

2010 VACO ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

County of Henrico, Virginia

The Fitness and Wellness Certification

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Program Overview:

In August 2009, Henrico County implemented a new fitness and wellness initiative - *The Fitness and Wellness Certification* program. This comprehensive program lays the path for improved health by exposing employees to, and encouraging participation in daily fitness and wellness activities. Employees are assigned to Fitness Trainers who work individually with employees to set goals and design a personal fitness plan. Weekly nutrition classes address healthy eating recommendations to eat a variety of foods daily, watch portion sizes, choose “nutrient-dense” foods, track food intake, and check body weight weekly. The results of this initiative were phenomenal. In just seventeen weeks a select group of employees lost 580 pounds, 780 inches (or 65 feet), experienced a 14% decrease in heart rate, a 27% increase in muscular strength, a 35% increase in muscular endurance, a 9% increase in flexibility, and a 34% improvement in HDL cholesterol. This initiative is yet another example of Henrico County’s commitment to make a difference in the health and well-being of its employees and the workplace by changing individual behaviors and creating effective partnerships to promote a culture of fitness and wellness.

The Problem/Need:

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, employee health is now recognized as more than an expendable fringe benefit. Workforce health is an essential element in determining the long-term success of an organization and whether or not it thrives. Organizations must focus on the prevention of chronic conditions including obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Part of the solution is to implement programs that improve multiple behavioral risk factors (e.g., sedentary lifestyle and unhealthy diet) of employees.

Henrico County has implemented various other fitness and wellness initiatives in the past. However, none thus far had focused on implementing a strategy that could be tailored to meet the individual needs of its diverse employees: young/old, male/female, fit/“not so fit” with measureable outcomes.

The Fitness and Wellness Certification initiative was developed to provide outcome data to support both the rationale for employee fitness and wellness programs, and the Department of Human Resources’ Fitness and Wellness Division’s vision of creating a wellness culture enabling employees to take care of themselves by eating right and exercising often.

Description of Program:

The Fitness and Wellness Division considered key wellness programming principles in designing an initiative that not only met Henrico County business needs but the individual fitness and wellness needs of its employees. *The Fitness and Wellness Certification* lays the path for improved health, fitness and well-being. It brings together multiple components to provide a comprehensive and integrated approach to employee fitness and wellness. The program allows employees to participate regardless of

current fitness level and health status. Employees are able to select a certificate level based on individual motivation and time commitment.

- Level I Certification requires 2 hours per week or a minimum of 34 hours of fitness and wellness activity throughout the duration of the 17-week program.
 - This level supports the *Report of the Surgeon General on Physical Activity and Health for Adults* key message which states – “physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve health benefits. Men and women of all ages benefit from moderate amount of physical activity.”
- Level II Certification requires 3 hours per week or a minimum of 51 hours of fitness and wellness activity throughout the duration of the 17-week program.
 - This level supports the *American Heart Association and the American College of Sports Medicine Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults* key message – “all healthy adults ages 18-65 should be getting 10-30 minutes of moderate intensity activity most days per week.”
- Level III Certification requires 4 hours per week or a minimum of 68 hours of fitness and wellness activity throughout the duration of the 17-week program.
 - This level supports the *American College of Sports Medicine Position Stand on Appropriate Physical Activity Intervention Strategies for Weight Loss and Prevention of Weight Regain in Adults* – stating “moderate intensity activity between 150 – 240 minutes per week will improve weight loss in combination with moderate diet restriction.”

