Position Paper

THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING AND SUSTAINING ORGANIZATIONAL WELLBEING

Position Statement

Wellbeing is a universal imperative for all human beings. Focusing on the wellbeing of all in the Juvenile Justice system improves organizational culture, improves leadership effectiveness, staff engagement, wellness, and positive outcomes for youth and families.

CJJA takes the position that organizational wellbeing is not an optional consideration but a necessity for a well-functioning juvenile justice system that supports the wellbeing of all.

Opening Statement

Recent events over the past few years, including the pandemic, social justice issues, and economic crises, have compounded the unique challenges already present in the juvenile justice field. It will thus take a concerted effort from leadership to acknowledge these challenges and to have systems in place to mitigate the additional stress and trauma that are intrinsic for those working in the juvenile justice field. This can be accomplished by supporting organizational wellbeing. This is a goal-state that will keep leaders and staff engaged in healthy and productive ways to support the meaningful work that we do with youth and families.

The Harvard Study on Happiness, summarized in the recent publication, *The Good Life*, reminds us that *More than two thousand years ago Aristotle used a term that is still in wide use in psychology today: eudaimonia. It refers to a state of deep wellbeing in which a person feels that their life has meaning and purpose* (Waldinger, Schultz, January 2023). As it did then, has over the centuries, and is supported by a breadth of scientific studies, this is the type of wellbeing that survives the ups and downs of life and is especially needed in the difficult work performed by those in the juvenile justice profession.

To provide the best quality services and outcomes for youth and families and quality of life for our staff, it is leadership's responsibility to assess our systems continuously to provide a foundation from which we can monitor youth and family outcomes and organizational wellbeing. We must also support the work of the staff, leadership, professionals, and community partners who are valuable assets in achieving our priority. With strong organizational culture, organizations will thrive in the most trying of times, and with organizational wellbeing as a focus and priority, the quality of the work and quality of life improves for all in the system.

LEADING FROM A WELLBEING FRAMEWORK IN JUVENILE JUSTICE

As stated, wellbeing is a universal need and fundamental drive for all of us. We need it, as do staff, communities, and the young people and families we serve. A wellbeing approach in juvenile justice is a natural framework to integrate what we know and are learning about organizational culture, staff engagement/wellness, and positive youth development.

Individual wellness can only be sustained in the context of systemic organizational wellbeing. Organizational wellbeing can be viewed on multiple levels, including the organization as a whole (program culture), leadership, staff, and service delivery (youth, families, and communities). A leader applying a wellbeing framework focuses on assets and supports the resilience of staff, youth, and families. It is important to remember to focus on a "culture of wellbeing" versus focusing on one part of the organization (e.g., staff only or youth only). Understanding what wellbeing looks like for the various levels of an organization leads to strategic actions based on assets and challenges of all in the system and creates sustainable outcomes.

An organizational wellbeing framework aligns values, structures, policies, and practices to support a healthy culture. At the staff level, a Gallup study states, *Individual wellbeing, employee engagement, and a culture of wellbeing link to important organizational outcomes, such as productivity, health, and employee retention. These factors complement and affect one another in ways that leaders, managers, and organizations can influence.* Robinson, J. (*2013)* "How to Create a Culture of Organizational Wellbeing," Gallup.

On a parallel level, when assessing the wellbeing of youth and families there is also mounting research on how focusing on their wellbeing - physical and emotional safety, stability, social connections, mastery, and meaningful access to relevant resources results in improved outcomes (versus the adverse outcomes of punitive models and practices), Full Frame Initiative (2016)

The table below provides examples of therapeutic approaches that support wellbeing and approaches that undermine wellbeing.

Supports Youth Wellbeing	Undermines Youth Wellbeing
• Positive youth development • Asset-based strategies • Family and community engagement • Skill building • Staff engagement	• Deterrence through fear • Deficit focus • Reliance on isolation • Excessive use of force • Staff surveillance

In the article "Improving the Effectiveness of Juvenile Justice Programs: A New Perspective on Evidence-Based Practice," the difference between the types of programs that have a positive impact on youth recidivism and those that have a negative impact is clearly outlined. It states, "*The meta-analysis found that the type of program was rather strongly related to its effects on re-offense rates—some programs are simply more effective than others, all else being equal ... When the mean effects on re-offense rates were compared for the programs associated with these two broad approaches, the programs with a therapeutic philosophy were notably more effective than those with a control [punitive] philosophy."*

Conditions of the Workplace and Conditions of Care

Assessing program culture and conditions of both the workplace and conditions of care for youth can help leaders to further understand how a wellbeing framework can support multiple levels in the organization.

