

Caring Workplaces, Committed Employees

By enhancing support for employees' and volunteers' family responsibilities, human services organizations increase staff commitment, which improves retention, productivity, and outcomes for the children, youth, families, and communities we serve.

Introduction

Families and communities have changed, but our employment and volunteer management practices have not kept pace. As a result, the nonprofit human services sector is experiencing challenges attracting qualified people for job or volunteer openings and retaining good workers.

The good news: four in five national sector organizations that participated in a small 2006 survey by the Family Strengthening Policy Center (FSPC) reported adopting internal policies and practices to strengthen families of all employees. Yet, **we need to do more** to compete with corporate and public sector employers who have profited from helping workers shoulder family responsibilities.

The premise for *Caring Workplaces, Committed Employees* is straightforward: when human services employees and volunteers experience organizational support for their family responsibilities, they are more effective in their work and committed to our organizations. The

initiative is focused on working families (including kinship networks) who are raising children under 18. Many caring-workplace practices also can meet other employees' needs and interests – for example, supporting caregivers of older adults or staff who mentor youth. These types of workplace supports are especially important to lower-wage workers, where the needs can be great and the resources of individuals and families few.

What Are Caring Workplace Practices?

Caring Workplace practices aim to enhance employee and volunteer commitment to our organizations and the children, youth, families, and communities we serve. As feasible, these practices extend across occupations; positions (exempt, non-exempt, voluntary); and stage of life. Some important caring-workplace strategies are:

- Flexible schedules and locations.
- Paid leave and leave banks.
- Health insurance, and safety and wellness promotion.
- Linkages to community resources.

- Childcare, eldercare, transportation assistance.
- Fair workloads.
- Career advancement assistance, especially for lower-wage employees and volunteers.
- Living wages (employees), stipends (volunteers).
- A workplace culture that deliberately strives to support staff and volunteers with balancing work and family/personal life.

How Can *Caring Workplace Practices* Make a Difference?

By increasing the sector's investment in how we demonstrate our care for employees and volunteers by supporting their family responsibilities, we will:

- Improve outcomes with the people and communities we serve.
- Strengthen our bottom lines by reducing turnover, absences, and family-related distractions.
- Influence other local employers to do their part in building strong families and communities.

What Does the Research Show?

Decades of experience and research have established that employees – and volunteers – are more effective at work when their families are stable. Caring workplaces contribute to family stability by assuring paid and volunteer staff receive support in meeting family responsibilities that might otherwise

distract them on the job or contribute to unpredictable absences, burnout, and premature departures. Business analyses consistently show caring-workplace practices can pay for themselves over time through recruiting and training savings and productivity gains (i.e., pay more, get more). Some effective practices cost very little to implement. For the nonprofit human services sector, with missions that speak to improving the wellbeing of vulnerable populations and communities, caring-workplace practices give us a new way to provide leadership.

How Will the Family Strengthening Policy Center Stimulate Change?

With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2008, sector leaders are helping us develop a catalog of *Caring Workplace* practices and recognize nonprofit organizations that are strengthening the families of employees and volunteers. Learning opportunities will include a webinar on *Caring Workplace* practices and a summit on September 25-26. To inform sector leaders, we are developing case studies, a business rationale, and a resource list of tools and technical guidance. The resource list is now available on the FSPC Web site.

For More Information or to Get Involved

Visit the FSPC Web site: www.nasassembly.org/fspc and click on *Caring Workplaces, Committed Employees*. Please address inquiries to Natalie Thompson by telephone at 202-347-2080, ext 21 or by e-mail at nthompson@nasassembly.org.

The Family Strengthening Policy Center

The Family Strengthening Policy Center, an initiative of the National Human Services Assembly, serves as a focal point for research, information, and advocacy on place-based, practice-driven family strengthening practices, programs, and policy. It is funded by a generous grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. **Visit the Center's Web site to access all practice/policy briefs, subscribe to a monthly family strengthening newsletter, and obtain other resources at www.nasassembly.org/fspc.**

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