Wellness Ambassadors program aims to connect employees with customized support

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In the coming months, Life & Work Connections will kick off its new Wellness Ambassadors program, with the goal of creating a sustainable and robust network of peers invested in the comprehensive well-being of their colleagues.

According to the Global Wellness Institute, interest in wellness continues to grow in the U.S., as people live longer and want to live better. Life & Work Connections has been working on a reimagined program connecting employees with wellness offerings and initiatives since the fall. Against the backdrop of COVID-19, these efforts could not be timelier, according to Chad Myler, health promotion manager at Life & Work Connections.

"The pandemic has shown that personal well-being practices are now more important than ever to strengthen our community's resilience," Myler said. "Employees have asked about ways to support their colleagues in this time of uncertainty, and the Wellness Ambassadors program gives them a vehicle to do that."

With many different wellness-related opportunities on campus and a variety of experts ready to provide counsel on issues such as mental health, diet and nutrition, child care and elder care, and financial literacy, having a designated point person who can let colleagues know what is available to them is really valuable, says employee wellness coordinator Christina Fisch.

"We find that employees don't always know about the services and providers available to them through Life & Work Connections," Fisch says. "Wellness can mean so many different things to different people, so having those champions who can take the pulse of their unit and connect them to the right resources can make a big difference."

The Wellness Ambassadors program is a relaunch of the Life & Work Connections Wellness Liaisons network, which was created in 2008. Unlike the liaisons program, which relied on word-of-mouth to recruit volunteers and was based on a year-to-year commitment, the Wellness Ambassadors program seeks to provide a more focused approach and more clearly defined roles, expectations and responsibilities.

The relaunched effort was informed by a survey Fisch conducted with peer institutions, including Ohio State University and Texas A&M University.

"Reaching out to other universities helped us get a sense of employee wellness programs similar to ours, and we can learn from their experiences," she says.
One advantage of the relaunch is that wellness events and activities can be customized to the specific needs of individual units, Fisch says.

"A walking challenge, for example, might be a great idea for a unit whose employees spend much of their workday in front of computer screens and spreadsheets," Fisch says, "but less helpful for a unit like the Grounds Services crew in Facilities Management."

This is where the individual ambassadors come in as "ears on the ground," as Myler puts it.

"The whole process starts with listening, with understanding the people you work with," he says. "We know that employee wellness programs are most successful when they have that sense of ownership from each department."

According to Fisch and Myler, Life & Work Connections designed the program with busy schedules in mind, creating incentives for the ambassadors to volunteer their time.

Under the new program, the wellness ambassadors, who are asked to dedicate up to three hours per month, are appointed on a volunteer basis for two years. They are encouraged to advocate for their unit's wellness needs with Life & Work Connections, to help share wellness services of interest to their colleagues, and to invite co-workers to participate in wellness activities.

"Ambassadors don't have to be running marathons or climbing mountains," Fisch is quick to point out. "They just have to want to promote an integrated understanding of health and be a positive influence on their colleagues."

Through the wellness ambassadors, the program will coordinate specific wellness ideas and initiatives just for employees, including a curated bank of 30-day wellness challenges.

Life & Work Connections will provide ongoing training and support for the ambassadors, including a virtual orientation on Aug. 5, quarterly meetings and one-on-one strategy sessions.

During the meetings and one-on-one sessions, Fisch will answer questions, troubleshoot issues and help brainstorm new ideas.

"For our volunteers, we want to provide a stronger sense of connection and community," Fisch says. "And for employees in their respective units, we want to meet them where they are and offer multiple points of entry for varying skill and interest levels."

Over the long run, Life & Work Connections is hoping the program will have ambassadors in every University unit.

Learn more by visiting the Wellness Ambassadors online application [4]. Share ideas for wellness challenges and initiatives by sending a message to wellnessambassadors@arizona.edu [5].

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Links
[1] https://lifework.arizona.edu/programs/wellness-ambassadors