



Feature
article

How Workplace Strategies helped one organization improve its mental health

This is the final story of the three-part series about the experience of Ottawa-Carleton Lifeskills (OCL). If you missed the other articles about [Greg Swaine's determination](#) to “be the change,” and [Jocelyne Paul's openness](#) as a leader, check them out. Read on to learn more about how her leadership influenced a culture change at their agency.

Greg was so invested in bringing positive change to everyone at OCL, he volunteered about 360 hours to research. He accessed the [National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) (the Standard) and tools and resources from other credible organizations – including Workplace Strategies.

“I’m realizing there are consultants who can help you implement the programs in far less time. **You don’t need to be trained to implement the Standard. Take advantage of the resources and tools that are available through sites like Workplace Strategies for Mental Health where everything is free.** There’s so much information out there, you can find most of the work’s already been done for you,” Greg recommends.

Greg’s research led to a small step with a big impact – and later to a presentation to OCL’s senior management team in 2017. “I signed up for [Healthy break](#) activities. I wanted to implement something right away at low to no cost and monitor my team’s behaviour so that I could present data from our own employees.”

**Workplace Strategies
for Mental Health**

Compliments of Canada Life

“We started changing the way that we did breaks. We focused more on doing something together and talking rather than jumping on our phones and going into a corner,” he explains.

They implemented other initiatives to improve the organization’s mental health at their location, including a wall of inspiration and a weight loss and physical activity challenge. “As we were getting deeper into the program, closer to my presentation date, we noticed people started talking about what they needed in the space, like a break to get away from noise. There was more connection.

It cost us nothing to do it and I could show measurable results within 4 to 5 months,” Greg says, adding OCL implemented this program across the organization.

Greg also used the Workplace Strategies template to strengthen his presentation to the senior management team. “It played a major part in the way that I gathered stats to pique their interest.”

OCL took a bigger step towards psychological health and safety with every employee completing the [Mindful employee](#) training. “We asked them questions about psychological safety in the workplace. We also used it as an introduction to what they could expect to see. When you start saying ‘mental health’ and you have a large male employee base, you want to get people comfortable with the idea,” Greg says.

“It became our first training opportunity that we’d ever been given as an organization and the first new training we’d received in more than a decade. While Mindful employee is free to take and share, it does take time. They [OCL management] found funds so everyone could be paid to do it, whether on their own time or at work,” Greg says.

“The best advice I can give is follow suit with what I did,” Greg says.

“Take something as simple as changing the way your employees take breaks. I read so many articles about the importance of giving employees their breaks. We’re in an age now where you’re rewarded for your

hustle and taking on projects that you work on ‘after work’. The team building and taking more productive breaks gives them a chance to call a friend or do some of the activities. They come back feeling refreshed and we saw a spike in productivity.

“We’re also following our culture statement (on page 4 of OCL’s 2018-2019 [annual report](#)). Those were the results I was able to present to the senior management team.” Greg says.

OCL is sharing their story within the developmental services sector at a provincial conference in May 2020 and while at a provincial labour relations session in October 2019, Jocelyne spoke about their innovative efforts. “There was a lot of interest from the other participants, wondering how we did this and its impact,” Jocelyne says.

“Mental health is a topic that’s getting a lot of attention – as it should. I would encourage other organizations to do what they can to support the mental health of their employees,” Jocelyne adds.

We thank Greg Swaine and Jocelyne Paul for allowing us to share the OCL story with you. **A workplace that pays attention to its employees’ psychological health and safety in addition to their physical health and safety, is likely to have a healthier and more engaged workforce.**

Browse this website for the resources mentioned in this article and many more. If you have questions, please [contact us](#) and we’ll be happy to direct you to the right tool or resource for your organization.

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