MAINTAINING STAFF MORALE

Staff working in homeless-serving systems are demonstrating an unwavering passion and commitment to serving their neighbours experiencing homelessness. Supporting staff morale both during and in the recovery phase of this pandemic is essential for staff retention and to keep everyone present for their clients and each other. This work can be very stressful. This resource provides strategies to help reduce stress and bring joy to the work—even small things can go a long way.

Here are some ways to support staff as they continue to champion responses to COVID-19:

- **Issue Hazard Pay or Other Incentives**: Hazard Pay is a form of compensation granted to essential staff members who have been asked to keep working in hazardous conditions, including COVID-19. Some have offered additional pay as an Essential Workers Premium. Others have considered retention bonuses (while balancing desire to not have staff come into work when sick). Consider when to start, when to end, and how to message these increases or incentives. The issuance of hazard pay and other incentives may depend on contracts and conditions that organizations have enacted as part of declaring an emergency. Hazard pay has been noted to range anywhere from a $2 to a 50% increase in pay. In Ontario, on April 25, the Government announced that pandemic pay will be issued to front-line workers, including those who work in shelters.

- **Be Visible and Vocal**: Leaders must be seen and heard often. Embrace Zoom and other technology to make sure your crew sees you every day. Silence is not golden; even small updates matter, particularly during a crisis. Prioritize one-on-ones, team meetings, and check-ins to ensure benchmarks are being met. See some key messages for leaders when working under pressure.

- **Be Transparent**: During this period of unknowns, it is critical for leaders to take a consistent and calm tone and measured actions when it comes to long-term plans. Transparency, even when information is fluid, is a key component of maintaining trust. Provide the who, what, when, where, and why so staff don’t fill in the blanks themselves. Use language such as:
  - “Here are the actions we have taken…”
  - “Here is how this will affect you/your team…”
  - “This is why we are handling it this way…”
  - “This is when it will go into effect…”

- **Be Confident**: If your staff trusted you a month ago, then project confidence that they can continue to trust you. Focusing on what can be done rather than the impossible can create a more productive environment.

- **Be Real**: These conditions are not pretty or smooth. If you are struggling with making work and home life work for you, share that with staff. They want and need to know you are in the trenches with them.

- **Be Flexible but Set Expectations**: Be clear on essential daily goals and benchmarks but also empathetic and flexible with organizational policies.
▪ **Give Staff Some Control:** People feel most anxious when they have no control. Ensure staff have opportunity to celebrate small victories in areas they can control such as providing a portal or venue for staff to share pandemic hacks and mishaps.

▪ **Foster a Mindset of Problem-Solving Thinking:** Times like this often result in “yes, but we can’t do this now” thinking. Challenge staff to come forward with “yes, and this is what we can do instead” solutions. This can change thinking from reactive to proactive.

▪ **Give Back:** Be good citizens both within the organization and externally. As an organization, find ways to “pitch in” and then share news and outcomes both internally and externally which can bolster morale and organizational pride.

▪ **Address Stress:** Consider these 9 key messages for leaders to communicate with staff when working under pressure. Also see CAEH’s COVID-19 Resource on Self-Care.

▪ **Give Pep Talks:** A good pep talk includes giving clear direction, showing empathy, and making meaning. See this Science of Pep Talks article for further information.

▪ **Support Accessing Professional Help:** No one is immune to emotional challenges that arise in times of crisis. Support people to access psychologists or counsellors to address their concerns effectively before they become unmanageable. Many counsellors work on-line.

▪ **Show Appreciation:** Consider handwritten thank you cards from management or the board, e-mails from management with inspirational messages, gift cards, flowers etc.

▪ **Bring Treats:** Bake treats for staff once a week - never underestimate the power of a freshly baked cookie! Have meals delivered. Leave candy on staff’s desk.

▪ **Humour:** Share encouraging and funny videos, GIFs or cartoons. Check out these videos related to COVID-19 as an example that can help lighten the mood.

▪ **Kindness:** Be kindness warriors – commit to doing a kind thing a day for another staff member.

▪ **Gratitude:** Create a gratitude wall, a whiteboard, or a bulletin board where people can list things or people that they appreciate.

▪ **Share Your “Why”:** Create a “why” wall, a whiteboard, or a bulletin board where staff can list why they do this work. It can be extremely motivating to reflect on the compassion and passion that has called staff to help their vulnerable neighbours.

▪ **Staff Input:** Ask staff for ideas on how to keep up morale and make concrete plans to action what you heard.

▪ **Host Virtual Get-Togethers:** Consider virtual coffee meetings, happy hours, or lunches. Try to keep conversation light as this should be a time to decompress. Some have even had virtual dinner parties using platforms such as Zoom or Skype.

▪ **See the Institute for Healthcare Improvement’s (IHI) Conversation and Action Guide** for some more ideas on how to sustain joy in the work (page 4).

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**Disclaimer:** This document is a collection of resources and/or ideas compiled by the team at CAEH. Please follow Public Health Agency of Canada guidelines on COVID-19 as the primary resource for all health-related concerns.

CAEH will continue to update this resource as new information or ideas become available. Please refer to the CNH3 website Resources page at cnh3.ca/resources for additional information. If you have an idea or resource to share or are seeking further support, please contact us at info@caeh.ca.