Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future

A Culture of Caring

A Compendium of Self-Care Tools and Workforce Support Principles for Front-Line Staff in Service-Enriched Housing

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NOTE: This report contains several live links to electronic resources. To access the electronic version of this report, go to www.sahfnet.org/ACultureofCaring

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Background

Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future (SAHF) is committed to improving the lives of vulnerable populations, including low-income families and individuals, seniors and those with disabilities. As a collaborative, SAHF is also committed to supporting the critical front-line staff (such as resident service coordinators, property managers and others) to ensure they can provide the highest quality of services to residents. This is an important element of SAHF's Community of Practice Resident Services Coordination Framework, adding to the sustainability and productivity of service-enriched housing to improve resident outcomes.

A unique feature of SAHF is the value of peer-to-peer sharing that occurs across its members, often resulting in the realization of common challenges as well as opportunities for innovation and collaboration. In July 2016, SAHF's resident services peer group came together to reflect on the mental and behavioral issues that are often encountered in affordable housing properties. In addition to issues that many residents face including domestic violence, toxic stress, substance abuse, depression and neighborhood safety concerns, peer group members also highlighted the many stressors that affect the staff who interact with residents on their properties. For example, SAHF members noted tremendous stress in dealing with death and dying on senior properties, while the impacts of toxic stress and violence at times created stressful working environments at family properties. Front-line staff frequently absorb and internalize deep stress and trauma from the communities they work in; impacting their own health, happiness, and effectiveness in their jobs. Developing greater capacity to support front-line staff at properties became the focal point of the discussion, and participants requested that SAHF help identify tools, resources and interventions to build this capacity. Subsequently, SAHF members suggested developing a compendium of resources and tools to help address this issue. This guide is intended for use by mid-level managers and senior leadership in affordable housing organizations, with the intent that these tools and resources be disseminated to front-line staff.

Genesis of Culture of Caring Work and Compendium of Resources

SAHF staff reached out to mental and behavioral health subject matter experts to determine resources, data driven interventions and tools that could support the mental and behavioral health needs of SAHF member front-line staff. Defined as **self-care**, these interventions are intended to help front-line staff adapt and cope with the stressors they may encounter while working with residents at affordable housing properties. Throughout the exploratory process, it became clear that there was a deficit in self-care resources and information specifically targeting affordable housing front-line workers. However, significant research and work exists related to self-care management for home care aides, nursing home staff and family caregivers. These groups of employees are also supported by organizations that understand the importance of creating work environments that promote high-quality services and help reduce workforce turnover.

This **Culture of Caring Compendium of Resources and Tools** details the learnings from engaging with subject matter experts in the mental and behavioral health field, while providing a collection of tools for affordable housing organizations. This guide is not intended to be an exhaustive list of resources; there are numerous resources that are not captured here. Mental and behavioral health experts guided the selection of these tools and resources that could be valuable for front-line staff in affordable housing. In addition to

highlighting tools and interventions that support staff on an individual level, this resource guide also dives into the importance of workforce and business models that support front-line staff to reduce turnover and attrition. Focusing on both individual and corporate level interventions, this guide endorses the development of a **Culture of Caring** to promote effective, sustainable and practical interventions that ensure the success of the member organization, staff and residents. A list of resources with active links are provided on self-care resources and tools that can be used for corporate level assessments and interventions to address self-care, as well as individual level tools that can be implemented for front-line providers in serviced-enriched housing.

Trauma Informed Strategies as Part of a Culture of Caring

A growing body of work also centers on the role of trauma informed strategies to help service providers gain a better understanding of how having chronic exposure to traumatic events can impact an individual's ability to fully realize her or his potential. This includes ensuring that service providers are sensitive to these issues and are careful not to inadvertently re-traumatize clients/residents through their interactions, creating additional stress and tension to the service provider-client relationship. In establishing a Culture of Caring, it is important that these principles and techniques are addressed with the employee and client/resident, as well.

Trauma informed strategies allow front-line staff to develop a deeper understanding of the toxic stress and trauma experienced by vulnerable populations, and constructive ways to respond in these environments that help to create a more supportive work environment. Although somewhat nascent in the housing sector, the healthcare and educational sectors have deeply adopted these principles in much of their work with vulnerable populations. Many affordable housing operators and owners serve these same individuals and communities, and thus these tools may also be applied to affordable rental housing.

