

EMPLOYEE SUPPORT THROUGH MINDFULNESS WORKSHOPS

City West Water

To support the mental well-being of staff during the coronavirus pandemic, City West Water introduced professionally facilitated virtual mindfulness workshop sessions as part of its Wellbeing program.

Background

City West Water has adopted a holistic and supportive employee framework that links its recognition, recruitment, equity, inclusiveness, health, safety and wellbeing approaches together; the approach forms a fundamental part of its people management strategy.

By encouraging deeper, quality conversations that happen more often the business can connect with its people to better understand and get to know them, seeing the whole person, not just their performance.

Through these quality conversations it became apparent that societal anxieties around coronavirus and the lack of a clear endpoint was having an impact on employee wellbeing and engagement.

Whether it be fear of job loss, blurring of work-life balance, isolation as a result of working from home, additional caring duties, dealing with uncertainty, or impacts on family or friends, all can contribute to increased stress and feelings of fatigue.

To address these challenges, City West Water considered ways to support employee mental health and well-being during this period.

Amongst a suite of initiatives available to staff has been a mindfulness program, developed in concert with a professional mindfulness practitioner.

Mindfulness activities are known to promote and provide people with:

- increased self-awareness,
- self-belief,
- increased compassion, and
- tools to remain connected to themselves and others.

Implementation

A virtual offering was established whereby a professional facilitator was engaged to host virtual mindfulness sessions via the corporate Microsoft Teams environment.

The initial engagement was for a five-week period, with two sessions being held per week.

Each session included a mindfulness welcome, a discussion on various mindfulness topics and a mindfulness meditation.

Topics covered included:

1. Being present
2. Mindfulness of thoughts and feelings
3. Creating compassion and self-compassion
4. Taking mindful action
5. Making plans mindfully.

Prior to the close of each session, the facilitator held a Q&A allowing participants to raise specific queries.

The initiative had support from all levels of management, including the Executive, who encouraged participation through their own attendance.

The sessions were promoted via various employee communication channels including email, newsletters, social business platforms and computer screen savers.

Staff were also supported by the provision of e-based assessment tools and guides as well as time to attend the sessions.

Employees were encouraged to attend one, some, or all the sessions, however the commitment was completely voluntary. If an employee missed a session they had the opportunity to view a recording of the sessions at a later time.

Surveys were conducted at various times during the program to get employee feedback on its effectiveness. Overwhelming support for the program was received through the feedback which resulted in it being extended for a further six weeks.

Benefits and outcomes

The mindfulness program normalised mindfulness and meditative approaches across the business, with even the City West Water Board having conducted a pre-meeting mindfulness meditation prior to the commencement of a regular Board meeting.

Through encouraging involvement through conversation, and with regular management participation, the number of staff who see value in taking a break and attending such sessions, or just a break to recharge, significantly increased.

The program was well-supported with more than 100 attendees having participated in sessions, with many more having watched recorded sessions.

The program also served to increase business connectiveness with participants in the program having come from all of City West Water's various business groups.

Testimonials

Person A – “I have regularly attended the Thursday afternoon sessions which are perfectly timed towards the end of a busy week. I have found myself looking forward to each session and in fact when work pressures start to impinge, desperate not to miss them. The sessions are top notch and a beacon of light in a raging sea of Zoom meetings and emails/chats.”

Person B – “The mindfulness sessions being offered has been really useful to take a break from the hectic schedule at home. The breathing exercises has helped managed the stress, and also focus on the task at hand. Overall, its been great to have these sessions to talk about how we feel and how we handle our emotions through these techniques. Thank you for organising.”

Person C – “Every week I look forward to the facilitator's gentle voice and her wealth of knowledge in this field. One of the skills I have taken away is self-compassion which I am now committed to practicing regularly.”

Person E – “Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom and coaching us in how to cope with the challenges that the coronavirus pandemic has brought to us. With deep gratitude”

Person F – “Thank you so much for organising the Mindfulness series. There is so many “tools” I have learnt from these sessions to improve my wellbeing, be more compassion(sic) to myself and to others”

Person G – “It has certainly helped a lot of us to pause for a moment and appreciate the more important things in life especially in a busy world we live in.”

Person H – “Just wanted to say how valuable the sessions are – I made this a regular appointment with myself on a Thursday, and though circumstances meant I couldn't always make it, I was always so glad when I did - instant calm. Looking forward to revisiting the sessions over coming weeks, especially those I missed.”