

# The Anglesey Sea Zoo

## United Kingdom



*Anglesey Sea Zoo is a major tourist attraction in North Wales. During the peak season it employs 35 people and in the off-peak season (October to March) 11 people. ASZ works in partnership with the Gwynedd Health Promotion Service of the North Wales Health Authority.*

### **About the company**

Anglesey Sea Zoo came into being in 1983, evolving from a lobster and oyster wholesale business when the owners realised that the tanks housing these creatures were becoming an attraction in their own right.

100,000 people now visit ASZ every year. ASZ prides itself on being a forward thinking, progressive company. From the outset, developing a corporate culture in which staff were valued and treated fairly, was a priority. These efforts have resulted in a number of awards: Investors in People Award (IIP), the Corporate Standard Gold Award for workplace health promotion activity, the Schrodgers Wales Tourist Board Environmental Award 1997 and the Gold Medal for Services to Tourism from the Wales Tourist Board. The company has also gone on to become a health promotion mentor to other organisations.

### **Key aims and objectives**

Within the Sea Zoo's Business Plan 2000, three of its ten Business Objectives relate to employee health and well-being, these are:

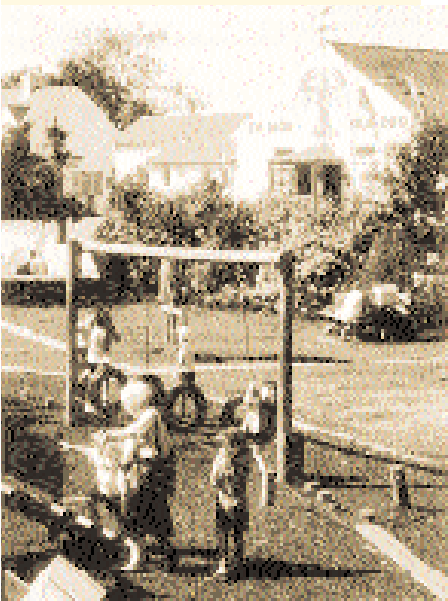
- n To be a good place to work
- n To develop individual abilities in line with business objectives

- n To encourage staff loyalty and commitment in working as part of a team.

### **Implementation of health promoting projects**

This began with a motivational lifestyle profile being offered to all the employees at the Sea Zoo. All except one participated. The lifestyle assessment was provided by specialist nurses from the Gwynedd Community Health Trust and consisted of motivational counselling in relation to lifestyle factors e.g. smoking, exercise, levels of alcohol consumption and so on. Each employee was provided with feedback, and the company was given an overall assessment of the health and well-being of its employees. Staff were very positive about the programme and no negative comments were received.

This "lifestyle approach" led to the development of a comprehensive range of policies and measures to protect and improve employee health and well-being. These naturally included the health and safety policy, but also included the development of a smoking policy, a nutrition policy (which reaches visitors via the restaurant as well), a parental leave policy and, since 1997, the use of Quality Circles as a method of resolving problems. The



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Sea Zoo has also developed an innovative policy on HIV / AIDS that applies to staff and visitors alike.

### ***WHP activities***

The owners of the Sea Zoo fully appreciate that workplace health promotion activity means something deeper than whether or not a company has a fully equipped gymnasium for its employees. On the contrary, what is important is the way in which the organisation, through its working practices and company ethos, supports and promotes employee health and well-being. With this in mind, the owners developed a company culture in which workplace health promotion was an integral part. This includes:

#### ***The staff handbook***

This contains information on a wide range of issues:

- n Health and safety
- n Dealing with the public
- n What to do in an emergency
- n COSHH regulations (Control of substances hazardous to health)
- n Manual handling and lifting
- n The use of quality circles
- n Communication
- n Health related policies.

Innovative ways of encouraging staff to read the handbook have been developed. These include a social event / quiz night based on the handbook with prizes for the winning team. The staff are also

asked for their comments on its content and for suggestions on how it might be improved.

### ***Health related policies***

Clear policies have been developed for tobacco use, alcohol and drug use, nutrition, stress and HIV infection. Referral to confidential, independent counselling is available to any member of staff. Similarly the Sea Zoo will provide help and support to employees who wish to stop smoking. The smoking policy recognises the needs of some to smoke during the working day, but restricts this to areas away from the view of visitors.

### ***Flexible and family friendly working practices***

The Sea Zoo believes that support should be given to parents with young children and to parents with disabled offspring. Consequently clear company guidelines have been developed to address the needs of employees with dependants. It is possible, for example, to work only during school hours (9 a.m. to 3 p.m.) and not to work during the school holidays. Clearly however, this practice has to be implemented by negotiation with the individual employee and on the basis of need and merit.

### ***Effective communication channels***

The company operates an 'open door' policy so that staff can raise issues quickly and easily. Effective

communication between all staff is seen as central to the company's success.

### ***Training***

Offering training and development opportunities helps to build up a motivated and highly skilled workforce. Health related topics such as health and safety, handling and lifting, first aid and food hygiene are all addressed through these training programmes.

### ***Involving the visitors***

Exhibitions on health and social issues are frequently displayed in the reception area of the Sea Zoo (the most recent was on child welfare). This space is also used to promote National No Smoking Day, Sun Awareness, healthy eating initiatives etc. Healthy eating is also promoted in the restaurant where nutritional guidelines are closely followed and there is a wide variety of foods to choose from.

### ***A successful conclusion***

Since the implementation of the workplace health promotion programme sickness absence rates have fallen and staff turnover has also declined. Morale among the staff is good and working relationships are excellent. Employees indicate that the company has a caring image, works hard to create good working relations and both listens to and acts on suggestions from staff.