Effective juvenile justice systems and programs pay close attention to the conditions impacting wellbeing. Conditions of the workplace for the staff and conditions of care for the youth go hand-in-hand. For example, the physical environment plays a vital role in the wellbeing of staff in the workplace, and in creating a physically and emotionally safe place for young people to thrive. For example, a clean and homelike environment is more conducive to youth's treatment and staff wellbeing. *Studies have also shown that providing an optimum workspace for employees boosts a company's ability to attract and keep top-quality personnel, strengthens interpersonal work relationships, and enhances employee productivity*. "What is physical environment in the workplace?" *Heimduo.org* (2019*).*

For youth in juvenile justice residential facilities, creating and sustaining a safe, developmentally appropriate environment that focuses on resilience supports the wellbeing of all who live and work there. *Ideally, a trauma-informed approach to physical environment should begin from scratch, designing every aspect of these facilities to produce a supportive environment for youth, staff, and families. But even when planning a new facility is not an option, a great deal can be done to make existing facilities less trauma-inducing.* Burrell, S. Youth Law Center, (2013)" Trauma and the Environment of Care in Juvenile Institutions."

A key component related to wellbeing and conditions of the workplace or conditions of care for youth is that we have appropriate staff-to-youth ratios which enables healthy relationships to thrive, provides opportunities to practice new skills, and develops the ability to facilitate healthy conflict resolution. Standards of staff to youth such as PREA standards and licensing requirements provide guidelines for optimal care. Other components that impact the conditions of the workplace and care for youth include teamwork, effective facilitation skills, healthy boundaries, and engaged staff and leadership.

Roadblocks to Wellbeing

Assessing how policies and practices create roadblocks to wellbeing is critical in creating a healthy organizational culture. By paying attention to wellbeing, leaders can avoid or address those roadblocks that can create untenable tradeoffs for staff and those served. Tradeoffs can happen when policies, practices, structures, and culture create forced choices for staff, youth, and families that can compromise or negatively impact their wellbeing. For example, staff in residential programs may be required to debrief after every shift; however, the structure of the day may not allow time for this to occur between shifts, which can contribute to safety problems, instability, staff feeling isolated, and youth receiving inconsistent care. Another example at the services level is that a facility may have family engagement as one of its values; however, policy hours for visits limit meaningful access for working family members, creating a tradeoff between financial stability, and connecting with their child.

To counter tradeoffs, system leaders can ask themselves what policies, practices, structures, and resources are in place to support emotional and physical safety, stability, social connections, mastery, and meaningful access to relevant resources. "Making Change is Hard and Requires Evaluating Tradeoffs" (fullframeinitiative.org)

Equity and Wellbeing

A critical roadblock to wellbeing is the issue of inequitable access to wellbeing. Leaders can better address the needs of staff and those they serve by understanding how societal issues and inequity impact systems and people. A wellbeing approach moves beyond an individual focus and encompasses the intersection of external factors impacting our staff, youth and families, communities, and our country.

Inhibiting people's access to wellbeing is a core driver of inequity. Issues such as the pandemic, inflation, financial uncertainty, and social justice impact our staff's wellbeing and the young people and families we serve. A wellbeing orientation creates pathways for equity, and by evaluating policies, practices, and resources through a wellbeing/equity lens, we can better address staff diversity and representation and mitigate tradeoffs such as biased narratives about youth and families and issues of inequity in race, gender, and identity in the juvenile justice system.

The Oregon Youth Authority has launched an agency initiative focusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Joe O'Leary, director of the Oregon Youth Authority, states: *Nearly half of the youth in our care are youth of color. They are dramatically overrepresented in our legal system. Research shows that clients have better outcomes if they see someone like them in the workplace. Having staff representation is critical to the youth's and staff's wellbeing. If we don't have an environment where our staff's cultures and identities are supported, they will not stay. Staff retention is improved by creating an environment where people can be their true selves. Focusing on wellbeing as a pathway to equity improves our organizational culture and supports better outcomes for our kids.*

Research shows that diversity in teams impacts the bottom line positively. *Organizations that exhibit gender and ethnic diversity are, respectively, 15% and 35% more likely to outperform less diverse organizations,* McKinsey & Company, and Society for Human Research Management (2017).

