

Health & Wellbeing

Asda

February 2009



EFA Overview

Asda has been working over the last ten years to develop an inclusive and engaging workplace that reflects the local communities in which it operates. It has removed the retirement age, age bands for pay and age information from applications. The company also opened a store with 50% of staff aged over 50 in 2001 to understand the myths and barriers to recruiting older workers. All of these actions have seen a significant broadening in its age profile. It has a Diversity Forum of senior managers, sponsored by an Executive Director, which co-ordinates a programme of activities. It has launched a wide ranging health and wellbeing campaign to help its workforce achieve a healthier lifestyle.

Initiative

Asda launched a broad programme of healthier lifestyle initiatives with an intense three week campaign followed by a series of smaller, local activities across the UK.

Aims of initiative

Asda understood that colleagues of different ages are affected by their health and wellbeing. A healthy workforce is more than people being physically well. It is the outcome of an environment where good work supports all round wellbeing. The company set itself the challenge to develop a programme of activities to support its workforce in achieving a healthier lifestyle both physically and mentally. Being a diverse employer, it aimed to raise awareness and promote the benefits of a healthier lifestyle to people of all ages and across all business areas.

Approach taken

Asda held a series of listening groups to understand views from around the business including colleagues, managers and People Managers. It completed benchmarking work within the retail sector and across wider industry to find best practice.

While Asda wanted to support all colleagues, it recognised the need to focus on those later in life as health and wellbeing is particularly relevant to them. It kickstarted its campaign with three weeks of intense activity in June 2008, launching a six month Slimathon with an 'A' plan diet, free fruit for available to all, discounts on vitamins and minerals, free blood pressure and cholesterol checks. Each store and depot elected a Health Representative to sit on the Colleague Circle, Asda's action-based consultative forum based in each of its 400 sites across the UK.

Asda launched initiatives that target physical health such as a 24 hour Bikeathon for Children in Need, where colleagues cycled 100,000 km raising £25,000. It also ran a smoke-free initiative with the NHS where the company gave out 50,000 Asda/NHS Smoke Free packs and the local PCT Smoke Free team visited every store and depot canteen to talk to colleagues about giving up smoking.

The company also looked at work organisation, job design and management practices to establish and sustain a healthy work environment. It simplified and extended flexible working schemes with paid time off for donation including: blood, fertility, bone marrow and up to three months paid leave to donate an organ.

Case Study



Asda successfully trialled Occupational Health services on half of its sites and rolled out the service across all sites in early 2009 with a £1.7 million investment. Occupational Health particularly helps older colleagues in the earlier stages of illness to get support, expert advice and prompt early treatment.

The company publicised a series of health campaign messages under the logo **Feel Good**. These included information on diabetes, cholesterol, alcohol awareness and calorie intake.

Challenges

Some managers were reluctant to talk to colleagues about health concerns especially if there were perceived barriers between them, such as age differences. The introduction of an Occupational Health service has removed those barriers through support and advice.

There was some reluctance from both colleagues and managers to get involved in health and wellbeing activities. Asda gathered feedback to find out what had been the most popular and effective campaigns and has improved its future agenda to increase participation and enthusiasm for the activities.

Outcomes and benefits of the initiative

The impact of the health and wellbeing project was to raise awareness and drive involvement and engagement of colleagues.

Asda enjoyed a positive response to health activities with 3,600 colleagues signing up to the Slimathon and losing over three tonnes in weight. The Bikeathon attracted 9,000 participants with many more sponsoring the riders and 50,000 colleagues took Smoke Free packs for themselves or family members.

Positive feedback from colleagues and Health Representatives has been used to plan bigger and better activities in 2009. This will include a main activity every quarter and smaller events every month. The health and wellbeing agenda forms an instrumental part of the company's people plans in 2009.

Impact on the organisation

The company's index of employee attitudes has risen by 5% in 2008 reflecting the initiatives taken to drive colleague engagement and wellbeing. It has seen a change in culture with health being a key driver in its colleague agenda for 2009.

Labour turnover and absence rates have fallen since the introduction of the health initiatives, with company labour turnover now at 21% and absence at 3.1%. Two years ago these were 28% and 4.1% respectively and these rates are significantly lower than retail averages. Asda has also seen a 1.4% drop in absence within the over 50 population as a result of targeted preventative measures such as cholesterol and blood pressure checks and occupational health advice and treatments.

Lessons learned

Asda launched its **Feel Good** health and wellbeing programme with an intense three week campaign of activities. The launch was a success but feedback was clear that a regular variety of activities would suit a diverse workforce. In future the emphasis will be on keeping messages simple to engage the widest audience with smaller, regular activities run throughout the year.

Case Study