The Fitness and Wellness Certification program comprised the following required components:

- The Cardiac Risk Assessment is in keeping with the American Heart Association diet and lifestyle recommendations to improve LDL and HDL cholesterol, triglyceride and glucose levels and lower blood pressure through physical activity and a diet high in fiber rich foods (fruits, vegetables, whole-grains), lean meats and fat-free dairy products.
 - Employees were asked to complete a pre Cardiac Risk Assessment within the first two weeks of the pilot program and post Cardiac Risk Assessment at the end of the 17-week period.
 - Henrico County Employee Health Services staff provided the testing services.
 - Testing included Blood Pressure, Glucose, Total Cholesterol, HDL, LDL and Triglycerides.
- The pre and post Fitness Assessments involved employees completing the 3-Minute Step Test, maximal push-up and sit-up tests, a low-back/hamstring flexibility test, and circumference measurements.
 - These fitness field tests were chosen for two reasons: minimal equipment is needed and execution of the tests is not a complicated process.
 - Henrico County Fitness Trainers provided the testing services.
- Optional fitness and wellness activities such as the weekly nutrition classes, guest speakers, fitness classes, personal fitness training services, use of the Training Center weight room, an Independent Study, and one-on-one nutritional counseling provided numerous opportunities for participating employees to earn fitness and wellness hours for credit each week.
 - The weekly nutrition classes emphasized well-established behavior change strategies in learning lifestyle changes for long-term weight loss and weight maintenance.

- Personal choice, responsibility and accountability were stressed, placing each employee in charge of his or her own eating and activity behaviors. Employees learned self-monitoring, goal setting, cognitive behavioral strategies, as well as received social support from each other.
- Outside guest speakers who are experts in the field of nutrition delivered seminars on lowering cholesterol with health foods, vegetarian meal planning, and sports nutrition.
- Fitness class instruction lead by Fitness and Wellness Division staff provided a total of 230 opportunities for employees to participate in a variety of classes such as Step Aerobics, Yoga, Zumba®, muscle conditioning, BOSU™, Core strength, Abs Plus, Boot Camp, to name a few.
- For employees who were unable to participate in a fitness class due to a restricted work schedule, Fitness and Wellness staff trainers were able to provide personal fitness training appointments to assist employees in meeting their fitness goals. Appointments for training services were scheduled between the trainer and the employee in order to accommodate the employee's work schedule.
- Use of the Training Center Weight Room was made available to all participating employees.
 - The weight room includes a complete line of selectorized weight equipment, free weights, and cardiovascular equipment like treadmills, elliptical machines, stair steppers and both stationary and recumbent bicycles.
- The Independent Study allowed employees to explore a fitness and/or wellness topic of their interest.
 - For some employees this meant enrolling in cooking classes, signing up for a local sporting event, participating in seasonal team sports, attending outside weight loss group

meetings, or utilization of the county’s nutritional counseling and/or smoking cessation health benefits.

Use of Technology:

Technology played a major role in the marketing, implementation and evaluation of *The Fitness and Wellness Certification* program.

- E-mail marketing pieces highlighting the program were sent to all Henrico County employees.
- Program details were listed on the Division of Fitness and Wellness website.
- Open registration was managed with the use of a dedicated email account.
- Use of on-line food journals such as MyPyramid.gov and LiveStrong.org were effective tools in tracking food consumption habits.
- Evaluation of the program involved use of “Survey Monkey” to capture employee feedback.
- Microsoft Excel to analyze Fitness Assessment results.
- Mediat medical software to analyze Cardiac Risk Assessment results.

The Cost of the Program:

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| • Cardiac Risk Assessment (all medical supplies combined) | \$5,409.00 |
| • Fitness Assessment (all assessment equipment combined) | \$756.00 |
| • Nutrition education (instructional materials and guest speakers combined) | \$4,863.00 |
| • Incentive Prizes (all prizes combined) | \$5,410.00 |

The Results/Success of the Program

The Fitness and Wellness Certification program yielded astounding results in a 17-week period of time. The program generated 3,388 visits to Fitness and Wellness Division activities provided throughout the duration of the program. This includes 2,067 workouts in fitness classes, 841 participants in the nutrition classes and guest speaker seminars, and 480 personal fitness training sessions.

