Families and Work Institute
New York, New York

Case Study
Families and Work Institute (FWI), a nonprofit research organization located in Lower Manhattan, takes on big issues—from learning to generational differences to aging in America—to fulfill its mission of creating new ways to live, learn, and work in today’s changing world. The institute is strategic and results-driven, and committed to excellence in providing research to live by for decades to come. When FWI was seeking a new office space, it was their turn to become the research subjects to help shape a work environment that addressed the organization’s needs.
FWI previously worked out of a space that was long and narrow, hindering visibility for people who work together. Individual workstations prevented the easy connections adjacent workers need to communicate about projects. Daylight and access to window views were blocked for a majority of the staff. There were few options for meeting spaces and nowhere to hold social events. People had no choice for getting away from their primary desk to do quiet work.

FWI desired a new space that would reduce costs, better support evolving work, and reflect the learning from their own research on worker health and well-being. It was important to choose a location in the same neighborhood as the old one, so as not to disrupt employees’ daily commute.
With the help of a third party research analyst, Haworth worked with FWI to conduct pre- and post-move surveys, as well as interviews, to assess workspace quality and employee behaviors. The purpose was to determine which design features impact organizational outcomes. FWI staff rated the overall environment; individual workspaces; meeting and social spaces; and the ability to use technology. They provided feedback on self-assessed individual performance, stress symptoms, engagement, and well-being.

The staff also evaluated opportunities for sharing individual workspace, since some people worked remotely during the week. This strategy would help create more flexibility in the work environment.

Collaborating with architect firm Tersigni Palachek and the Haworth workplace research team, FWI took the opportunity to redesign a space that supports the more mobile, social, and collaborative workstyles of its staff. The new location, with its view of the Empire State Building, was designed with offices on the perimeter and collaborative spaces in the center, making it easy for staff members to connect with each other.

The director’s office became a prime candidate for a multi-use space, doubling as a conference room while she’s traveling. In the reception area, benching serves as both a seating solution and a place to lay out work. Smaller spaces were created for unplanned casual meetings and larger open spaces offered locations for social interactions.
A number of aspects of the overall quality of the work environment were improved for FWI staff, helping to reduce stress while improving engagement, well-being, and performance.

**STRESS:** Ratings for workspace design and aesthetics were higher in the new space, and people reported better quality of sleep (an indicator of lower stress), which improved their ability to focus at work.

**ENGAGEMENT:** Improvements in staff engagement were driven by an increase in physical comfort.

**WELL-BEING:** Support for focus work and better support for technology through furniture design influenced an improvement in overall wellbeing, helping people feel both more relaxed and happy at work.

**PERFORMANCE:** With more adjustable furnishings and better support for technology, the new space also improved staff performance.

FWI demonstrates how space design, when driven by research, has the power to help people work better. The new space also better reflects the organization’s mission of creating new ways to live, learn, and work in today’s changing world.
Customer Profile

Families and Work Institute (FWI) is a nonprofit center dedicated to providing research for living in today’s changing workplace, family, and community. Founded in 1989, its work focuses on three major areas: the workforce/workplace, youth, and early childhood. As a preeminent think-tank, FWI is known for being ahead of the curve, identifying emerging issues, then conducting rigorous research to work, learn, and live by.

Architect/Design Firm
Tersigni Palachek, Palisades, NY

Photography
Chun Y Lai Photography