This guide provides several tools and resources to facilitate incorporating trauma informed strategies into service delivery models. As with many of the resources listed in this guide, these tools are intended to provide individual resources that can be used for front-line staff as well as resources that are geared towards organizational level changes.

Why Should Employers Create a Culture of Caring? – An Overview of a Changing Business Culture

Organizational culture, defined as "a system of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs which governs how people behave in organizations" is often interchanged with an organization's norms, accepted behaviors or climate. Culture defines what the company values most, driving investments, resources, time, and energy. As corporate culture continues to evolve, businesses across various sectors have found self-care to be essential, fostering positive outcomes including improved employee health, satisfaction and retention and performance. In the Harvard Business Review, Amy Jen Su quotes a business CEO as saying, "Self-care is no longer a luxury; it's part of the job." In fact, businesses that have traditionally fostered the most fast-paced and competitive workplaces are now paying significant attention to employee self-care. A wide range of studies demonstrate that employees need self-care to focus, make good decisions, and reduce stress, and also that poor self-care takes a significant toll on the U.S. workforce and the businesses that employ them.

According to Forbes Magazine, $190 billion in annual healthcare costs are due to workplace stress. This fiscal impact further validates the importance of self-care for employees and creating an organization that fosters a Culture of Caring.

Creating a Culture of Caring

The direct service work of many mission-driven organizations culminates in service delivery by front-line staff. Yet, even the best organizations can lose sight of the stress experienced by front-line providers. For that reason, committing to a Culture of Caring can bring about a refocusing for an organization, representing a company that values all employees, especially those in direct service. Typically used to reinforce relationships between nurses and patients or teachers and students, the Culture of Caring concept can be more broadly applied to an organization's approach towards relationship-building internally, as well as externally with clients[i]. A successful Culture of Caring embodies the entire organization, with the leadership in the company caring about the staff, staff caring about the clients and their colleagues and clients caring about the organization.

Creating a Culture of Caring: Where to Begin

The starting point of any organization-level change is to conduct an internal assessment soliciting the employees' thoughts and opinions about the organization as a whole, and their job experiences. Additionally, an organization should know and analyze employee turnover rates at the organizational level as well as by position, location (if relevant), time in job, and time of year.

Commitment to organizational culture change requires adjustments to both position design and to the organizational structure and policies. It is important to build consensus on the appetite and capacity of the organization to adopt a Culture of Caring. This consensus ideally would be developed as part of a larger strategic planning effort with a discussion of mission, vision, goals and values and how those are reflected in the culture and daily work life of the organization.

Organizational and Employee Assessments

It is highly recommended to utilize an external contractor for the staff assessment process. Employees are far more likely to be honest and upfront if they are assured that their responses will not be viewed by their supervisor or others within the company. An outside entity may help to signal to employees that this issue is an organizational priority. An assessment can come in many forms, and the focus should be related to the goals of the organization. Below are several survey options and instruments. While important, surveys should not be the exclusive strategy for completing an organizational or employee assessment. Qualitative data collection methods are highly recommended to provide the context that surveys cannot capture. Examples of qualitative method include: focus groups, listening sessions, interviews, or recommendation/suggestion boards or boxes.

Significant resources should be devoted to examining the aggregate results, allowing the organization to better understand current experiences and perceptions of the organization and characteristics of the jobs. Additionally, the data should be dimensioned by staff, position and location for additional analysis.

