

This case study series aims to support City agencies to foster a [Culture of Health](#). Agency-specific worksite wellness programs, with strong leadership support, can have [broad impacts](#) for employees and agencies, including improved health & well-being, improved job satisfaction & retention, improved productivity, and reduced absenteeism.

### **Working Well at New York City’s Administration for Children’s Services**

The [New York City Administration for Children’s Services](#) (ACS) prioritizes worksite wellness. In partnership with WorkWell NYC, the City’s workplace wellness program, ACS developed a wellness initiative to support agency staff. The collaboration allows ACS to take responsibility for their wellness program, while WorkWell NYC remains available to provide advice and resources on an as needed basis.

ACS protects and promotes the safety and well-being of New York City’s children and families. With approximately 7,000 employees, the agency:

- Coordinates and funds programs and vouchers for close to 100,000 New York City children eligible for subsidized care
- Provides preventive services for families at risk of a crisis
- Provides and oversees foster care services
- Investigates cases of suspected child abuse and neglect
- Manages and funds juvenile detention and placement, as well as intensive community-based alternatives for youth

### **How did ACS get started on their wellness program?**

ACS was an early WorkWell NYC partner, beginning in 2016 with the National Diabetes Prevention Program. The ACS wellness program expanded through close collaboration with WorkWell NYC staff, responsiveness to staff interests, and the development of a broad array of programs.

ACS understood the importance of wellness-specific staff early in the program’s development, and hired a designated lead Wellness Coordinator in 2016. The current Wellness Coordinator stepped into the role in 2023.

*“There has been exponential growth [at ACS] from the very basics of a bake sale to raise money – to now COVID happened so, ‘Are you well? Do you need help?’ Not just providing that [telephone] number to give them and say ‘Okay, best of luck to you’ but actually hearing [from employees] and then providing workshops that are very instrumental to helping individuals – like grief, uncertain times, resilience.”*  
– WorkWell NYC staff member

## **What led to the success of the ACS wellness program?**

ACS built a responsive, sustainable model with the eight Culture of Health principles.

### **1. Visible commitment of organizational leaders**

Leadership at ACS have demonstrated their commitment to wellness and the wellness program by:

- Allocating funding for a staff position to direct the wellness program
- Serving as and/or appointing wellness [Ambassadors](#) and giving them significant authority to develop and implement wellness activities
- Actively promoting engagement in wellness program activities through email, an intranet site, and their own attendance
- Allowing staff time for participation in the wellness program, including during regular work hours

*“Our Commissioner for the agency is very heavily involved in this initiative, as well as my Deputy Commissioner for the Office of Human Resources... They’re very involved in the needs of the agency for wellness, which is why [a Wellness Coordinator was] hired and brought on [by them]. The Commissioner also has messages that he sends out and emails that go to the entire agency, and mentions wellness... Our intranet, we also have a banner that I send out to marketing, of two things to highlight for the month for health and wellness.”* – ACS staff member

*“Having senior leadership [at wellness activities] just to show face and be present and participate speaks volume[s], and it makes staff feel supported. I think that’s super important.”* – ACS staff member

**2. Dedicated team of managers, union representatives, and workers collaboratively developing, implementing, and evaluating wellness programming**

ACS has a paid Wellness Coordinator based in the Office of Human Resources. The Wellness Coordinator effectively supports the work of over 130 wellness Ambassadors and Champions through monthly meetings and individual consultations. Together, they comprise the ACS Wellness Committee.

Wellness Ambassadors represent the different divisions and a variety of ACS roles, such as managers, directors, supervisors, program associates, and community associates, as well as other levels of leadership within the agency, including a chief of staff. Ambassadors address the onsite logistics of program implementation, solicit input and feedback from colleagues and other staff, and promote wellness activities through personal outreach and connections.

*“The Ambassadors are ... the ones who promote the programming. And then the Wellness Coordinator ... [is] the lead person in terms of approvals of workshops and meetings. And then, because she works out of HR, she works very closely with the Commissioner, and she works very closely with the Deputy Commissioner there at ACS.” - WorkWell NYC staff member*

*“There’s a lot of effort that you have to put into it... Even [the Ambassadors], it’s not our full-time job... Obviously, [the Wellness Coordinator] helps out with that. She keeps us motivated, on our feet – always asks for updates. “Hey, what are you planning?” So, there’s this constant reminder because, again, we can get lost in our primary job. So, having that support there, I think that also adds to why we’ve been successful. - ACS staff member*

WorkWell NYC staff and external partners also support the development, implementation, and evaluation of the wellness program.

