives."

And because Fellowship is a counseling agency, there's an added benefit: employees with healthy lifestyles provide clients with positive role models.

"This is part of a long-term plan," Paul said. "Wellness is part of our strategy now, and it will be part of our strategy in the future. It's a recipe for success." ■