



Healthy Mendocino Roundtable Report December 10, 2020

Roundtable Discussion

We are now in month 10 of sheltering-in-place and many of us are experiencing burnout and overwhelm due to demands of our work, familial and economic stressors, and social isolation. How is your organization working to identify signs of burnout among your workers and what are some creative ways your organization is supporting their mental health and boosting morale as we head into the holiday season?

Megan Barber Allende, CEO of Community Foundation, made a presentation from the Executive Director Leadership Institute on burnout and surge capacity. She shared some strategies she has put into place both for herself and for her employees.

Roseanne Ibarra, Adventist Health: All 3 of the Mendocino County sites have created “Zen Dens” in private spaces where employees can decompress. Each space has sensory deprivation and goody baskets for employees to take home. Additionally, someone from the executive team does a nightly call to 1,400 employees to get an idea of what is happening at their hospital site. The President holds town halls for associates and leaders make rounds with their team to check in and see how people are doing, which helps with morale. Roseanne stated the President of Adventist Mendocino County, Jason Wells, is empathic and has shown his human side through all of this. That is important as a leader and has been tremendous in his leadership strategies.

Donna Schuler, Mendocino County Public Health: Since March, Public Health has stopped having monthly meetings because all their time went to the emergency operations center. They just resumed having monthly check-ins. Donna does frequent check-ins daily with staff she supervises. The biggest strategy Public Health has been using to support their workers is to set them up for remote working and act as their advocate, as many of them work in the DOC full time. Some of them have more than one boss and roles and chain-of-command can be confusing and overwhelming. The Behavioral Health Department has set up karaoke.

Jennifer O'Donnell, United Way of the Wine Country: United Way was able to shut down the agency for 2 weeks during the holidays and give employees that paid time off. She pointed out that in Mendocino and Sonoma we have practice in recognizing impact of disasters on employees because of the fires. She asked about the Town Hall concept that Roseanne shared. United Way has been struggling with town hall engagement and attendance. United Way schedules them but employees do not really show. Roseanne responded that their town halls consist of a 5-10-minute update from the president and lots of time for questions from employees.

Victoria Kelly, Redwood Community Services: RCS executives are also doing town halls. RCS has always done town halls but has re-visioned them after shelter-in-place. The town halls are 1-hour and incorporate fun team building exercises: new staff introductions, announcements of staff birthdays, dress up and a Q&A. These town halls are recorded so they are available for those not able to attend. Victoria has also implemented COVID specific Group Problem Solving meetings, or GPS meetings. Anyone in the organization can call with problem in their program and discuss solutions with leadership and management. These meetings are held frequently.

May Kate McKenna, Mendocino Coast Healthcare Foundation: MCHF is giving employees holiday leave with administrative pay.

Tim Karas, Mendocino College: Mendocino College has allowed individuals working from home to create their own schedule that fits with demands of family. Their philosophy through shelter-in-place has been if workers want to get their work done at 10PM at night they may, they do not need to be at their desk in the 9AM-5PM block. They organization has been trying to stay flexible to real-life schedules and Tim believes remote work will make us be more flexible in the future. Attending meetings remotely, we are missing the casual chit chat with our colleagues before and after meetings. Leadership at the colleges has been trying to intentionally build this time into the virtual meetings. Overall, staff is working to embrace that we are in a fluid situation, which is different than in the beginning of the pandemic.

Patty Bruder, North Coast Opportunities, Inc.: it is a difficult time to figure out how to support people. Our work at NCO has escalated quite a bit and staff are taking on more duties outside of their positions. It is difficult to balance. We have bought supplies to support people working from home and are offering a stipend for work from home costs and are staying flexible about hours. We have helped people tap into resources and other items if they cannot work full time. We are encouraging staff to take trainings and webinars that help them feed their soul. Some people cannot take advantage of these because of their workload.

Roseanne posed a follow-up question: As employers, how are we identifying signs of domestic abuse and substance abuse among your staff?

Dina Polkinghorne, Project Sanctuary: Dina advocates for leaders to take the time they need off. Your agency will survive for two weeks without you and taking time for yourself will set a good example for staff. Domestic violence numbers have gone down quite a bit since school started. People are putting their crises on the back burner since they are focusing on school.

We are seeing people at the explosive point of the crisis. This time of year, is generally quiet anyway because people just want to keep a lid on things so their kids can have a nice Christmas.

Michelle Hutchins, Mendocino County Office of Education: Michelle asked if Dina would share the current domestic violence data with her. Child abuse reports are down as least through the month of October and reporting from teachers is significantly down as compared to non-pandemic months. However, the abuse the ER is seeing is very severe. MCOE is making a lot of efforts to teach teachers how to recognize the signs of child abuse virtually.

Michelle sends thank you cards to staff going the extra mile. There was an outbreak among the IT department at Ukiah Unified right before school started this fall, which required some employees to step up to get everyone ready for online learning. She sent personal thank you cards to those employees that helped and they were well received. Doing those little things that went to the employees home went a long way. Schools have gotten no summer break because of the planning for hybrid reopening and adapting quickly to the constant changes in mandates from the state. At one point the survival of MCOE executive leadership was in peril. Michelle forced an agency-wide closure so staff could take an additional 3 days off during Thanksgiving break. She knew top leaders would not answer staff texts if the whole agency was shut down. She also sends weekly emails summarizing all things about the schools and COVID-19. She meets daily with executive team and they draft public communications together.

