BT South Shields hit the kayaks to row away the January blues

Employer: BT Harton Quay
Area: South Tyneside
Theme: Physical Activity: kayaking

January for most people is a cold, dark, depressing month. Many people face the hard slog of waiting until that ever so far away pay day arrives, all the excitement of Christmas is over and people are looking at the inches lost in their wallets and added to their waistlines. Knowing that was the mood of the staff at BT South Shields, the better health team planned and prepared a great way to combat this.

The current partnership that BT South Shields have with Tyne and Wear Sport enabled them to loan two indoor Kayak machines in an attempt to get the workforce into fitness, create some healthy competition between the teams and increase the mood and general wellbeing of everyone.

In the fight against the January blues caused by the lack of sunlight, money, the extra pounds gained over Christmas and the hype of Christmas being over, the better health team wanted to raise the mood of everyone. That was achieved by showing how easy it is to get back the feel good factor by adding something new to the site by way of
indoor kayaks and creating some healthy competition through exercise. By doing this, the health advocates wanted to try and have a direct impact on the “January lull” and stop attendance from spiking by keeping everyone fit and healthy both physically and mentally.

Coincidentally, there was also a Supporters’ Club (BT’s charity) incentive running that was country wide, where a colleague could win a trip to Cape Town, South Africa to work with the Supporters’ Club charity. Using this info it was decided to set the site a challenge of seeing who could clock up the miles and row to Cape Town. The distance from South Shields to Cape Town as the crow flies is 6262.732km so that was the site target.

The better health team held a meeting to discuss plans for the remainder of the year and the topics that were to be covered in 2015 with regards to raising awareness and keeping up the focus on the site staying well and being healthy. During the meeting, discussion took place about future site events and the prospect of bringing indoor Kayaks to the site which had proven extremely popular in local businesses in both North and South Tyneside. Demand however meant a delay in being able to access them. It was therefore decided that as Stoptober, binge drinking, Macmillan and Children in Need in the lead up to Christmas had already been planned that the best time to have them on site would be January.

Engagement with the senior management team, line management teams and Manpower, the onsite agency, helped promote the forthcoming visit of the Kayaks in January. The Kayak provider gave the better health team thorough instructions on how to use the Kayaks safely.

There are two centres on site each centre employing approx. 100 people so the centres competed against each other and the times and the distance were all documented. The meeting room used has large windows overlooking the river Tyne so the kayaks were positioned facing the river to provide a more realistic environment.

The outcome of the exercise was a really positive experience for all, with everyone getting involved, even those who hadn’t exercised for some time. There was lots of healthy competition. Overall, morale improved which helped with the dreaded January blues but unfortunately the target of Cape Town was unachievable. Interest and engagement with health and wellbeing initiatives has certainly increased since having the kayaks onsite.

Further information available from Jasmine Danby at Tyne & Wear Sport:
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