

The Small Business Wellness Initiative: Reaching Out With Evidence- Based Substance Abuse Prevention Programs

By **Joel B. Bennett, PhD**

Consider these sobering facts: 1) Smaller businesses have a greater chance of employing workers at-risk for substance abuse and mental health problems. 2) National data (SAMHSA, 1999; 2002) indicate that about 8 to 10 percent of the working population abuse alcohol or drugs, with prevalence estimated to be twice as high in small than in larger businesses. 3) Smaller businesses are least likely to have policies and human resource benefits that address risks. 4) When illness or behavioral health concerns emerge (e.g., theft, a drunk employee), small business operators have fewer resources to cope and can face significant financial loss. 5) These operators are hardest hit by rising health care costs, and 6) the majority of workers in the U.S. are employed in businesses of less than 500 workers.

Based on the above, it is clear that the small business community can benefit from health promotion programs. Fortunately, we have assembled tools to help small businesses to deliver these benefits.

The Small Business Wellness Initiative

In September 2002, through a grant from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), we began the "Small Business Wellness Initiative" (SBWI) to deliver prevention programs to businesses in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. We believe that this three-year project serves as a model for others and is unique for six reasons.

1. The SBWI is a collaboration between a non-profit community agency (Tarrant Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse); the regional, North Texas Small Business Development Center (SBDC); and our private research/consulting firm.
2. We delivered versions of "evidence-based" programs that CSAP identifies as scientifically effective in the area of substance abuse.
3. Following a needs assessment with the small business operator, we customized classroom health promotion to specific health needs.
4. The SBWI uses an experimental design with pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys to determine effectiveness.
5. To our knowledge, this is the first project in the country to use a science-to-service model for small businesses.
6. We are developing dissemination and assistance materials (e.g., a website) to help replicate SBWI in other areas. The following explains more about each of these components and how they form the basis for starting your own SBWI.

Guidelines for Forming a Small Business Wellness Initiative

(1) Initiate Some Community Collaboration.

Evidence suggests that community networks, coalitions, or inter-agency linkages are critical to building public health awareness. Our SBDC partner represents one of many agencies that provide resources for developing drug-free workplace and risk management strategies for small businesses. To find an SBDC in your area, visit www.sba.gov/SBDC. Similarly, Tarrant Council is one of hundreds of non-profit agencies looking to partner with health promotion advocates. To find a prevention partner, visit <http://preventionpartners.samhsa.gov>. Collaboration is not always easy, but you can start by getting these local groups together. See Chinman et al. (2004) for help.

(2) Use "Proven" Programs. We used four-hour classroom adaptations of two SAMHSA Model Programs. *Team Awareness* is a team building/social health program that interweaves communication skills,

peer referral, and stress management. Visit *Team Awareness* at www.organizationalwellness.com. *The Healthy Company* is a multi-component approach that interweaves health promotion messages with substance abuse prevention. To learn more, visit the "Product Gallery" at www.centerforworkforcehealth.com. Both programs have been shown to improve health outcomes while also reducing/preventing substance abuse. To learn how programs are deemed scientifically effective and download program flyers, visit www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov.

(3) Listen and Customize to Their Needs. As with any size business, each small business has a unique set of risk and protective factors. Accordingly, we listened to small business operators in a one- to two-hour needs assessment interview, and selected the set of programs that fit with their needs, culture, and unique setting. This new customizable program—"Choices in Health Promotion"—drew on over 20 hours of material from both *Team Awareness* and *The Healthy Company* as well as modules on spiritual health, parent communication, and tobacco cessation.

(4) Evaluate and Give Feedback. To date, we have delivered training to 25 businesses and almost 900 workers in businesses within construction, transportation and hospitality/service industries. We are currently comparing these businesses with 16 businesses and almost 300 workers that did not receive training. Our preliminary results show trained participants are more likely to improve their stress coping skills, receive counseling (for self or family), and report improvements in health.

(5) Become a Champion in Your Community. By participating in any one of the above steps, you will be playing the role of a champion in your community. Although small businesses need health promotion services, they unfortunately lack awareness of the need, are in denial, or (for a host of reasons) are not ready or don't have the time to embrace prevention programs. By following the above steps—collaboration, relying on science, listening, and evaluating—you can lay the foundation, spark involvement, and even empower small businesses and their associations (e.g., chambers, civic clubs) in your community!

(6) See website www.sbwi.org. We are in the process developing a host of materials (e.g., logic models, replication manuals, newsletters) to help you explore setting up an SBWI in your area. Please visit our website www.sbwi.org or contact me directly at learn@organizationalwellness.com. We will also work with you to host a technical assistance workshop or provide training-of-trainers of the SAMHSA programs. For more information about the website, contact Roxanne Martinez by e-mail at r.martinez@tarrantcouncil.org.

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ADDITIONAL WEB-BASED RESOURCES

Working Partners for an Alcohol- and Drug-Free Workplace.

www.dol.gov/workingpartners/welcome.html. (Good resource for materials on setting up a drug-free workplace)

Division of Workplace Program at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. www.drugfree workplace.gov. Site includes many resources on prevention in the workplace.

Get Fit. Visit <http://getfit.samhsa.gov>. New site with health promotion materials.

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Joel Bennett, PhD, is President of Organizational Wellness & Learning Systems (OWLS), a consulting firm that specializes in promoting integral organizational health. Dr. Bennett has served on advisory boards in healthcare, has consulted for federal and local government, as well as privately held and military organizations, and is a peer reviewer for scientific journals in the field of organizational health. He most recently co-authored "Heart-Centered Leadership: An Invitation to Lead from the Inside Out" available at www.instituteofhcl.com. To contact the author, email owls@charter.net or visit website www.organizationalwellness.com.

He will be speaking on the Small Business Wellness Initiative in more detail July 12 at the 2004 National Wellness conference. ■

Empowering Student Energy: Enhancing a Positive Campus Wellness Community

By Kristi Leonard, MA

In just three years, the wellness program at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, has grown from one annual wellness event for staff coordinated by volunteers to over 100 wellness and health-related programs, activities, and presentations for faculty, staff, and students. An important part of this growth has been the energy and involvement of students empowered by Luther's wellness program and staff through peer training and mentoring, wellness education, and promoting self-responsibility.

Luther College is a small, private, liberal arts institution with 2,600 students and 500 faculty/staff members. It is a Lutheran faith-based institution with a mission to "help students connect faith with learning, freedom with responsibility, and life's work with service."

In 2001, the Nena Amundson Lifetime Wellness Program was created to enhance the personal, professional, and academic well-being of the students,