

Bulletin Board: Working parents believe in backup

by Amy_Winter

One day when Lynne Hildreth, an employee with Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Fla., was in a meeting, she got a call from her daughter's day-care center telling her the 6-month-old was ill and needed to be picked up immediately. Since it would have been difficult for her to leave work right then, she decided to try backup care. Now she refers to it as a stress reliever.

Moffitt's child-care benefit offers the Back-up Care Advantage Program, a partnership with Workplace Options and Bright Horizons, to their employees. Moffitt employees now receive sick care, backup child care and elderly care free of charge.

Yvette Tremonti, the human resources director for Moffitt, says her company had been looking for sick-care options since women make up 80 percent of their work force. Working mothers having to deal with sick children was a common occurrence.

"We recognized there was a need," says Tremonti. "But we had no ability to deal with it."

The idea of providing a place for employees to bring their sick children on-site proved to be too expensive, especially since the need for such a facility fluctuated seasonally. After talking with Bright Horizons Family Solutions, a provider of employer-sponsor care, Tremonti discovered the new backup care program. It has been available to Moffitt employees since April.

Ninety percent of both men and women are nearly or almost certain they would use backup care if it were offered through their employer, according to a study by Workplace Options, a provider of work-life employee benefits.

Backup care comes in handy when scheduled child care or elder care cancels due to illness, vacation or an unexpected event. The WPO study states that 59 percent of employees or their spouses missed three to 10 days of work because of limited options for child or elderly care.

Hildreth had reservations about the program; however, it proved to be reliable and easy to use. All she had to do was call the backup care number and explain her situation. Within a half-hour, the caretaker had already picked up her infant daughter.

"I had low expectations," says Hildreth. "But the lady was fantastic and had run a day care. She had parenting

skills and was qualified."

Feeling comfortable about leaving her child at home with the caretaker, Hildreth was able to return to work without missing a day. She says she thinks this program was a much-needed benefit.

Other organizations are seeing the value of the backup program. It is now offered to employees at more than 75 companies, such as hospitals, law firms, universities and Fortune 500 businesses.

Tremonti says the program has been successful so far at Moffitt; it has had a positive impact on employees because they don't have to miss as many days to care for loved ones.

For more information, visit www.brighthorizons.com and www.workplaceoptions.com

CURB THAT COMMUTE

Employers may need to offer more solutions in order to keep workers during the high gasoline price season.

John A. Challenger, the chief executive officer of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, thinks companies could balance the increasing cost of commuting with telecommuting or coupons for public transportation.

"The average worker commutes 16 miles each way to work every day," says Challenger. "That adds up to more than 8,000 miles per year going to and from work.

"Companies will be forced to help ease the financial burden of higher gas prices or risk losing their workers to companies located closer to their homes and/or companies that offer full-time telecommuting."

The idea of telecommuting is spreading across the country.

The Telework Advisory Group for WorldatWork found that the number of Americans telecommuting to work increased 20 percent from 12.2 million in 2005 to 14.7 million in 2006. And Connecticut's department of

transportation has seen an 86 percent rise in telecommuting since 2001 due to high gas prices.

It takes approximately 396 gallons of gasoline to go back and forth to work for a year at an average commute of 32 miles per day during a workweek.

Challenger offers these tips for companies to make up for high gas prices:

- Reward employers who ride a bike to work.
- Increase pay 2 percent to 3 percent during the high gas price season.
- Lobby for lower public transportation costs.
- Repay employees for gasoline costs.

For more information, visit www.challengergray.com.

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