



SALGBA 2015 Challenge Application

The SALGBA Challenge is designed to motivate you to take the next step and implement an idea surrounding employee health care within your state or local entity. Any current SALGBA member is eligible to participate in the Challenge.

Entity: City of Austin

Address: 505 Barton Springs Rd.

City: Austin State: TX Zip: 78704

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1. What was your idea for change within your workplace?

The City of Austin wanted to increase adherence to employee walking programs and help the multitude of dogs at its no-kill shelters. The City of Austin employee wellness program, HealthyConnections, hosts a variety of free fitness classes to all City employees including several walking classes. A study by R.A. Johnson and R.A. Meadows (2010) found that walking a “loaner” dog increased adherence to walking programs. HealthyConnections wished to create a win-win situation by increasing adherence to employee walking programs and getting shelter dogs outside and exercising. By walking the dogs weekly, the shelters hope to acclimate the animals to people and help them become more adoptable. The solution was to create the Trail Dogs PE class.

2. What steps did you take to execute your idea?

HealthyConnections partnered with Town Lake Animal Center and Austin Pets Alive to create the Trail Dogs class. A training course was designed to teach participants proper dog handling techniques and canine safety. This training course is a mandatory part of the class and takes place on the first day of class. Captains were identified to manage the class and act as a liaison between HealthyConnections and the shelters. All Captains are required to take a canine safety and handling course offered through the shelters. The Trail Dogs class was added to the PE Program, which offers free fitness classes to all City employees.

3. Who did you involve?

HealthyConnections runs the Trail Dogs class and manages all aspects of the initiative. However, the partnership with Austin Pets Alive and the Town Lake Animal Center was instrumental in making the program a success. An effort was made to involve top level leadership and department heads so that employees would be supported in attending the classes. City of Austin employees volunteered to act as class captains and were involved in marketing the Trail Dogs class.

4. How and when was your idea implemented?

Trail Dogs was launched in the fall of 2012 with 20 participants enrolled in the class. Employees registered through the City PE Program and met at the animal shelter once a week to take the dogs for a walk. If employees attended the class for 10 out of 12 weeks, they qualified for 4 hours of paid leave. This incentive was used to encourage employees to participate in the program. Austin Pets Alive and the Town Lake Animal Center provided the dogs, leashes, and helped coordinate proper canine safety and handling. Participants were allowed to walk the dogs along the beautiful Town Lake Hike and Bike Trail for 30 – 45 minutes.

5. What are the results to date?

The class has been an overwhelming success and now includes classes at two different locations during lunch or after work. Classes average about 20 employees each and roughly 100 different dogs are walked depending on the location. Trail Dogs has one of the best attendance records of the City of Austin PE Program. On average, Trail Dogs classes have a 90% completion rate, which is measured by attending 10 out of 12 classes. Employees indicated that they were more motivated to participate in walking when “loaner” dogs were involved. Approximately 65% of the dogs who participate in Trail Dogs leave the shelter alive within two weeks of the end of the class. Within three months of the class ending, 99% of the dogs involved in the program have been adopted. To facilitate this process, there is a Facebook page that posts pics and comments about all of the dogs involved in the program.

6. What do you expect will be achieved or gained in the future as a result of this change?

We anticipate the program to continue to expand as the demand of the shelters continues to increase. We are interested in adding the option to walk “loaner” dogs during our other walk classes to increase attendance and adherence rates. Our goal is to use the dogs in order to motivate employees to attend classes regularly and raise awareness. We also hope to increase the adoptability of the dogs involved and help them get exposure. The Trail Dogs program creates a win-win scenario where employees are engaging in healthy behaviors and animals in need are gaining a friend and some playtime.

7. Why do you think you and your organization deserve to win the SALGBA 2015 Challenge?

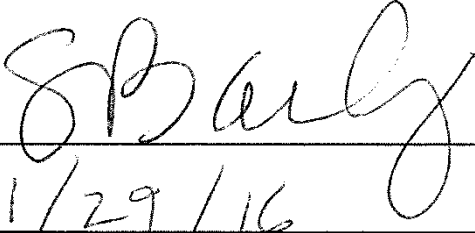
The City of Austin and HealthyConnections have once again created an innovative solution to address problems that the City is facing. Austin’s no-kill shelters are over capacity and understaffed, which means the dogs don’t receive regular walks. Obesity, high blood pressure, and stress have been the top health risks for City employees for the past several years. The Trail Dogs program attempts to impact both of these issues. More importantly, we are implementing data driven programs that attempt to create positive health outcomes. The 90% attendance and completion rates in the Trail Dogs classes indicate that employees like the concept and consider the dogs a motivating factor. By increasing adherence to our walking classes we hope to impact employee obesity, high blood pressure, and stress, which are all benefitted by regular exercise.

References

Johnson, R. A., & Meadows, R. L. (2010). Dog-walking: Motivation for adherence to a walking program. Clinical Nursing Research, 19(4), 387-402. doi:10.1177/1054773810373122

Please feel free to submit attachments such as presentations, reports, etc.

Please mark you calendars for the SALGBA 2016 Conference, April24-27 in San Antonio, Texas.

Signature: 
Date: 1/29/16

Applications should be submitted by February 1, 2016 to the following:

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