



Healthy PSU: PSU Summit Day

Innovation and Entrepreneurship Cluster Project

Denise Normandin, RD, LD and Christian Bisson, EdD, Plymouth State University



Introduction

The idea for PSU Summit Day was sparked by listening to our Plymouth State University, Faculty and Staff members who participated in the On the Move initiative. On the Move is a 12-week National physical activity and well-being challenge co-developed by WELCOA-Wellness Council of America and Sean Foy, MA, exercise physiologist, behavioral coach and Author of The Burst! Workout.¹ The challenge inspired our employees to move more, sit less and thrive throughout their workday. The participants were provided access to the On the Move, on-line/mobile platform which allowed them to track their movement, read weekly learn articles, assess their personal health, share their fitness and well-being goals with others and boost (virtual high-five) their teammates. Plymouth State University received designation from WELCOA as one of the Top 25 Active Companies in the On the Move Challenge in June 2016. PSU employees demonstrated their commitment to the program with an overall participation rate of 92% over the course of the 12-week program.

In week eleven of the challenge, PSU employees were voluntarily asked to share their personal fitness goals/dreams through the on-line platform. What emerged organically was a consistent theme around continuing to be active outdoors, walking and hiking with others to gain more confidence and endurance, specific goals were share to hike some of the highest peaks in New Hampshire.

Project Goals

1. To educate a group of participants on hiking skills/safety and equipment needs.
2. To provide the participants with a physical activity opportunity for personal growth in the natural environment.
3. To inspire the participants in a purposeful experience in nature to promote health and enhance well-being.



Methods

The project proposal was submitted by Healthy PSU and was the first approved cluster project by the Innovation and Entrepreneurship cluster. Healthy PSU is Plymouth State University's award-winning employee health and wellness, research-based campaign.

The PSU Summit Day cluster project partnered with the faculty experts from our Adventure Education Department to engage participants in a group physical activity, hiking outdoors with a purposeful intention. This project provided an opportunity for individuals to strive towards the summit of a given mountain while experiencing physical activity in the natural environment. The participants were introduced to trail hiking techniques, safety and equipment needs, physical activity assessments, proper nutrition and hydration, medical questionnaires, journal reflection and continued access to the On the Move Monthly on-line platform all of which prepared them for a safe, one-day hike in a group setting. The participants were observed directly in both, indoor and outdoor environments.

The project brought together a multi-disciplinary team of faculty, staff, students, alumni, community members and external partners to promote healthy living that inspired collaboration, leadership and community-building.



After the On the Move 12-week Company Challenge was completed, it was followed by a series of employee focus groups. Information from these combined sources was used to inform the cluster project goals and outcomes. Our Healthy PSU program has incorporated the Wellness Council of America's (WELCOA) patented Well Workplace processes and On the Move initiative throughout the campaign and the WELCOA seven benchmarks are inherent in all that we do to build our results-oriented workplace wellness program.^{3, 4}

Project Outcomes



1. A total of 20 individuals, including 5 faculty, 2 students, 6 staff members, 2 alumni, 3 external partners & 2 community members (11 males and 9 females, ranging in age from 22-68 years old) participated in face-to-face training sessions, group discussions and email communications leading up to the summit day hike.
2. All participants had a hiking buddy and established a purposeful intention for the hike. 18 of the 20 participants completed the 9.9 mile day hike up the Jewell Trail of Mount Washington. Two participants summited Mount Washington via the Auto Road. All participants safely finished the climb without injury.
3. Many of the participants shared a personal testimonial about the positive and meaningful impact that PSU Summit Day had on them. The statement below is from one of the student leaders regarding her experience:

"PSU Summit Day gave me an opportunity to meet and lead a group of inspirational faculty, staff and partners up the tallest mountain in the northeast, Mt. Washington. This experience helped me grow as a leader. I was able to meet great leaders who not only helped me realize my strengths and weaknesses, but also gave me confidence to keep moving to reach my goals - all while I was helping them reach their goal by summiting Mt. Washington safely."
- Andreana Sideris '18

The results from the On the Move Challenge and the successful completion of PSU Summit Day were submitted to the American Heart Association for the Fit-Friendly Worksite Innovation Award in November 2016. In December of 2016, Plymouth State University was recognized by the American Heart Association for achieving the requirements of a Fit-Friendly Worksite Innovation Award.

Conclusions

We have learned that having our Healthy PSU health and wellness campaign built through community member engagement (community-based) is well accepted and establishes a readiness for health behavior change across all levels of influence. According to the World Health Organization, "whether people are healthy or not, is determined by their circumstances and environment".⁵ Having top-level leadership support has been critical to the success of our integrated award-winning health and wellness initiatives at Plymouth State University.

The PSU Summit Day project is entrepreneurial, innovative, incorporates experiential learning and leadership that aligns with the vision of PSU. The project enriched the well-being of the leaders and participants while building knowledge and experiences to enhance future programs and/or university engagements.

The experiences gathered from the On the Move initiative and PSU Summit Day have inspired a sense of community building and social connectedness at PSU like no other programs we have implemented. It is clear that the participants of PSU Summit Day connected outdoor physical activity with their own personal growth as well as those they interacted with during the hiking experience. Given the success demonstrated by the PSU Summit Day cluster project, the organizers hope to continue PSU Summit Day as a "new" PSU fall tradition for our entire campus community to participate starting potentially in 2017.



References

1. Foy, S. *The Burst! Workout*, 2014 Workman Publishing Co., Inc., New York, NY.
2. 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (n.d.). Retrieved April 1, 2017, <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/>
3. WELCOA's Seven Benchmarks –WELCOA. (n.d.). Retrieved April 1, 2017, <https://www.welcoa.org/services/build/welcoas-seven-benchmarks/>
4. WELCOA's On The Move Initiative – WELCOA. (n.d.). Retrieved April 1, 2017, <https://www.welcoa.org/about/on-the-move-initiative/>
5. The determinants of health. (n.d.). Retrieved April 1, 2017, <http://www.who.int/hia/evidence/doh/en/>