*[Our WorkWell NYC liaison] “has been so phenomenal in troubleshooting and being a support system for the development of this program. She’s able to help with any questions you may have.” - ACS staff member*

Although creating a team was considered essential, the personal qualities of individual team members, including their dedication and skills, were also emphasized.

*“ACS has one [lead Wellness Coordinator] ... They may get an intern in the summer ... However, I wanna say that ACS has been able to overcome those obstacles, because the person is 100%, and because the person prioritizes what needs to be done.” - WorkWell NYC staff member*

*“A lot of the wellness Ambassadors that are currently in the role just do a tremendous job, and again, it's about making a difference to somebody. That's what circles back to making sure they have the support, the resources that they need.” - ACS staff member*

### **3. Data-driven strategy built on workplace health assessment**

Two-way communication, like ACS Wellness’s dedicated email inbox, offers opportunities to learn about staff interests and priorities. ACS is also working on a general survey to assess interest areas, as well as preferable modes of delivery.

*“I’ve had emails requesting different types of topics and workshops. So, based on that feedback, I’ll bring it back to the committee, and I’ll say, ‘Hey, somebody wants to talk about menopause. Somebody wants to have a speaker come in about Alzheimer’s awareness... Somebody wants to have a blood pressure screening.’ So, always the input of the staff is what we do as far as programming.” - ACS staff member*

### **4. Operating plan that includes program and implementation planning and management**

ACS has a carefully considered strategy and processes for program planning and implementation with division-level Ambassadors and Champions, supported by the Wellness Coordinator and leadership. Ambassadors and Champions present their program ideas to the Wellness Coordinator for refinement and promotion through agency-level communications. Flexibility remains key to ensuring that the program remains responsive to staff interests and priorities.

*“We also know that part of programming is [that] things change... how to evolve, and how to work better and smarter.” - ACS staff member*

## **5. Comprehensive, varied, integrated programs and activities**

ACS, working with WorkWell NYC, other city agencies (e.g. FDNY), and external collaborators, offers a broad range of in-person, remote, and hybrid activities—using a wide variety of modalities.

Wellness topics include but are not limited to:

- Alzheimer’s awareness
- Blood drives
- Caregiver support
- CPR training
- Employee Assistance Program 101
- Financial wellness
- Flu shots
- Hydration stations
- Meditation
- Mindfulness
- Nutrition education
- Paint and relax
- Relaxation stations
- Self-defense
- Self-massage
- Social worker recognition

Mental health is a priority of the wellness program as ACS staff are frequently exposed to trauma.

*“We have staff who really feel the burnout of stress and mental health. I think that's one component and one thing that we emphasize. Something that's been really popular is the relaxation stations ... It's a room that we have, any room that we can find – basically a conference room will have a diffuser, meditation, music playing, and we have the massage chair pads. And staff can go in there and decompress. Have a little break.” – ACS staff member*

## **6. Policies and practices that support workplace wellness goals**

Policy and practices at ACS increasingly support wellness goals. Examples include funding and other resources for the wellness program; regular communications on wellness; development and implementation of activities available to those who work outside of regular business hours; and support for staff to attend wellness activities.

*“They’ve now looked at ‘Well, what times would be best?’ Offering things early in the morning, perhaps before a shift starts.” – WorkWell NYC staff member*

*“Once you make someone aware in leadership that this event is happening, and it is to basically address some of the concerns that they have had [about their employees] like, ‘Hey, my employee’s always calling out or they’re tired’ ... I feel like that communication [with leadership] early on helps with staff feeling comfortable, just saying, ‘Hey, I’m going to that event that’s happening today.’” - ACS staff member*

## **7. Strategic communications**

ACS uses multiple modes for communication regarding the wellness program, including email, an intranet page, hard-copy flyers, and workplace bulletin boards. The Commissioner regularly sends agency-wide emails that highlight wellness. Additionally, the ACS intranet site includes a dedicated wellness section with two wellness resources each month.

*“We get Commissioners’ email or ACS communications. We get that email which goes out to all staff in the agency, and there’s a section now for wellness, which is huge, because we didn’t have that before. Then, also, [the Wellness Coordinator] went ahead and she also added a tab on the intranet, specifically for employee wellness.” - ACS staff member*

*“The wellness Ambassadors and Champions send out emails to their leadership and their staff for their division. There is also the external affairs email communication that goes out every week, that also has the communications. There’s also our Team’s chat that we have, wellness Ambassadors, that we’ll post information on there.” - ACS staff member*

*“For the wellness Ambassadors from my division, we send the wellness calendar. If we have any events for that month, we send it to our Chief of Operations and let her know, “Hey, we are doing these wellness events on this day at this time.” Then she’ll send it to the whole entire division.” - ACS staff member*

## **8. Evaluation that determines impact and allows for program refinement**

ACS implements post-activity surveys and regularly solicits opinions on utility and program preferences. Feedback and survey results are used to guide program planning, including new program areas, as well as alterations to programs that have been implemented and program expansion.

