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Summit County Children Services

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How can our mission be fully accomplished by staff that are experiencing secondary trauma and burnout?(Blog Post)

Posted on August 31, 2020

An Ohio Supervisor's Experience with Resilience Alliance



My name is Stephanie Reau and I am a training supervisor at Summit County Children Services. We are an agency of 350 employees with a focus on recruiting and maintaining diverse staff committed to serving all children and families.

Summit County strives to attract and retain well-qualified staff, but like many child welfare agencies in Ohio, this has been a difficult task to accomplish. The overwhelming pressures of the job cause secondary trauma, burnout and ultimately staff turnover. Staff turnover impacts the morale of the agency, is costly, and, most importantly, it negatively impacts the families we serve.

Our mission statement reads "Summit County Children Services is committed to the safety, permanency, and well-being of all children served, in partnership with families and the community." I pose the question: how can our mission be fully accomplished by staff that are experiencing secondary trauma and burnout?

Due to the dedication and commitment to understand how to improve staff retention, the leadership at Summit County Children Services adopted the philosophy of Resilience Alliance. The team is committed to ensuring each caseworker developed skills to help them better handle the stress and demands of the job. To kick-off Resilience Alliance, all supervisors in the Social Services Department attended trainings related to coaching and learning how to implement a supportive supervision style. During these trainings, I learned coaching skills and how to develop a supervision style that is supportive and engaging. The knowledge and skills gained through these trainings are valuable, as research indicates employees are more likely to stay at their jobs due to their direct supervisor.

All caseworkers, supervisors, department directors, and the Director of Social Services attended a Resilience Alliance group each week for an hour, for twenty-four weeks. These groups focused on self-care, self-reflection, and developing skills and behaviors that promote physical and psychological well-being.

Overall, the Resilience Alliance groups were well accepted and appreciated by the staff. For me it ended up being my favorite hour of the week, something I looked forward to and anticipated. For the first time in my 24-year career, I only thought about me for that hour, no staff, no cases, no worries, it was just about me. It was my time for self-care and self-reflection. It was a "safe place" for me to share, listen and learn. After each session I felt rejuvenated and refreshed. I felt mentally prepared to do my job.

Personally, Resilience Alliance has impacted me greatly and I am committed to implementing the skills I have learned. My supervision style has changed. For example, reframing is a big part of my communication style now at the end of each work week I now take time to self-reflect, and self-care is now a priority.

I am not sure how the agency as a whole will be impacted by this initiative, as I think it is too early to say. The one thing I strongly believe is due to the Resilience Alliance groups, staff is comfortable speaking up about their wants and needs and the Leadership team at Summit County Children Services is listening.