



Cradles to Crayons Creates a Culture of Wellness to Reduce Heart Disease and Stroke among Employees in Boston

Source: Cradles to Crayons

Background

The values that Cradles to Crayons (C2C) has built both its organization and wellness program upon state: Kids come first, We are one and we are stronger together, We lead the way, Diversity is our strength, Inclusivity our bond, Service is our legacy. Their “work plus life not work versus life” approach promotes employee physical, mental, and financial health. The Organizational Growth and Innovation Team is responsible for employee wellness.

“There are small things we can do every day to reduce the frequency of heart disease and stroke. Since we are around our co-workers for eight hours a day, why not motivate each other to live healthier and enjoy life?”

– Marisa Sweeney, Associate Director of Employee Engagement

Opportunities

At C2C duties range from Operations—a physically-demanding role in the warehouse packing and receiving donations—to Development—an administrative role requiring long periods of sitting. The Boston location has 40, predominately female (68%), employees with an average age of 35 years. Although this is a relatively young and healthy workforce, heart disease and stroke prevention efforts are warranted:

- Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women in the United States¹
- Nearly 60% of stroke deaths are in women²
- Over the last 15 years stroke hospitalizations among younger adults (ages 18-54) have increased³
- In Massachusetts specifically, the decline of deaths from stroke over the past few decades has reversed since 2013.³

C2C’s wellness program grew out of a 2016 Working On Wellness grant from the Massachusetts Wellness Council. The \$10,000 grant was used to provide incentives for participation in wellness activities, and it also served as a “wake up call” to the employees who were used to putting their needs on the back-burner in favor of accomplishing their work priorities. The grant laid the groundwork for leadership to consider employee wellness and ultimately launch a more comprehensive wellness program that is now part of the company’s annual budget.

At-a-Glance

Cradles to Crayons

- Founded in 2002, Non-Profit
- Industry: Social Assistance
- Location: Boston, MA with additional locations in Chicago, IL and Philadelphia, PA
- 40 employees in Boston location

Cradles to Crayons was established when founder Lynn Margherio realized her niece’s outgrown and unworn clothes could be used by a child in need. The organization’s mission is to provide children from birth through age 12 with everyday essentials they need to thrive. Items such as clothing, shoes, books, toys, school supplies, and hygiene items are provided free of charge by connecting communities that have with communities that need. Staff and volunteers solicit and organize “Kidpacks” for distribution by community service partners to children in low-income and homeless situations.



Wellness Activities

C2C provides a mix of wellness programming from which employees can choose.

Health Benefits

C2C offers a comprehensive benefits package to employees that includes:

- Subsidized health premiums including 100% coverage for individual employees
- Annual contribution to a Health Reimbursement Arrangement Account.

The insurance provider has a Healthy Actions program. Employees visit their primary care provider (PCP) annually for a complete physical screening (e.g., blood pressure, cholesterol, and tobacco use). Based on the physical, if the employee is determined to be healthy, s/he receives a \$300 gift card. If the PCP suggests a goal for the year (e.g., lowering blood pressure) the employee receives a partial incentive. When the PCP verifies the employee has met their goals the employee receives the balance of the \$300. Forty-five percent of the Boston employees participated in 2017, 66% of which were fully awarded gift cards. C2C receives a premium discount from the insurance provider based on the number of employees achieving goals.

15 Minutes for Wellness

C2C has a 15 Minutes of Wellness Policy, allowing employees to take 15 minutes of paid time daily to pursue something wellness related. Employees use this time to stretch, walk, or meditate—whatever that employee wishes. Every Wednesday afternoon, interested employees gather to stretch and walk for their 15 minute break. They walk outdoors in nice weather, or in the warehouse in poor weather. Organization leadership participates regularly.

Monthly Wellness Events

Every month, C2C has at least one wellness event (e.g., nutrition class, cooking demonstration, yoga or meditation class, or financial wellness session) at the end of the day so most employees can participate. At the end of the month there is a raffle drawing for a \$100 gift card for employees who participated in one or more events during the month. More than 60% of employees regularly participate in these events.

Challenges

The C2C annual budget is small. The company seeks creative programming that is free or low cost. They use online resources to find ideas, search for class instructors, and shop-around for lower costs for supplies (e.g., water bottles). Instructors (e.g., yoga, meditation, and Zumba) are certified and currently working in their field. They volunteer or charge a minimal fee.

Successes

All employees can choose to integrate wellness into their work day every day because of the 15 Minutes for Wellness policy. Group walks each Wednesday provide social support for physical activity. According to C2C, most employees (72%) have participated in wellness activities in 2018. Organizational leadership participates in wellness activities to role model healthy behaviors for all employees, creating a culture of health. They also see the program as an effective recruitment tool for new employees.

References

¹ Xu JQ, Murphy SL, Kochanek KD, Bastian BA. Deaths: Final Data for 2013. National Vital Statistics Reports; Vol 64, No. 2. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2016

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Women and Stroke. https://www.cdc.gov/stroke/docs/women_stroke_factsheet.pdf. Accessed July 30, 2018.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Preventino. Preventing Stroke Deaths: Progress Stalled. CDC Vital signs. September 6, 2017. <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/pdf/2017-09-vitalsigns.pdf>.



Cradles to Crayons employees participate in an onsite yoga class

"This program helps us come together as a company. We all work in our siloed departments so it's nice to be able to come together for a stretch, mindfulness exercise, or a walk where you can chat and laugh with your fellow coworkers. I look forward to seeing what else will come out of the initiative in the future."

– Roksana, Information Technology

"I enjoy wellness Wednesdays because it's a nice way to break up the busy work week, and gives me time to focus on physical and mental health."

– Deanna, Marketing & Communications

Additional Wellness Offerings

- Newsletter promoting monthly wellness activities, health topics, and monthly raffle winners
- Hydration and step challenges
- Healthy foods available at meetings and trainings
- Reduced membership fees at local fitness facility