1. **Cultural Assessment**
    a. DecisionWise Sample Questions: This tool measures the current organizational climate and how aligned employees are with organizational culture.
    b. OASAS' Creating a Healthy Organizational Culture: From Assessment to Change – a workbook designed to provide a general overview of organizational culture and the benefits of a healthy organizational environment.
    c. BridgeSpan Group: Assess Your Organization's Culture: A template to identify aspects of an organization's culture that may or may not align with the expectations of potential new hires.
2. **Employee Experience**
    a. Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire: A questionnaire on psychosocial working conditions, health and well-being.
    b. Maslach Burnout Inventory: The tool is recognized as the leading measure of burnout, and is validated by extensive research.
    c. National Home Health Aide Survey: Administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, this survey instrument includes sections on recruitment, training, job history, family life, management and supervision, client relations, organizational commitment and job satisfaction, and workplace environment. Components of this survey can be adapted to be used by an employer to assess front-line staff in affordable housing.
3. **Organizational Assessments for Individual Self-Care**: Organizations may consider using these tools before they begin implementing employee self-care strategies to inform programming and provide a benchmark to assess organizational progress.
    a. Organizational Self-Care Assessment *(Aging in New York)*
    b. Organizational Self-Care Checklist *(One Legacy)*

Tools and Resources for Creating a Culture of Caring

Below are a series of resources, tools, and trainings, compiled with the input of mental and behavioral health subject matter experts. This list provides resources that support a Culture of Caring, including trauma-informed strategies, at the organizational level and at the individual level.

To achieve an organizational culture shift, self-care and trauma-informed strategies must be modeled at each management level. Front-line staff will not prioritize self-care if they do not see colleagues and supervisors doing the same.

Tools for Organizations

1. Getting Started in Organizational Self-Care: An article that makes the case for developing organizational self-care strategies and offers questions that initiate a strategic planning process for organizational self-care. *(Compass Point)*

2. Creating Trauma Informed Provider Organizations: A comprehensive listing of resources, toolkits, and articles to help an organization think about and implement trauma informed approaches. *(JBS International/Georgetown University's National Technical Assistance Center for children's Mental Health)*
3. Creative Ways to Minimize Burnout and Encourage Self-Care: Suggested strategies for preventing burnout and turnover. *(www.nonprofithr.com)*
4. A Roadmap to Trauma Informed Care: A guide and timeline to the implementation process starting with recognition and awareness at the organizational level to the adoption of new policies and practices. *(Trauma Informed Oregon)*
5. Trauma Informed Care Resources for Organizations: These resources are aimed at improving the design of programs and services as well as the organization context in which they are delivered. *(Trauma Informed Oregon)*
6. Practical Strategies for Creating Trauma-Informed Services and Organizations: A webinar series offering a framework for understanding trauma in the context of domestic violence and for responding to trauma in the lives of survivors and their children. This series focuses on practical strategies and tools for creating accessible, culturally attuned, domestic violence and trauma informed services and organizations. *(National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health)*

Organizational Level Programs & Initiatives to Support Staff

A number of programs, trainings and supportive services are available for employers to offer to their staff to minimize burnout and encourage self-care amongst employees.

1. **Employee Assistance Program (EAP):** An EAP is a voluntary, confidential program that helps employees (including management) work through various life challenges that may adversely affect job performance, health, and personal well-being to optimize an organization's success. EAP services may include assessments, counseling, and referrals for additional services to employees with personal and/or work related concerns such as stress, financial issues, legal issues, family problems, office conflicts, and alcohol or substance use disorders. EAPS can also work with management to provide response to unique traumatic events.

    a. Employee Assistance Programs: An Often Overlooked Resource *(American Psychiatric Association)*

    b. Employees Assistance Programs for a New Generation of Employees *(Office of Disability Employment Policy)*

    While EAPs offer a terrific resource for support, the sessions that are available to employees are often time limited and may not offer the necessary ongoing support. In addition, employees may resist using the service, not trusting the privacy and confidentiality of sessions.

2. **Peer to Peer Support:** Workplace peer support programs are coordinated programs where trained employees volunteer their time to provide mental health and wellbeing support to their colleagues.

