

Benefits of a Comprehensive Program to Grow Caregiver Resilience & Well-Being

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The Research:

This program enabled 'animal caregivers' to systematically develop skills in resilience, social and emotional learning, and to embed proactive strategies that addressed the self-defeating habits and mindset that commonly leads to stress/burnout.

Research Questions:

What benefits were found in building an intervention program that focused on resilience and proactive strategies to manage workplace compassion fatigue, burnout & secondary trauma? What learning outcomes were found for participants, teams, and the organization? Can an animal care organization shift from a culture of cynicism, bullying and high attrition rate to one where caregiver stressors are effectively managed, and resilience skills including self-other care are embedded in a healthier organizational mindset and where the entire local animal care community benefits from this shift in everyday activities?

Purpose of the Study:

Animal caregivers are at higher risk for Compassion Fatigue/Burnout than any other caregiving profession (Figley, 2005). This paper explored the viability of an innovative learning environment based on resilience skills by implementing the proposed intervention strategy, recording the effectiveness of the approach, as well as recording/determining the learning outcomes of the participants.

Research Methods:

A Canadian Animal Care Organization Staff (n=20) participated. Since resilience, a process of adaptability, takes time to learn, a longitudinal approach was applied. Pre/Post testing was conducted; the evaluation protocol was repeated several times over 3.5 years. The data was analyzed using a mixed-method design. Qualitative content analysis was executed using self/other reflection, interviews, group-work and psycho-educational learning strategies. Self-reporting questionnaires included MHS EQi 2.0, PROQOL, Workplace Challenges Inventory™, and ICF approved Coach-Mentoring Approach Training. One evaluation tool, Conflict Resolution, was designed by the staff.

Findings:

This intervention demonstrated that a resilience-based framework, implemented in a reflective, systematic framework over time, produced a positive shift in trust, mindset, coping strategies, solution-focused thinking, effective conflict resolution, increased collaboration, and accountability. Mapping the qualitative results such as interviews, reflection exercises and questionnaires, demonstrated a significant shift in self-care strategies and mindset. Learning outcomes were duly noted. The cycle of reflection continues as central to the learning approach.

Conclusions:

During this intervention period, accountability for self-care improvement (both individually and in teams), resilience skills were effectively learned and the health and well-being of the participants improved. The central reflection process was imbedded into the culture. A larger data set was collected to confirm and generalize the results over the three year period.

Most importantly, this organization built upon the resiliency skills formally learned throughout the program, then adjusted what they formally learned, to create their own, unique approach to resilience in their particular working environment. This Animal Care Organization created a cyclic 'resilience-in-action' approach. They can truly call their 'innovative program' in stress management and resilience, 'their own'.

This particular intervention demonstrated a strong potential of transferability to other types of caregivers who are facing similar challenges.

Abstract has been accepted and the Journal Article will be presented and published in the Fall of 2015.

Key Words: Caregiver Stress, Compassion Fatigue, Secondary Trauma, Social & Emotional Learning, Coach-Mentor Approach, Resilience, Organizational Psychology, Emotional Intelligence, CBT