Evaluation of pre and post fitness and cardiac risk assessment scores revealed a 14% decrease in heart rate, a 27% increase in muscular strength, a 35% increase in muscular endurance, a 9% increase in low-back/hamstring flexibility, and a 34% improvement in HDL, or good cholesterol levels. Fitness and nutrition class evaluations were ranked by employees to be outstanding, with a 98% approval rating.

The new lifestyle habits that employees have adopted as a result of *The Fitness and Wellness Certification* program are hard to measure but carry the greatest impact on personal satisfaction. Henrico County employees have caught the health wave. They are losing weight, changing their eating habits, challenging themselves to complete marathons and triathlons, taking their new lifestyles and sharing what they have learned with co-workers, family and friends. The impact of this program has dramatically improved the quality of life of its participants. The employees in the program are healthier and stronger. They report being able to do things they never thought they could do before. What is even more eye opening is how this program has transformed the working environment at Henrico County.

Worthiness of an Award:

During this dire economic time, the commitment to dedicate monies to employee fitness and wellness efforts speaks to Henrico County's vision shared by the County Manger and the Board of Supervisors. By providing employees with resources to maintain personal health will, in the long-term, benefit the business needs of the organization. Tailoring the *Fitness and Wellness Certification* program to the needs of the employees, and delivering services in a relevant and engaging way (regardless of age,

gender, education, job category, or ethnicity) speaks loudly to the uniqueness of this program. The process of providing systematic health assessments, timely and meaningful health behavior feedback, assistance in setting and monitoring individual health, wellness and fitness goals established effective rapport between staff and employees. As a bonus, a supportive social network emerged among fellow employees that will exist in the long term.

Appendix I

Employee Feedback

“I learned so much out of the nutrition classes from tracking my daily food/drink intake and visually seeing what I was consuming and making small changes, to learning how to make better food choices when I am out to eat with family or friends, to my meal portion sizes that I should be eating and bringing healthy food choices into my home for my family like more fruits and vegetables.”

“The content of the classes was excellent. They really were a good mix of providing me with information AND with helping me figure out how I could fit that information into my daily activity. The information was provided in a way that helped me remember. The resources and web pages given were excellent and I have revisited them often for recipes, etc.”

“... I enjoyed the camaraderie this program provided me and my team, who all did this together. It really changed how we do things (like not keeping candy in a jar just to munch on and asking for salads as a substitution for French fries when we eat out). I never had the courage or even felt the need to monitor those things before the program began.”

“The program changed my life! I’ve tried every diet out there and didn’t get as much success as I did with the program. The program was a wealth of knowledge and support. You gave me the tools to make positive healthy changes and it was up to me to use those tools. I love the county fitness classes and my one-on-one training with my Fitness Trainer. I lost 24 pounds and more importantly 21 INCHES! I learned how many calories my body needs to lose weight, the difference of intensity of my workouts and how to judge it, and what types of foods to eat. It was truly an A to Z guide on a healthy lifestyle. What a great motivating program!!”

“I really enjoyed the tangible aspects of the program with the fitness test and blood work, they were actual numbers that you could see improvements in strength and heart health, other than the sometimes daunting scale.”

“My Fitness Trainer was great. She helped me to stay on track with my fitness goals by providing encouragement, education and support. It is often a challenge to find time to exercise and eat healthy while providing the level of service that our Henrico jobs demand. By offering an opportunity to take classes close to work, the Trainers have made it possible for me to achieve better health on those many nights when my work demands prevent me from making the timely commute to my gym.”

“The best lesson I learned in the program was to stop doubting myself. My Fitness Trainer pushed me to try new things in our training sessions that I never would have attempted on my own because I thought there was no way my body could do that. I was pleasantly surprised at what I could achieve with some positive motivation and encouragement. I was definitely sore after working out but knew it would pay off in the end. It was a win-win situation for me. I lost pounds and inches and gained confidence in myself that I hope will help me in the future live a healthier and more active life.”