

Young People's Supported Accommodation Service

Staff Wellbeing Guidance

1. Purpose of the document

Our shared ambition is that the YPSA teams across all providers (both commissioned and OCC) flourish mentally, emotionally and physically so they can work with young people from a place of wellbeing. It is essential that our services cultivate healthy workplace environments both online and frontline. Services in supported housing can experience challenges with staff retention. This instability in our workforce can further de-stabilise young people. We believe that together we can change this if we put the happiness and wellbeing at the forefront of our services.

We want to encourage all of us delivering the Oxfordshire YPSA services to be bold advocates of wellbeing, and work collaboratively to transform the culture of stress and burnout into one where professionals feel at their best and love the work they do.

The nature of this work with young people who have often experienced complex trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can be stressful, emotionally demanding and take a toll on mental health if protective factors are not in place and wellbeing placed as central to the support offered to all those who work with young people.

Role-modelling wellbeing practices is not only vital in inspiring young people to adopt their own positive relationship to self-care, it is vital to creating and maintaining a resilient workforce, reducing burnout from stress and overwhelm and increasing work satisfaction.

Our vision is that all staff working in the YPSA feel energised and inspired by their work, and with the support of their managers commit to developing a healthy relationship to sleep, healthy eating, time off work doing the things they love that replenish them, and staying active in body and mind.

This document describes some of the contributing factors which may impact on the wellbeing of YPSA staff, as well as share some recommendations and resources for managers and workers to consider utilising in their teams to promote their wellbeing.

2. Contributing Factors which may impact on Wellbeing of YPSA Staff

2.1 Working in a Healthy Organisation

Studies show that “who you work for” is one of the biggest determinants of employee wellness¹. This includes:

- Access to a **supportive, flexible manager** who is open to regular workload assessments in order to **reduce trauma exposure**

¹ Source: www.tendaacademy.ca

- Leadership from a manager who encourages staff to attend **ongoing professional education** and who provides **timely and good quality supervision** as needed.
- Employees who had **more control over their schedule** reported a higher rate of job satisfaction overall. **Reducing hours** spent working directly with traumatised individuals was the single **most effective** way of reducing VT.

The top personal strategies identified includes:

- Developing and maintaining a **strong social support** both at home and at work
- **Increased self-awareness** through **mindfulness meditation** and narrative work such as journaling
- Regular self-care

2.2 Secondary/Vicarious Trauma/Chronic Stress

Secondary Traumatic Stress disorder, also referred to as 'Compassion Fatigue', is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of others. This is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the first-hand trauma experiences of another. Those most affected are loved ones, therapists, child welfare workers, case managers, caregivers, and other professionals who are so focused on the care of others that they neglect their own needs and are not practicing self-care.

"Compassion Fatigue is a state experienced by those helping people or animals in distress; it is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create secondary traumatic stress for the helper."

-Dr. Charles Figley & Paul Henry of Tulane University.

The stress from "caring too much" can, in turn, bring about feelings of isolation and symptoms such as apathy, sleeplessness, irritability, unexplained anxiety, anger, headaches, stomach problems, fatigue, and mood swings.

"The development of Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) is recognised as a common occupational hazard for professionals working with traumatized children. Studies show that from 6% to 26% of therapists working with traumatised populations, and up to 50% of child welfare workers, are at high risk for secondary traumatic stress or the related conditions of PTSD and vicarious trauma."

2.3 Impact of Covid

The Covid global pandemic has increased the risk of staff feeling disconnected and isolated from their teams as a result of remote working². It is vital that organisations prioritise connecting over the telephone regularly with their team and make wellbeing a regular part of their team based and 1-1 conversations. Staff will also hold anxiety about catching Covid from others and then passing this to household members.

Continuing to deliver face-to-face work or returning to work after a period of time away from frontline work has been recognised as source of anxiety for employees in particular key workers, with more reassurances needing to be put into place regarding how employees are safeguarding the health and safety of the workforce.

² See YPSA webpage www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/yposa for powerpoint on supporting staff during Covid.

3. Recommendations

The following recommendations can help YPSA services to proactively address and implement good practice, procedures, and policies in order to support staff wellbeing in the YPSA service:

- **Plan** Staff wellbeing training and team building sessions at the beginning of every year and scheduled into the team's diaries in advance. Training sessions can support workers wellbeing, strengthen relationships and provide opportunities for peer support. Training can include Trauma-Informed and Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) training and Mental Health First Aid.
- **Encourage** staff to plan the use of their annual leave allowance, with staff not working more than 6-10 weeks max without leave of a minimum of 3 days
- **Prioritise** completing regular wellbeing and job satisfaction audits with workers and teams. This could include quarterly surveys, appraisals and the self-care assessments found in the resources section of this document.
- **Set Up** a Wellbeing working group in their individual organisation as well as a joint working group with representation from each organisation across the YPSA, to lead on cultural commitment to improving staff wellbeing.
- **Support** workers to attend reflective practice sessions with the YPSA Psychologists to offer a safe space to reflect on their work and its impact upon them.
- **Conduct** supervision sessions on a monthly basis (or more regularly if required) for managers to meet with workers to discuss their wellbeing and workload. This should include workers being encouraged to reflect on a challenge and a triumph within each supervision, to encourage reflection, practice development and inspire motivation.
- **Empower** your staff in staff meetings, with workers encouraged to support the development of the agenda and have the opportunity to discuss key areas of their work and where possible to make sure they feel heard and empowered around the decisions that are made.
- **Implement** Buddying systems within each organisation, as well as across organisations to provide peer support and reduce isolation.
- **Invest** in Employee Support schemes can offer 24 hour counselling services and make sure you share this information with your employees, especially during induction.
- **Identify** and train some members of staff to hold the role of Mental Health First Aider within the organisation and these staff members are known to team members for support as required.
- **Promote** flexible working arrangements to support maintaining a healthy home-work life balance.

5. Appendix

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Description
Compassion fatigue	<p>A less stigmatising way to describe secondary traumatic stress has been used interchangeably with the term</p>
Vicarious Trauma	<p>Refers to changes in the inner experience of the therapist resulting from empathic engagement with a traumatised service user.</p> <p>It is a theoretical term that focuses less on trauma symptoms and more on the covert cognitive changes that occur following cumulative exposure to another person's traumatic material.</p>
Burnout	<p>Characterised by emotional exhaustion, de-personalisation and a reduced feeling of personal accomplishment.</p> <p>While it is also work related, burnout develops as a result of general occupational stress; the term is not used to describe the effects of indirect trauma exposure specifically.</p>
Compassion satisfaction	<p>Refers to the positive feeling derived from competent performance as a professional supporting others.</p> <p>It is characterised by positive relationships with colleagues, and the conviction that one's work makes meaningful contribution to clients and society.</p>