



Press Release
Be Healthy Berrien

YMCA Helps Worksites Build Wellness Programs that Work

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This is the fourth article in a 4-part series highlighting Be Healthy Berrien and YMCA of Southwest Michigan's worksite wellness programs and services. To read the previous series articles, visit www.BeHealthyBerrien.org/news.

YMCA of Southwest Michigan, through its partnership with Be Healthy Berrien, has identified four worksites in Berrien County that have voluntarily chosen to participate in their YMCA Worksite Wellness Program, including Ballard Elementary School in Niles, Southside School in Niles, STEAM Academy at MLK in Benton Harbor, and Westwoods of Niles. This new program brings YMCA Diabetes Prevention Program (YDPP), Health Coaching, and Lunch-and-Learn sessions on-site to worksites. The program also provides expert help for worksite leaders to build healthy practices that help support healthy choices for their employees, like creating water stations, holding regular walking meetings, and including information about health topics during staff meetings.

After completing a worksite wellness assessment, Westwoods of Niles leaders and staff learned what kinds of practices they could implement to support health at their worksite. One item that they have implemented is posting health information every month on a different topic in the employee breakroom and clock-in area so all staff can learn more about healthy choices. They have also provided re-usable water bottles for staff members to use to encourage drinking water throughout the day. The onsite YDPP, Health Coaching, and Lunch-and-Learn sessions have led to many great individual changes as well. The YDPP program has given new hope for becoming healthier to many participants who were scared or intimidated to try something new. One participant (who did not want to share her name) tells her story. "When I saw a sign hanging in the break room for the YMCA to help people lose weight, I was not going to do it. I had a friend at work that wanted to do the program and kept encouraging me to do it. I finally went and got the paperwork and filled it out. I learned that I had prediabetes and I needed to do something about it. I thought to myself 'Okay, I will give this try.' With the support of the YMCA coaches and my friends, it makes it nice. I have found that since I have started working out at the Y my body feels better in many different ways. Yes, at first I may have been scared to go to a class... but I found out they [YMCA Coaches] were there to help me in the class and told me great job."

Erica Walsh is one of the YMCA's YDPP Coaches and wellness experts. Erica shares, "by offering the YMCA Diabetes Prevention Program at a workplace, you are able to serve a group of people more conveniently at the same location. You get better successes as each participant



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attends more meetings. It can just help your employees feel better and be able to function in their job more efficiently.”

Heather Cole, Director of Be Healthy Berrien, has a lot of praise for Westwoods of Niles. “They did a wonderful job of building a wellness program that meets the both the wants and needs of their employees. Using a worksite assessment to guide their program helped to create fun ways to incorporate wellness into their daily work routines that the employees feel good about.” While there are lots of wonderful resources for worksite wellness available, the Be Healthy Berrien Worksite Wellness Toolkit brings together local, state, and national resources that help create programs that work for many different kinds of workplaces. You can find the interactive toolkit online at www.BeHealthyBerrien.org/worksite-wellness.

YMCA of Southwest Michigan offers customizable worksite wellness programs to employers throughout Berrien County, including on-site services, expert advice, and corporate membership options. For more information on YMCA Worksite Wellness services, contact Monica Norton at the Benton Harbor-St. Joseph YMCA, (269) 428-9622.

The YMCA Worksite Wellness Program is supported by Be Healthy Berrien through a 4x4 Grant from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. The purpose of the Michigan Health and Wellness 4 x 4 Coalition Initiative is to implement Michigan’s priority strategies to improve health and reduce obesity by creating healthier communities, expanding prevention activities and empowering people to make healthy choices and adopt health as a core personal value. The expected outcomes include changes in weight status and improvements in healthy eating and physical activity.

Be Healthy Berrien is a county-wide partnership of Berrien County Health Department, Lakeland Health, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, United Way of Southwest Michigan, and YMCA of Southwest Michigan. These organizations are working together to reduce obesity and chronic illness by creating healthy places to live, work, learn, and play. For more information about Be Healthy Berrien, please visit www.BeHealthyBerrien.org.

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