Wellbeing and Crisis

During a crisis, there can be a pull to default to what is comfortable, what is expedient, and to utilize control/punitive strategies. The universal need for wellbeing does not change during crises; how we meet the needs must change. Crises can be external such as pandemics, labor shortages, and other societal issues, or internal such as unstable program environments, increased and persistent incidents such as fights, runs, self-harming, PREA violations and staff turnover. Losing focus on wellbeing during a crisis can lead to deepening cycles of trauma and harm to young people and staff. During crises, it is vital to not react to symptoms and surface issues but stay true to a systemic focus that assesses the assets and needs in the domains of wellbeing that are being impacted by the crisis.

An example of how we can lose sight of wellbeing during a crisis in juvenile justice programs is when the focus shifts to physical safety versus physical and emotional safety. Efforts to protect only perceived physical safety can create negative tradeoffs regarding youth's emotional safety. Isolation can become a default response to addressing physical safety. Numerous studies show the negative impact of isolation on the wellbeing of young people. Use of isolation can lead to significant harm due to segregation from staff, peers, family, and disconnection from educational and treatment services. This can escalate the crisis and increase exposure to harm for youth and staff. Additional examples listed below:

Strategies That Positively or Negatively Impact Wellbeing During a Crisis

Positively Impact Wellbeing	Negatively Impact Wellbeing
• Leaders and staff work together as a team in implementing strategies that restore physical and emotional safety • Ensure the continuity of educational and treatment services • Increase staff and leadership presence/support during the crisis • Ensure parents/guardians are aware of the crisis and strategies to address it • Be mindful of staffing and develop strategies to support staff • Provide access to additional support for youth, families, and staff as needed (e.g., meeting clinical and basic human needs.) • Debrief after the crisis to increase learning, support staff, and improve effectiveness in future crises	• Creating shortcuts in response to the crisis • Falling back to what was once comfortable but not effective • Getting caught up in the drama/urgent cycle and developing strategies that only address the urgent and not the important • Reacting only to the crisis vs. being intentional in responding to wellbeing • Resorting to punitive/harmful strategies to address youth's behavior • Not providing staff adequate access to leadership and a lack of meaningful communication between leaders and staff

Additional Strategies to Support Organizational Wellbeing

By focusing on the entire system, leaders can address underlying issues and needs, providing optimal opportunities to improve and sustain organizational culture versus short-term strategies focusing on symptoms. Examples of strategies that support wellbeing include:

- Review and align the values, practices, policies, and structures to support a healthy culture and increase wellbeing.
- Create strong mission, vision, and values statements that center on wellbeing and are integrated into all aspects of operations (policy, practices, and culture).
- Invest in and build staff facilitation skills to increase staff mastery on how to provide services from a wellbeing perspective.
- Utilize staff's unique talents and attributes to enhance programming and increase staff involvement, sense of mastery.
- Develop safety plans that outline for staff and youth what to do in crises.
- Recognize and provide programming that supports and celebrates youth and staff culture and identities.
- Examine and change policies and structures that create disproportionality and inequities in practice.

A leader in the St. Louis County Juvenile Office, Delinquency Services shares how the St. Louis County Juvenile Office implemented a wellbeing framework in their organization and the impact on youth, families, staff, and leaders. St. Louis Interview for CJJA.mp4 (vimeo.com)

STAFF WELLNESS

Nationally, there are staff shortages across all industries. The juvenile justice system is not exempt. The issues of staff shortages and burnout were happening long before the pandemic and have had a more profound impact on working conditions during and since the pandemic. This has taxed the already strained conditions for the essential front-line staff whose work is extremely difficult. As we move into individual staff wellness, there are several areas that need attention. Long hours, continuous stress and exposure to traumatic events, staff turnover, disengagement, high numbers of sick calls and disabilities (incurred within the workplace), changes in population and the complexities of the youth we are serving, including the acuity of mental health challenges, perception of safety, long COVID and burnout.

The CDC reports in 2018 that 71% of adults in the general public had at least one symptom of burnout. This number is substantially higher for juvenile justice staff (Branson 2017).

The International Classification of Diseases (ICD) determined in January 2021 that burnout is now acknowledged as a recognized syndrome. *Burnout is an organizational problem that requires an organizational solution and research by Gallup has shown that the risk of occupational burnout increases significantly when an employee's workweek averages more than 50-hours and rises even more substantially at 60-hours.* Moss, J. (2021) "The Burnout Crisis," *Harvard Business Review.* The pandemic has exacerbated burnout for facility staff who work in conditions of continuous staff turnover and shortages, which has an added deleterious effect due to the pandemic and its effect on the work force. Leadership and administrative staff are affected as well due to emails, messages, and requests coming in 24/7 with minimal separation of work and home boundaries.

