

Rice County Gets Healthy

Employers create a culture of health thanks to a locally focused Statewide Health Improvement Program project.

These days, over 8,000 employees across Rice County are on the move, making better food choices and reducing tobacco use. The secret behind their health kick? Rice County's Statewide Health Improvement Program worksite project, Healthy Rice County: Achieving Wellness in the Workplace.

Since early 2010, the program has helped more than 20 worksites in Faribault, Northfield and surrounding areas to learn about ways to offer healthier foods and encourage employees to increase activity and reduce tobacco use.



"Interest in the program began when Rice County Public Health sent a press release to media outlets about the new SHIP initiative," says Natalie Ginter, Rice County SHIP Coordinator. "Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota led the recruitment process by mailing invitation letters and making follow-up phone calls to top leaders and human resources staff of more than 80 Rice County organizations."

Once the interest level of each organization was determined, Blue Cross led education and consulting efforts among the participating organizations, helping each to understand and successfully implement the best practices for worksite wellness.

"In our work guiding employers to create a culture of health, we have provided detail on what it takes to be successful," says Linda M. Pellowski, Blue Cross workplace wellness consultant. "For example, leadership support is the most critical, and a representative wellness committee can help with sustainability and continuity. The best practices for each component were given as a framework along with mentoring and examples from other success stories as a way to encourage employers to adopt the recommendations as best as they can."

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After learning about best practices, the participating organizations used a vision and goal-setting document provided by Blue Cross to write their organization-specific workplace wellness goals. Blue Cross then provided implementation plans outlining the action steps necessary for each organization to accomplish its specific goals.

"We hear that those turnkey tools help make it easier for the employer to be successful," Pellowski says. "For example, should an employer set a goal to write a tobacco-free worksite policy, an assessment checklist, a framework for writing an ideal policy and an actual sample employer policy are provided. We see it as important for the organization to receive comprehensive support to allow for the best opportunity for success."

As organizations worked to implement their worksite wellness plans, the Northfield Area Family YMCA staff was on hand to help organizations adapt best practices



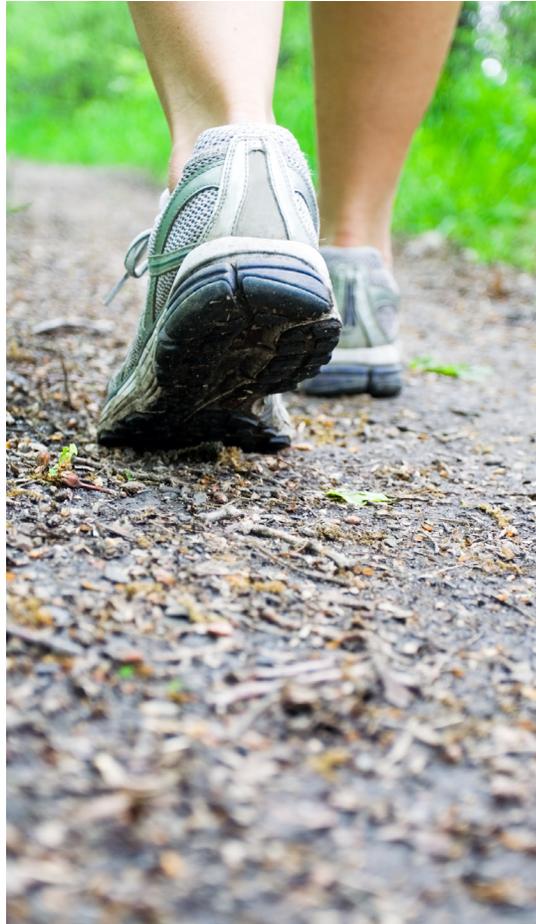
to their individual environments and capabilities. To keep the wellness efforts flowing, each organization will continue to receive consulting and mentoring support from Rice County Public Health and its two partners, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota and the Northfield Area Family YMCA, through the fiscal year, which continues through June 2011.

One participating organization, The State Bank of Faribault, has seen a rapid culture shift following its wellness initiatives. It offered employees an incentive of reduced health care premiums for taking certain steps to improve their health. And, nearly all employees engaged. The incentive criteria were participation in biometrics screenings (for cholesterol, triglycerides and

SHIP is supporting sustainable initiatives such as increasing employees' access to physical activity by adding mapped walking paths nearby.

blood sugar) and a health assessment, the setting of a personal health goal, and attendance at two talks within a four-part series about healthy living. With further encouragement, The State Bank of Faribault has also purchased stability balls for its break room and

offers access to information on healthy nutrition. This summer, the bank will map a walking route from its location through the neighborhood to encourage more physical activity among employees. SHIP's goal is to help Minnesotans live longer, healthier lives by preventing the leading causes of chronic disease: tobacco and obesity. It launched as part of Minnesota's Vision for a Better State of Health,



and making sure employees know of QUITPLAN and other cessation resources available to them.

Other SHIP-funded projects in Rice County are also helping the community's collective health status. New bike racks have been installed, public gardens have been planted, and new signage brightens up the county's walking and biking trails. A workshop on healthy school lunch attracted more than 40 school and day care staff. SHIP initiatives also encourage children and youth to play more actively at recess or through physical education classes, sports or after-school activities.

To learn more about Rice County's wellness programs, visit www.healthyricecounty.org.

THE BEST OF WELLNESS



the bipartisan health reform package enacted in 2008. SHIP makes it easier for Minnesotans to choose healthier behaviors by making changes in the places where we live, learn, work and play.

SHIP's mantra is a focus on policy, systems and environmental change. That means that organizations participating in SHIP-funded worksite wellness programs have had less emphasis on programmatic approaches and more on sustainable initiatives such as:

- **Increasing the amount of healthy foods offered in vending, decreasing portion sizes in worksite cafeterias, and offering healthier options at reduced prices.**
- **Implemented a tobacco-free worksite policy that**