Clinton Maxwell, Mendocino County Office of Education: Clinton added that he ends all team meetings by sending people into breakout rooms so they can catch up on a person level. Sometimes there is a concept to discuss, sometimes not. They can exit the meetings from their breakouts so can choose when to leave or whether to participate at all. He cautioned about training staff on self-care plans. They can occasionally be turned into a list of new year's resolutions that they beat themselves up for not keeping.

Holly Madrigal, Leadership Mendocino: Holly does not have staff, but she does have a steering committee. They expressed to her their desire to have clear guidelines on their expectations and how they are making an impact in the organization. This could help boost morale at other organizations. She is going out of her way to reach out to other NCO co-workers. We are all sick of Zoom, so sometimes phone calls are the way to go. The pandemic has revealed just how much work she would get done at Black Oak Coffee, for instance, running into people she can chat with about work related topics. Unstructured checking in is so important.

Julie Fetherston, First Five Mendocino: First Five has so many parents with young kids on staff and Julie is responding with flexibility in supporting them. The hallway conversations staff had pre-COVID were the feedback loop and those types of connections are so much harder to get on a virtual platform. She has noticed staff do not want to have more meetings, even if it means connecting with each other. They just want to get in and get out. It is apparent how much we rely on in-person relationships to decompress.

Ryan LaRue, Rural Communities Housing Development Corporation: Ryan sees burnout and surge capacity trickling down to staff. As leaders we can set a precedent and example in how

we take care of ourselves and manage our own burnout. Ryan is working to have a more personal outreach to staff members to see how they are doing and remind them to be kind to themselves. Given the nature of our work and the work of much of the organizations on the call, there is compassion fatigue and boundaries can feel impossible to set. The CEO sent out 5% bonus checks 3 months in to the pandemic and recently did it again as a sort of employee retention compensation.

Lucresha Renteria, Mendocino Coast Clinics: Because MCC was so much a part of bringing surveillance testing to our area, that gave MCC employees a real sense of purpose. Additionally, getting feedback and gratitude from the community made them feel they had purpose. We had to pivot to virtual appointments on a dime and did not know how we would pay for the technology. We had to cut schedules in dental which was painful. Luckily, some of them qualified for supplemental unemployment and all of them were understanding and grateful to still have a job. The agility we have had to show in reaction to the changing health requirements and protocols is immense and Lucresha is very proud of her staff. Virtual visits are much harder because health providers must teach the patients how to engage in the virtual world—this has gotten better as time goes on and the professionals and patients become more familiar with the tech. Early on, MCC assigned staff to do check-in calls—employees loved it because they heard the joy and gratitude from the patients and the patients felt cared for.

For the first 2-3 months of the pandemic, we did a gift a week—handed out gift certificates or cookies to each staff member once a week thanking them for their service. Lucresha could work from home but is at the clinic every day in solidarity with her staff that must show up every day. Morale is doing very well. The gratitude from the patients and general feeling of “these are our healthcare” heroes has gone far and made a huge impact on our staff.

A Roundtable member asked whether any of the other leaders have witnessed some tension between the staff that is working from the office and staff working from home. Is there resentment between these two groups where each thinks the other has it better? Sage Sangiacomo responded that the issue has come up at the City of Ukiah. He has honest discussions with those workers and explains that those that are working from home are doing so to decrease the load in the office so that those that must come in can do so.

Sage Sangiacomo, City of Ukiah: It is easy to get stuck thinking about all the negatives with COVID—daily counts, how many people are sick, etc. Sage is trying to keep optimism up and highlight the resiliency of our agencies and team members that have shined throughout the pandemic. People are doing what they are doing for the agencies because of their sense of pride. The City tried to celebrate the wins.

Miranda Ramos, ARCH: Miranda is the sole employee of the organization she works for. COVID has brought the opportunity to strength relationships and identify where mission, goals and strategies overlap between organizations, and where we can pull together and collaborate in more effective ways.

Annie Liner, Mendocino Coast Children's Fund: We must look beyond agencies and to grassroots organizations. We have many people in our community who want to help. Often, it is not money we need, its information. We should create a central place to post who is going from point a to point b to transport resources across the county more efficiently and with less expense.

Una Wirkebau, MOVE 2030: Una used to work solely with remote teams at her previous position. Holding everything remotely has brought the outlying areas into more conversations. Una has seen an increase in outlying areas sharing information from their region.

Chole Guazzone, Anderson Valley Health Clinic: What has been discouraging for staff and their mental health has been the political dialogue and denial of science and public health protocols.

John Gallo, COVID Response Network: John is the only staff person for this new non-profit. CRN is a volunteer powered organization that meets weekly. He has received feedback from the volunteers that the weekly meeting is their highlight. It is fulfilling to have a purpose right now and get together with people under a cause and connect with like-minded people. The pandemic is allowing networking in a way that has never been done before and opened opportunities to build an open knowledge network and leveraging latest technologies to help us work better. If anyone is interested in partnering for our network of resilience using technology, please contact him. The more we can expand on the silver linings, the better.

Tim Schrader, Redwood Quality Management Services: RQMC providers are heroes and the organization has whole-person-care wellness coaches on hand for staff. Tim agrees with the idea of being positive. Leadership meets with each provider network twice a week and with people in residential facilities for services in homeless shelters. Leadership at RQMC is focusing on positive reinforcement and creating visions of people and what they can do to keep themselves safe, maintain their relationships, and support clients.