*“The expansion has come, too, because of the evaluation. The data that has been collected based on “Do you like this program? What would you like to see?” So, it’s driven by the data and the evaluation that has caused the expansion to happen at ACS.” - WorkWell NYC staff member*

*“It’s not, ‘We’re gonna put up a poster and next Wednesday at 12, come and see about a diabetes workshop.’ No, it’s more they’ve done an assessment. They’re getting feedback.” - WorkWell NYC staff member*

*“At the end of the workshops, I also speak to [participants] that come over to me. They either say, ‘Hey, this was great,’ or ‘Hey, can we do this [different thing] next time?’ So, again, we always get feedback. That’s how we’re able to kind of improve on what we did... So, the next time that we host [the workshop], it’s a little bit different.” - ACS staff member*

### **What are some challenges faced by the ACS wellness program?**

**Challenge:** Managers’ concerns about productivity inhibit their interest in promoting wellness.

**Lesson Learned:** Regular communication by Ambassadors, the Wellness Coordinator, and leadership is necessary. Communications proactively inform managers of upcoming events; emphasize the workplace benefits of employee wellness, such as reduced burnout, stress and missed work; and the short length of time needed for wellness activities (sometimes as brief as 5-15 minutes) compared to the length of the workday or workweek.

**Challenge:** Developing systems for evaluation is a lengthy process, so comprehensive data collected in a systematic manner is not yet available.

**Lesson Learned:** Data available through the WorkWell NYC Pulse Citywide [survey](#), emails received, in-person interactions, and attendance records provide a base for understanding staff interests and perceptions of wellness activities. This information can be used for program planning.

**Challenge:** Sufficient resources for staff to develop and implement the wellness program, given the large size of ACS, is an ongoing concern.

**Lesson Learned:** Although funding is limited, with a dedicated Wellness Coordinator, a large network of enthusiastic and creative Ambassadors and Champions, and engaged leadership, a comprehensive and responsive wellness program can be developed and implemented.

The photos below capture the essence of The Administration of Children Services Employee Wellness program during events. The Employee Wellness Program is in the Office of Human Resources and provides wellness and health programming that is easily accessible, effective, and efficient in the workplace.

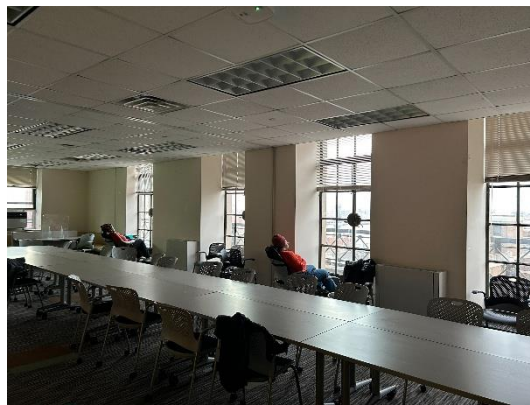


Photo descriptions:

- Photo 1 Top left: Office of Human Resources Julydration Hydration Station
- Photo 2 Top middle: Social Work Appreciation Month: Self-Paced Paint & Relax
- Photo 3 Top Right: ACS Bedford Site in Brooklyn Health and Wellness Bulletin Board
- Photo 4 Middle Left: ACS Bronx South DCP Site Wears Red for Heart Health Month
- Photo 5 Left: ACS Central Office Summer Fitness Session: Self-Defense
- Photo 6 Bottom Left: ACS 12 MetroTech Site CPS Human Slot Machine
- Photo 7 Bottom Right: ACS Central Office Division of Family Services Staff Appreciation Relaxation Station

This case study was prepared in 2025 by Foram Jasani, Sheaba Daniel and Linda Weiss of the Center for Evaluation and Applied Research at the New York Academy of Medicine through a collaboration with NYC Administration for Children’s Services and WorkWell NYC. To learn more about a Culture of Health and developing your agency worksite wellness program, visit [on.nyc.gov/cultureofhealth](https://on.nyc.gov/cultureofhealth).