

Staff Wellness in Head Start/Early Head Start of Beaver County

As a part of Private Industry Council's Personal Development Program (PDP), staff have an opportunity to participate on various committees throughout the year, one is, the Wellness/Welcome Committee. The committee in Beaver County meets monthly to plan activities and provide education to improve employee physical health, mental well-being and staff morale. In addition, we celebrate and support different causes within the community to help raise awareness.

The Office of Head Start (OHS) has issued an information memorandum recognizing the importance of supporting staff wellness in order to provide high quality comprehensive services to children and families. OHS recommends prioritizing staff wellness and building a culture of wellness as programs deal with the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The memorandum states, "Staff wellness is vital to child well-being." As a committee we believe this wholeheartedly.

Pre-pandemic, working with children and families could be stressful and cause burnout. However, the pandemic has created some very stressful working experiences and self-care has been a constant theme of the Wellness Committee. We believe it is critical to provide opportunities to build and maintain positive and supportive relationships with colleagues. In September, we provided information from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) on "Coping with Stress" and recognized, Suicide Prevention Month. We shared warning signs and when to seek immediate help, along with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline phone number. We have also, provided information related to the pandemic on the layered approach of risk reduction strategies in order to keep our children and staff safe. We supported a Back to School Drive within the community and donated two boxes of supplies for children, whose families lack the resources to provide the tools children need to be successful.

October's activities focused on Breast Cancer awareness and included, encouraging early detection, through self-breast exams and scheduling regular clinical breast exams and mammograms. We contacted a local oncology office and expressed an interest in donating items of need to their patients. We will present their office with kits of ICE GUM and LIP BALM that will help manage dry mouth during chemotherapy treatment and restore moisture to their lips.

The Wellness Committee also, sponsored its first Pumpkin Decorating Contest, there were two categories, classroom and staff entries. We received a total of eight entries and the winners received gift cards to Target and Wendy's Coupon Boo Books. All of the pumpkins were beautiful, it was hard to vote for a favorite! It was a fun activity; all staff had the opportunity to participate in the decorating and voting. We are looking forward to making this an annual activity.

Other causes we celebrated in October, included "Unity Day", (October 20) where we came together and wore the color orange to celebrate kindness, acceptance and inclusion. Orange is a color of safety and visibility and we observed this day in harmony. In the words of the late Senator John McCain, "Despite our differences, much more unites us than divides us."

Lastly, we recognized, "World Mental Health Day". Nearly one in 20 adults live with serious mental illness. Raising awareness can help to understand symptoms, find professional treatment, and possibly break the mental health stigma that leaves people suffering in silence. A link to the infographic "You Are Not Alone" was shared for additional information.

https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/NAMI_YouAreNotAlone_2020_FINAL.pdf;

https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/NAMI_MentalHealthCareMatters_2020_FINAL.pdf

It is wonderful that OHS supports staff wellbeing and encourages opportunities for grantees to prioritize the wellness of staff. If we can work together to reduce stress and recognize staff contributions, it may and improve productivity and help us to attract more employees and retain existing employees.

