

## **HR Standard 1.15**

### **EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE/WELLNESS PROGRAMMING**

#### **PHILOSOPHY**

Management in the Child Welfare Service Delivery System has begun to recognize that personal problems experienced by Agency employees can have a detrimental effect on a staff's ability to perform adequately on the job. Add to that several safety issues and the enormous amount of pressure that is inherent to the child protection field, and the stress that individual employees feel in their daily lives has great potential to multiply exponentially. This increased stress from home and work can affect their ability to cope with the mounting pressures, expectations, and responsibilities placed on staff to keep children protected and safe. Problems like absenteeism, medical and workman's comp claims, disciplinary actions, staff turnover, burn-out, low morale, and inadequately servicing their clients become the visible symptoms of organizations who do not recognize or deal with these increasing pressures placed on this workforce. In essence these pressures and stress are the occupational hazards of our field and should be recognized and dealt with as such, if we want staff fresh and prepared to deal with the complex job of working with at-risk children and families and keeping them protected and safe. Employees experiencing distress and their own personal and family problems will find it difficult, if not impossible, to perform adequately and effectively on the job of assisting others in need.

#### **OUTCOME**

Employee Assistance/Wellness Programs are developed and implemented to assist employees in getting the kind of help they need, both therapeutic and supportive, to decrease and minimize stress and its associated problems (turnover, absenteeism, medical claims, performance issues, etc). They are designed to enhance job satisfaction, morale, and sense of wellness and support necessary for an employee to become and maintain their own status as an effective practitioner and asset to their respective Agency. These Programs can be run internally or externally through contracts/agreements and are the first step in the recognition and minimization of stress and its associated problems that serve as "Occupational Hazards" and personal and professional barriers to adequate functioning and effective on-the-job performance in the protection of children.

Simply stated, Employee Assistance/Wellness Programs assist employees in leading more productive, healthy, functional lives, both personally and professionally, while tackling the complex nature and duties of the Child Protection Field. "Care for the Caretakers" is essential to well-run organizations that value their staff and their contributions to this field.

## **Objectives**

- To Identify, recognize, and prevent of those stressors inherent in the Child Protection Field that have a detrimental impact on the personal and professional performance and functioning of our staff.
- To minimize the employee's personal and professional problems that have a negative effect on the everyday performance of agency staff.
- To assist in decreasing turnover and professional burn-out associated with personal problems aggravated by job related stress.
- To serve as a positive alternative to performance problem resolution caused by stress or personal family issues in lieu of or in conjunction with discipline and/or corrective action planning by a supervisor.
- To assist in complying with the Drug Free Work Place Act legislation and possible reduction in medical, worker's comp, and safety related claims, especially if substance abuse issues are present or suspected.
- To provide critical incident debriefing on complex and/or catastrophic cases (i.e. child fatality) and their associated pressure and stress on agency staff and operations.
- To increase feelings of support, wellness, and enhanced or improved job performance through a supportive, stress minimizing work climate and environment that demonstrates to PCSA employees the investment we have in them and that they are valued members of the organization.
- To develop a stress resistant work environment by providing all staff with the opportunity to achieve the aforementioned outcomes through a series of structured, regularly scheduled therapeutic, supportive, educational, recreational, and social activities geared at reducing/ minimizing personal and/or job related stress that can adversely and negatively impact increased and enhanced feelings of personal and professional health and wellness.

## **Model EAP Program Component Areas:**

### 1. Assessments and Counseling:

Confidential assessments and on-going counseling as indicated for PCSA employees needing help with a host of personal and/or professional problems. Also, provides for information and referral for access to other appropriate community resources in an attempt to assist employees in resolving conflicts or problems. (Most health care providers provide EAP/Behavioral Health Care Services to their enrollees, which includes County PCSA staff.)

1. Educational:

Regularly scheduled workshops, seminars, forums, etc. dealing with topics related to stress and wellness (i.e. stress management, relaxation techniques, nutrition, good health habits, leisure time activities, chemical dependency, depression, etc). These sessions will provide PCSA employees with regular educational opportunities that will increase their knowledge in areas related to stress reduction, health, and quality living habits that promote physical and emotional wellness. Can be handled through a series of every other month brown bag lunches.

2. Recreational:

Regularly scheduled recreational opportunities for all county PCSA employees planned and implemented by the Employee Assistance/Wellness Committee utilizing Agency or community facilities (i.e. open gym for volleyball, basketball, jazzercise/aerobics classes, walking, jogging, etc). This component recognizes the value of exercise and recreational opportunities as an alleviator of stress and a promoter of good health and wellness.