Peer support can come in a number of forms – it can be informal comradery and sharing, peer to peer counseling or coaching, or periodic peer sharing groups**.** Peer to peer support is not a substitute for EAP support or the Human Resources function, but rather a valuable complement to other support services. Through destigmatizing the notion of seeking help, peer support programs can increase the total usage of support services.

a. Peer Consultation Groups *(APA Practice Organization)*
b. Dialogue Circles *(British Columbia Association of Social Workers)*
c. Building a Workplace Peer Support Program Webinar *(Canadian Mental Health Association)*

3. **Mental Health First Aid:** Mental Health First Aid is a training that introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of potential mental health issues, builds understanding of their impact, and provides an overview of common treatments. Participants are introduced to local mental health resources, national organizations, support groups, and online tools for mental health and addiction treatments and support. *(The National Council for Behavioral Health)*
    a. **Mental Health First Aid Training:** This is an 8-hour course that teaches staff how to help someone who may be experiencing a mental health or substance abuse challenge. The training helps the staff person to identify, understand and respond to signs of addictions and mental illness. You can find a mental health first aid training here. *(www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org)*
        i. Get Certified to Teach a Course to train others in the workplace and community on Mental Health First Aid, fostering a Train the Trainer model.

4. **Trauma Informed Approaches/Trainings:** Trauma Informed Care is an organizational structure and treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing and responding to the effects of all types of trauma. Trauma Informed Care also emphasizes physical, psychological and emotional safety for both clients and staff, and helps survivors rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.
    a. Trauma-Informed Care Project *(traumainformedcareproject.org)*
    b. The Need for Trauma-Informed Care and Consulting Services *(National Council for Behavioral Health)*
    c. Online Trauma Training Courses *(Trauma Informed Care Network)*
    d. Train the Trainer Series and Additional Local Trainings *(Trauma Informed Oregon)*
    e. National Center for Trauma - Informed Care Trainings & Technical Assistance *(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA)*

Tools for Individuals

1. Self-Care Starter Kit: This online toolkit includes an introduction to self-care, guidance in developing a self-care plan, individual self-care assessments, exercises, and activities, and additional self-care resources. *(University of Buffalo – School of Social Work)*

2. Self-Care Exercises, Practical Techniques, and Mobile Applications: Exercises can help individuals feel better and reduce the symptoms of toxic stress. This list provides examples of exercise models and

other practical techniques that may be used by those who have experienced trauma or those working with traumatized individuals. In addition, many free or low cost mobile applications are now available that provide self-help, education, and support for those who have experienced trauma and for those who work with traumatized individuals. *(JBS International/Georgetown University's National Technical Assistance Center for children's Mental Health)*

3. 6 Ways to Weave Self-Care into Your Workday *(Harvard Business Review)*

4. Self-Care Tips from The Center for Mind-Body Medicine: A series of self-care videos that guide individuals through exercises designed to reduce stress. (*The Center for Mind-Body Medicine)*

5. Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project: The Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project is based on the belief that compassion fatigue in caregivers can be alleviated through educational workshops where caregivers are taught the guidelines and benefits of practicing healthy, authentic healthcare. *(Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project)*

6. **Motivational Interviewing**: Motivational Interviewing (MI) is an evidence-based treatment that addresses ambivalence to change. MI is a conversational approach designed to help people identify their readiness, willingness, and ability to change, as well as making a commitment to the change.
    a. General Information about Motivational Interviewing *(Psychology Today)*
    b. A List of Motivational Interviewing Resources *(Center for Evidence Based Programs, Case Western University*
    c. Free Poster – Exploring Motivation to Change with Housing Residents *(Center for Evidence Based Programs, Case Western University)*

7. **De-escalation Interventions:** Staff who work in human services roles may be confronted with angry, hostile, or noncompliant behavior on a daily basis. Additionally, staff who work in high-stress environments might find themselves in emotional conflicts with other staff members. De-escalation techniques are non-physical skills used to prevent a potentially dangerous situation from escalating into a physical confrontation or other form of verbal abuse.

    a. 10 De-Escalation Tips to Respond to Difficult Behavior in the Safest, Most Effective Way Possible *(Crisis Prevention Institute)*
    b. De-Escalating Tensions with Colleagues *(Harvard Business Review)*

Conclusion

Creating a Culture of Caring and implementing trauma informed strategies in affordable rental housing requires organizational change, commitment and tangible resources. As SAHF and its members continue to advance excellence in the delivery of affordable rental homes that expand opportunity and promote dignity for residents, addressing the self-care of front-line staff is a critical component to achieve that mission. We hope that the insights and tools provided in this guide help to ensure that self-care goes beyond individual interventions, but moves your organization to achieving a Culture of Caring that is critical for ultimate success.

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