

# Stepping up to the Challenge

## Success Story

### Workplace initiative builds sister-like bonds

Story and photo by Mark Evans



(Left to right) Sandy Goodheart, Marilynne Turner, Joyce Rossiter and Diana Campbell all worked together at the outpatient department and emergency department at the QEII Hospital in Grande Prairie. The Healthy Eating Challenge connected the four co-workers to make some healthy changes to their lifestyles.

Sandy Goodheart, Marilynne Turner, Diana Campbell and Joyce Rossiter aren't just co-workers anymore.

They consider themselves to be stepsisters — both for the friendships they've built and the miles they've put in walking through a pilot project that promotes healthy lifestyles in Alberta Health Services staff.

“It made us a team and brought us together as friends as well,” says Campbell.

The foursome all knew each other from working at the QEII Hospital in Grande Prairie but hadn't connected outside of work too often. When Rossiter saw the e-mail looking for Grande Prairie teams in the Healthy Eating Challenge she rallied the group together.

Rossiter knew they had been pursuing healthier lifestyles on their own by attending Weight Watchers® and walking and saw an opportunity to build some friendships, workplace camaraderie and healthy

lifestyle habits.


“We all had the same goals and it's more fun to do it as a group,” says Turner.

The Healthy Eating Challenge was piloted in Grande Prairie and Westlock in the spring. Starting in May the six-week pilot had individuals and teams put healthy eating into practice in their workplaces.

Participants set healthy eating goals and collect points for achieving their goals and were supported with weekly motivating messages and health tips. Key to the success of the challenge was leadership from a well-known site Wellness Champion. In Grande Prairie, Patient Food Services manager Hisham Karami and team captains like Rossiter encouraged and motivated participants.

The idea of the challenge was to encourage staff to set healthy eating goals, improve their eating habits, create awareness about the benefits of healthy eating in the workplace as well as at home and create lasting change.

The four Grande Prairie stepsisters worked different shifts so they couldn't always get together for a healthy lunch or exercise. They did briefly connect weekly and whoever wasn't working would come



into the hospital. Ultimately, texting to each other and using an application (app) that recorded their activities helped keep the team together, says Turner.

If a couple of the stepsisters could meet for a walk or a healthy lunch, the app or text messages would let the others know.

“It gives us a little motivation and some competition,” says Turner.

Goodheart also got the group organized to share healthy recipes and ideas. She made binders for the team with healthy recipes and ideas to share. When a group member saw another healthy recipe they’d share, and it would go in the binder. She also brought the team journals to record their own thoughts and motivational messages.

When their schedules allowed them to meet together the team built close bonds. Goodheart bought four stones; each etched with a different word - Peace, Confidence, Believe, and Courage. At each meeting, they each picked a new stone to carry with them until they met again.

“We really are the stepsisters,” said Goodheart. “We took this big step together and built this bond. It’s been a lot of fun.”