Ways to avoid/combat burnout include:

- Encouraging staff to feel a sense of purpose
- Reminders of the meaning and value of the work
- Meaningful supervision
- Promoting a manageable workload
- Pro-active continuous work/focus to keep work hours at a reasonable level
- Mental health options and support for staff
- Attention to the culture and environment
- Added communication options for staff to connect with management

Daniel M. Cable in the publication *Alive at Work* (2019) Harvard Business Review Press presents research in the neuroscience of engagement that shows another avenue to keep employees engaged, productive and healthy. He notes that by encouraging intrinsic motivation, staff will remain engaged and will keep organizations innovative and relevant. This may be simply accomplished by allowing staff opportunities to be recognized for their individual strengths and providing avenues to honor and acknowledge these strengths and passions. There are multiple publications and studies that reveal that combining this with a strong vision and mission improves job satisfaction, which is a significant predictor of staff retention.

Staff retention is a critical component of stable work conditions, aids in recruitment and creates a safer environment allowing effective and quality work to be accomplished with youth and families. The [CJJA Toolkit: Recruiting, Hiring and Retaining Qualified Staff](#) provides a wealth of knowledge addressing these areas in much more detail and provides avenues for action in achieving these important and needed goals.

Tyrone Oliver, former Commissioner of the Department of Juvenile Justices Services in the state of Georgia, is quoted in the GA Recorder publication (4/26/21): *We need passion more than pay to retain employees and mitigate the up to 97% turnover rate for juvenile corrections staff. Pay does have an effect, however engaging employees in the vision and mission ultimately has more of an effect in staff recruitment and retention.*

A leader from the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justices Services shares how they implemented a staff wellness plan. [Georgia DJJ Interview For CJJA - YouTube](#)

Strategies to Support Staff Wellness

Individual wellness is not maintainable without a wellbeing framework that addresses organizational culture. Creating a healthy culture within organizations starts with how we welcome new employees on every level and how training and orientation is facilitated. What the research has shown is that we need to start with a clear vision and mission, a commitment to organizational wellbeing and making that a priority by developing and implementing sound policy and protocols supporting this initiative. Clearly demonstrating how the organization supports wellbeing and balance will demonstrate our commitment to our staff and work. This process must start at orientation and continue throughout employment to be effective and have the strongest impact.

Making quality supervision a priority by having a system in place to show support to staff personally and professionally will manifest commitment to making this concept not just an idea, but a reality. An effective system of supervision would include components that evaluate and monitor staff health and wellness. Refresher trainings would follow the initial orientation training about health and wellness, and awareness of red flags. Having options for staff on a regular basis to mitigate trauma and promote

wellness are things that staff have voiced across the country that would help with keeping them in a place where they are able to have quality lives and thus provide quality care.

SUMMARY

Building our organizations, programs/services, workforce, and community partnerships on a wellbeing platform can transform lives and make us more effective and adaptive leaders. Plato is recognized for stating. "The part can never be well unless the whole is well." A culture focused on wellbeing that is modeled by leadership will be the determinate factor in quality of care and outcomes and creates the conditions to sustain and support the individuals in an organization and the young people and families in our care.

Resources

- Waldinger, Robert, MD; Schultz, Marc, PhD. (2023) The Good Life. Simon & Schuster, New York, NY
- Waldinger, Robert. ((2015). « What Makes a Good Life, Lessons from the Longest Study on Happiness » [Video]. TedxBeaconStreet What Makes A Good Life
- Videos from Creating and Sustaining Organizational Wellbeing and Staff Wellness, CJJA Summer Business Meeting 2022 (Sampson, Becker) embedded on pages 5 & 6
- "Taking on Transformation" Chapter 6 Culture Change: Taking On Transformation
- "The Five Domains of Wellbeing for Youth and Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice System" Wellbeing for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System Download (fullframeinitiative.org)
- "Five Domains of Wellbeing Implication Tip Sheets" https://www.fullframeinitiative.org/resources/five-domains-of-wellbeing-implication-tip-sheets/
- Dempsey, M., Faulkner, W., Pette, Sharon., Abreu, Theresa., Chamberlain, J., Menzer. M., …Sampson, P., (2019) "CJCA Toolkit: Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Qualified Staff". Braintree, MA: Retrieved from htt://cjca.net/publications/.