

Stairway to Health - Success Stories

Success Stories

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Government of New Brunswick

When Marie-Claire Pierce of New Brunswick's Sport Recreation and Active Living Branch heard about the promotion of Stairway to Health she said "What took you so long?" Her department occupies the 7th floor of an 8 storey office building in Moncton New Brunswick, housing a stairway that is plain, but clean and well maintained.

Coordinated by a dedicated team of 4 key volunteers her workplace began looking at encouraging stair use in 2001 as a program to address the physical activity and health needs of fellow employees. "When we asked everyone to commit to participating in 15 minutes of physical activity a year earlier, no one really said no. But it was hard to motivate people day after day," says Pierce, "and it kind of died off."

Not easily discouraged the group of volunteers re-grouped, and conducted a survey of employees, covering the topics of physical activity, nutrition, lunch workshops and special events. The survey offered some options, but also allowed employees to make their own suggestions for activities. One of the options was a stair climbing challenge and most people responded positively to this. Stair climbing also met the criteria of providing options for individual activity, group activity, and friendly competition which were principles that the volunteer committee felt were important in order to motivate different employees in different ways.

The first challenge was the Empire State Building, the 103-story giant of the New York skyline. A chart was created and placed prominently by the door, for those working on the 7th floor. Each square coloured in represented one story, and employees could compare progress toward the top each day.

"The results were terrific! We kicked off our challenge with a launch and invited the whole floor. Everyone who participated contributed \$2 to a prize pot, and we used this money to purchase items at the 'Dollar Store' to be used for recognition and motivation. Our managers were very supportive of the program. The best part was the terrific response we got to the program, and we achieved results that are continuing one year later."

14 of 23 employees participated in the program. Participants reported increased stamina and energy, reduced stress, improved nutrition habits, weight loss, and an increased sense of well being as well as a sense of accomplishment.

One employee noted that "people seem happier... we do the stairs, we colour in the chart, and we talk about it with each other. It really is a lot of fun and it's something we have in common that's not work related." "It's like we never thought of the stairs before," adds Pierce, " but now I can't make a trip to my office without thinking about seeing that chart when I get to the top.

In reality one of the challenges for the organizers was the enthusiasm that the program has generated. "When we started the Stairway Challenge for the Empire State Building, we started on a Thursday, and on Sunday night of the same week I got a call from one of my colleagues saying, I'm at the top Marie-Claire, and I love the view! She had taken the stairway challenge home with her and had climbed enough stairs to make it to the top of the 1860 step building."

Pierce suggests having several challenges prepared ahead of time, and rewarding multiple climbs of buildings, as a way to stay ahead of the enthusiastic response of co-workers. (Note: Interactive tools contained on this web site will facilitate this.)

Other tips from Ms. Pierce include:

- Start with an employee committee and survey, and talk one on one to fellow employees.
- Launch your program by showing how you are responding to the survey.
- Recognize and reward accomplishments regularly via quick gatherings, lunches, newsletters, emails etc.
- Report success stories from your co-workers.
- Find out what motivates your colleagues. Is it competition, social activities, a common goal? Is it health, weight loss, strength, appearance, energy levels? Whatever it is, try to build a program that links to their needs.

Nortel Networks

Nortel Networks, one of Canada's leading telecommunications providers invests a great deal of time and money in encouraging health lifestyles for its employees. So when it designed its new building two years ago, it wanted a design that encouraged employees and guests to use the stairs instead of the elevators.

"Nortel wanted a design that drew people visually and physically to an attractive and functional stairway as part of its main entranceway" says William Mitchell of HOK Canada, the company that designed the building.

Elevators are provided of course, but with an ironic role reversal compared to traditional workplaces, the elevators are not 'visually' accessible, and require that people must take a longer route in order to use them.

Results are positive "We see far more people using the stairs here than at most office buildings," says Mitchell.

Statistics Canada - Government of Canada

Even though the elevators in Statistic Canada's Tunney's Pasture buildings were refurbished and operating efficiently, employees there were frequently frustrated by long waits during peak periods...too many people wanting to use the elevators at the same time.

Seeing the opportunity to turn this negative into a positive, Lydia Butler and her team at Statistics Canada decided to implement their own Stairway to Health Program. The program makes the case to employees there that lifting your body against gravity to climb stairs is one of the best things you can do for your heart, muscles and bones. "In an age of 'no time for exercise,' the steps all around us provide an inexpensive and extremely effective way to add physical activity to our daily routine."She encourages a promotional article be sent electronically to all employees.

The Statistics Canada Fitness Centre, Workplace Wellness Committees and Heart Health Coalition sponsored a 'Take the Stairs' campaign, which began just after the labour Day long weekend and ran for two weeks. Employees were encouraged to form small teams to make stair-climbing a fun activity, and were give their own activity card to record their progress.

Prizes like T-shirts, fitness center memberships, and cookbooks were awarded, and winners were randomly selected from all those who participated.

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<http://stairway.hc-sc.gc.ca/viewssuccessstories.aro?Cid=1>

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