

# Celebrating success of healthy workplace initiative



The achievements of an initiative to help North Staffordshire workers adopt a healthier lifestyle were celebrated at a special showcase event.

Launched in summer 2010, Let's Do Healthy Workplaces assisted more than 50 organisations with a total of several thousand employees to focus on issues such as healthy eating, exercise and quitting smoking.

A joint initiative between the Beth Johnson Foundation and North Staffs Chamber of Commerce (NSCCI), Let's Do Healthy Workplaces was supported by the Department of Work and Pensions. The scheme encouraged local businesses to promote healthier lifestyle activities at work and in turn reduce absenteeism – an issue which cost the national economy an estimated £13 billion last year.

The scale of its success – and the range of free support and services available to employers and employees – were highlighted at the showcase event, organised by the NSCCI Projects team and attended by more than 40 representatives from local businesses and support agencies.

Project Co-ordinator Linda Burns said that encouraging a healthier and happier workforce was a win-win situation for employers – raising staff morale, reducing absenteeism, increasing productivity and improving profitability.



Top and above left, delegates at the showcase event. Above right, Project Co-ordinator Linda Burns

"Employees average 60% of their time in the workplace, so it is the ideal setting to tackle health and wellbeing," she said.

Working with local health support agencies, the initiative had tailored individual packages of measures to suit client firms, ranging from bulletin boards and weekly newsletters to health checks, simple exercises and cookery tips, to advice on alcohol.

The organisations involved reflected a complete range of the local business world, including major employers with hundreds of staff such as Vodafone, Portmeirion and Royal Mail, charities like Douglas Macmillan Hospice and smaller professional firms.

"We have achieved far more than we ever expected," Linda continued. "Although our funding ceased after March 31, we hope we have left a legacy that will go on to benefit North Staffordshire far into the future."

Real-life case studies showed how two local companies are taking action to improve the health and wellbeing amongst their workforce.

Yasmin Cooper, Operations Manager at Vodafone, Festival Park, told of the firm's ongoing programme of activities to support the site's 900-strong workforce.

These included twice-yearly health assessments, lifestyle coaching, support phonedlines and a wellness kiosk providing BMI, weight and hydration data on demand. Some initiatives, such as chair massage

and spinal assessment, were tailored specifically for a workforce seated for seven hours a day.

Suzanne Bradley, Safety, Health and Environment Co-ordinator with Kier Stoke, said that the housing maintenance specialist was promoting fitness classes, healthy options and quitting smoking amongst its 560 employees and 90 subcontractors. A special on-site event had brought together a host of support services and highlighted many issues for employees.

"We are looking for gradual change in the workplace and we also believe that by aiming for adults we can lead to change in the whole family, benefiting both parents and children," said Suzanne.

NSCCI Business Engagement Officer David Wellings said that the Chamber's Projects team had used its network of contacts to support the initiative by identifying and recommending client organisations to take part. "Let's Do Healthy Workplaces should be congratulated on making a real difference to people's lives in North Staffordshire," he said.

Over a healthy buffet lunch, attendees had the opportunity to get more information and discuss issues with representatives from support agencies covering areas including cancer awareness, company health policy, cycling to work, quitting smoking, employee health checks, free fitness classes and mental health.

Attendees at the event, held at the Michelin Athletics Club, were given a de-stressing break from the presentations in the form of yoga exercises followed by an impromptu belly dancing session, both led by Blythe Bridge-based instructor Julie Gater.

The three winners of a business card game took away prize boxes of fruit and vegetables, courtesy of Bush Tucker Enterprises of Blurton.

## Positive outcomes

- Over 50 companies assisted and encouraged to take part
- Health questionnaire designed and used by the companies, to assist in implementing a company health action plan

### Participant companies report:

- Reduction in smokers
- Reduction in sickness absence
- Weight loss
- Increase in staff activities
- Team working
- Lowering of blood pressure
- Reduction in stress