**HEALTHY BODY - HEALTHY MIND!!**

3. Social:

Regularly scheduled social events for county PCSA employees and their families (i.e. picnics, holiday parties, etc). This gives PCSA employees positive, festive occasions to look forward to for socializing with fellow staff, peers, and their families. Increases team building spirit, pride, morale, and a sense of affiliation and belonging. Agency sponsored/quarterly event to celebrate accomplishments, success, and show value for staff and their families.

4. Support:

General philosophy and accompanying behaviors that encourage all PCSA employees to promote internal mechanisms, systems, and/or a general overall Agency climate that assists and supports all employees, especially during times of stress or crisis.

5. Systems:

General practice in Program stressing the importance for supervisors, department heads, and management personnel to regularly and realistically analyze those stressors inherent in their own departments/units that serve as barriers to minimizing and reducing stress for their employees (i.e. analyzing staffing needs, training, work loads, paper flow, adequate supervision, support, positive reinforcement, praise, etc). Analyzing and dealing with

internal conditions and other system “quirks” that create stress rather than reduce or minimize it.

## **Explanation of Major Structured Components**

### 1. **Support:**

Tie this component to current Agency operations:

- Individual/Unit meetings/regular supervision
- Staff meetings
- Structured peer/supervisor support system set up to assist and support workers, especially during times of stress or crisis
- Praise - positive strokes
- Reward systems - intrinsic/extrinsic
- CID - Critical Incident Debriefings

### 2. **Therapeutic/Counseling:**

- Referrals to individual counseling (usually coordinated with health care carrier.)
  - Voluntary self-referral
  - Mandatory supervisory referral
- Assessments (individual) - plug into community resources
- CID - Critical Incident Debriefings for staff on child fatality or other complex catastrophic cases
- Group process/therapy of all Agency staff at Agency offices by bringing in therapist for group work
- Work with individuals as identified and needed, especially when individual is experiencing poor job performance or other problems
- Provide Agency workers with an opportunity to ventilate their emotion laden child welfare experiences in the presence of a mental health professional who can assist them in processing these on-the-job experiences - Care for the Caretaker.

### **Educational:**

- Regularly scheduled workshops, seminars, forums, etc. dealing with topics related to stress and wellness (i.e. stress management, relaxation, nutrition, good health habits, leisure time activities, etc). Provides staff with regular educational opportunities that will increase their knowledge in areas related to stress reduction, good/quality living habits that promote physical and emotional wellness. Usually a one hour brown bag lunch that occurs every other month.

### **Recreational:**

- Regularly scheduled opportunities for Agency staff to participate in recreational

opportunities planned and implemented by Agency staff (open gym for volleyball games in winter, basketball, jazzercise/ aerobics classes held at Agency in recreational facility, etc). Recognition of exercise and recreational opportunities as an alleviator of stress - Healthy Body - Healthy Mind

**Social:**

- Regularly scheduled social events for agency staff and their families (i.e. picnics, holiday parties, staff appreciation/recognition events, etc). Gives staff positive, festive occasions to look forward to for socialization activities with fellow staff, peers and their families. Increases team building spirit, and a sense of affiliation and belonging. A planned, Agency sponsored, quarterly event is usually preferable.

**Systems:**

- On-going Agency/Systems analysis
- Analyze additional staffing needs for units understaffed/overworked
- Analyze on regular basis workloads and paper flow
- Restructuring workday to include scheduled breaks and periods of minimized interruptions
- Minimize identified stress due to system “quirks”

**Summary**

In summary, this Program was developed out of a recognition of the enormous amount of pressure and stress that is inherent in the child welfare field and as a means of beginning to manage it. The problems associated with stress are many and are just now being analyzed for the negative effects they have on both individuals and organizations. Though we would be naive to think that this Program will give us a stress-free environment, we do believe that a Program of this nature, is a positive step in beginning to minimize stress and the negative effects that it has on the personal and professional functioning of our staff and organization. A stress resistant work environment is our goal. An environment that has a greater immunity to problems such as staff turnover, absenteeism, worker burnout, poor attitudes and performance problems, while at the same time beginning to actually increase positive feelings of wellness, adequate job performance, and over-all personal and professional satisfaction. We hope that this Program is a means to those positive ends and ensures that our staff are physically and emotionally prepared to undertake the rigors of working with very complex at-risk children and family cases seen regularly by PCSAs in the Child Protection Field.

Policy adapted from the Marion County Children Services Board