

Norway

The “GET WELL PROJECT” in Nedre Eiker Local Authority

Facts about Nedre Eiker Local Authority

Nedre Eiker Local Authority is located in Buskerud County and is populated by some 20,000 people. Approximately 1,400 people are employed in Nedre Eiker's four departments.

Nedre Eiker Local Authority is in a poor financial state. It stands in the shadow of more prosperous local authorities in south-east Norway. The absenteeism rate in Nedre Eiker has exceeded the national average by more than 10 per cent. In recent years, absenteeism in Nedre Eiker has been on the increase and become a liability in an already pressured local government budget.

Establishment and foundation of the “GET WELL PROJECT”

Establishment of the “GET WELL PROJECT” was suggested after gaining good experiences from a small pilot project that tried out extended self-certified sick leave arrangements as well as training and exercises during working hours on a selected group of employees. The Working Environment Committee adopted the “GET WELL PROJECT” with support from all parties within the organisation. The Committee wanted the project to: “Create health-promoting workplaces by initiating a process which results in development and lasting changes of attitude in the entire organisation”. Concrete goals were to be realised: “Develop a healthy and active work environment in NELA (Nedre Eiker Local Authority), where personnel management and colleague

responsibility were key issues in order to create a good work environment characterised by job satisfaction. A reduction of absenteeism by 25 per cent over a three year period.”

The management favoured the project strongly and hoped for a reduction in the large absenteeism rates. The politicians also responded positively and signalled a green light for a project period of one year.

Meeting challenges

In order to succeed with such a project, the senior management must give the project a firm foundation and approve and lay down guidelines throughout the system. Deciding on priorities and giving support must be demonstrated in practical actions and adaptation. “The “Get Well work” must be integrated into daily operations. There must always be a common understanding of how NELA as an organisation, the management as a responsible unit and the staff as individuals, are to meet everyday challenges in the work environment. This must be demonstrated by practical actions and improvements in the employees' workday.

The current challenges and challenges to come, will be how the organisation can take care of human resources in the best way possible, whether it comes to buoyant persons or less resourceful individuals. Each and everyone must feel significant and that they have a meaningful job, with their separate background and qualifications taken into consideration.

Contact:
Nedre Eiker kommune
Christian Vegar Dahl
Chief administrative Officer
Phone: +47-32232500
E-mail:
post@nedre-eiker.kommune.no



Project idea

The main intention of the “Get Well Project” was to initiate a process, which would lead to progressive developments and lasting changes of attitude in the entire organisation over time.

The main focus is always the positive aspect of:

- WHAT WORKS instead of what does not work
- PRESENCE instead of absence
- OPPORTUNITIES instead of limitations
- THE FUTURE instead of the past
- RESOURCES instead of problems
- SUCCESS instead of failure

The demands further down in the organisation will be defined by those who “own” them, in order for these people to individually take control and work constructively with positive changes, the so-called “bottom-up” – not the traditional hierarchic “top-down” method. The intention is to create a better work environment where job satisfaction and productivity are long-term rewards.

This philosophy is partly taken from the “empowerment ideology” – acknowledged by international public health work - where participation and mastering, from each person’s own starting point, are the main principles along with the principles described in the Luxembourg declaration.

Purpose-built activities

The main focus of the “Get Well Project” is, as already mentioned, a process to achieve lasting changes of attitude.

Two directions stand out for the practical work and for the purpose-built activities:

Health promotion

- promote co-operation and well-being as well as taking care of each individual in a good and active work environment
- give priority to work environment work with a focus on job satisfaction
- social initiatives and focus on well-being
- stimulation and co-ordination of physical activities and desired lifestyle changes

Absenteeism

- care and adjustments in order to get sick people back to work and in an appropriate position at the work place
- take people seriously and help people who have a hard time
- improve follow-up routines for people on sick leave
- revise and determine the authority’s occupational rehabilitation work co-ordinated with support and new steps from the employment services and the social security office
- systematic training of management that creates a stance
- a network that offers information and activities to people on sick leave.

The resource teams: how the idea was translated into practice

The so-called “resource team model” is a working method where participation, exchange of experience and network principals are used. The model is the fundamental element and the “Get Well Project” in practice.

The resource team model has been used in the starting process in order to commit, improve and increase qualifications of a selection of staff from all service departments in a given period of time. Local conditions and internal wishes and requirements must form the basis for the choice of content, members and function. The function of these teams will be to be push for health promoting attitudes, pass on knowledge, stimulate to activities and be motivators, resource persons and supervisors within certain areas in the entire organisation. Each team draws up a “menu” in the form of a product brochure where they market their resources and offer assistance of different kinds.

The model consists of four teams with about eight persons in each. The teams are as follows:

- “Sick/Well Team” – working with traditional absenteeism work, occupational rehabilitation and care of the people on sick leave. New ideas and alternative organising may be tried out.
- “Job Satisfaction/Re-teaming” – working to promote job satisfaction and the feeling of workplace community. The work is based on committing

The “GET WELL PROJECT” in Nedre Eiker Local Authority

training, and a simple form of re-teaming methodology will be put into practice. Several ideas and initiatives promoting well-being will be of interest with respect to local conditions and internal wishes.

- “Guidance/Supervising Team” (co-worker guidance) – working with experience exchange from one area to another on the basis of different needs and guidance methodologies.
- “Physical Activities/Lifestyle Team” – encouraging people to form initiatives that involves physical activities of all types, as well as healthy lifestyles. The intention is to suggest and initiate activities for mutual experience and a strengthening of team spirit.

Looking at the results

A large number of employees have been involved in the “Get Well Project” and many activities have been initiated. More than 50 people have been directly involved in different groups, teams and committees that have been established as a result of the project. A number of employees as well as line managers have received training with “Get Well” content on several courses and seminars.

Future perspective and commitment

The project group has been closed down, however, the work will continue:

- A coordinator group will coordinate the work in the future.
- The coordinators from the four “resource teams” have the responsibility to make a “resource brochure” of who they are and what resources

the team has and what type of assistance they can offer. This will be a toolbox that can help management at all levels in the entire organisation. It will be a part of the training manual for line managers.

A total of NOK 200,000 (2500 euros) has been allocated from the budget to continue this work. The plan is to divide this pool into three of which one part

- (1) finances the continuation of initiatives in the project; foundation/information, training, theme days, individual activities and guidance.

The second part

- (2) is proposed for the teams that gradually have become self-managed and are operating with costs for different activities for other users/ departments/target groups.

The third part

- (3) suggests an annual set sum for a “Get Well Fund” where everyone can apply for financial aid for different local activities.

Last but not least ...

A big hand goes to the number of employees in the authority who have been of invaluable support with regards to the “Get Well Project”. Without them, this project would not have been possible.

The project supervisor has a large network and has assessed the exchange of experience with different specialist environments and people of resource as very important factors with regard to the improvement in competence, required specialist weight and the focused work with the “Get Well Pro-

ject”. Marketing and co-operation provide important contacts and will open doors to future opportunities.