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INSTITUTE FOR NONVIOLENCE CHICAGO

Supporting CVI Workforce Wellness

Lessons from the Institute for Nonviolence Chicago's Staff Wellness Initiative

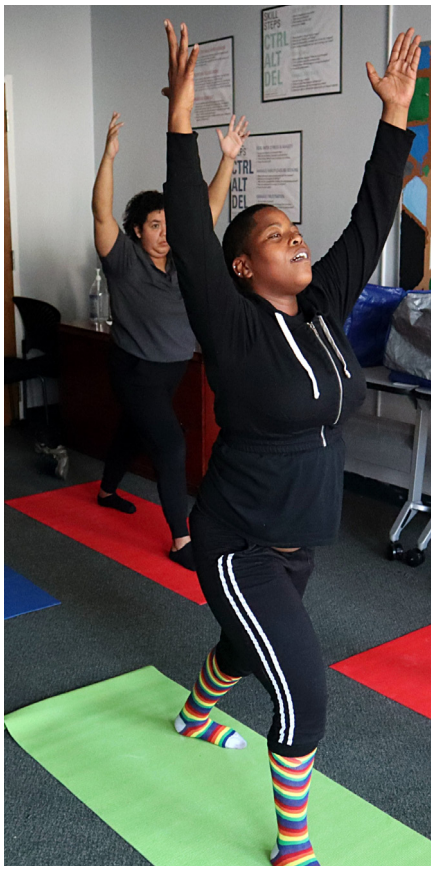
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Recognizing the need for targeted wellness support for CVI staff, the Institute for Nonviolence Chicago launched their Staff Wellness Initiative in March 2022. The Initiative's mission is to enhance wellbeing across the entire organization.

Community violence intervention (CVI) plays an essential role in Chicago's public safety ecosystem, yet the boots-on-the-ground work of building safer communities is risky and often traumatic. The CVI model—heavily reliant upon strategies like conflict mediation and rapid incident responses—places outreach workers at a high risk of trauma exposure.

A landmark survey on the CVI workforce found that 20% of Chicago's outreach workers had themselves been shot at while on the job, and roughly 60% had witnessed someone else being shot at. Frontline workers often share lived experiences and residential proximities with CVI participants, and the physical and psychological hazards associated with their work often compound staff's prior traumatic histories.

Recognizing the need for targeted wellness support for CVI staff, the Institute for Nonviolence Chicago (INVC) launched their Staff Wellness Initiative (the Initiative) in March 2022. INVC partnered with Northwestern University's Center for Neighborhood Engaged Research and Science (CORNERS) to conduct a process evaluation of the Initiative's implementation and develop recommendations based on key findings.



Source: Institute for Nonviolence Chicago

Key Recommendations

CVI Leaders

Start with Trauma Education

By prioritizing trauma education, organizations can create more effective and impactful staff wellness programs that both improve workplace culture and empower individuals to promote their personal wellbeing and that of their colleagues.

Create Dedicated Space for Wellness

CVI organizations can support worker wellbeing by creating safe, non-clinical spaces where staff come together to focus on wellness. These spaces should be driven by trust-filled relationships, allowing staff to show up authentically and nonjudgmentally.

Identify and Support Internal Champions

Respected leaders and trusted staff can help promote wellness supports to other key stakeholders, build or lead a committee to advance the work, or serve as a credible messenger modeling wellness within their organization.

Operationalize Wellness Beyond Individual Self-Care

Sustainable staff wellness efforts should explore structural interventions like flexible/hybrid work arrangements, task modifications, and interpersonal communication trainings that support workers and build trust between different levels of the organization.

Funding & Policy Leaders

Dedicated Investments in CVI Worker Wellness

Given the high rates of exposure to violence and traumatic stress among CVI workers, additional funding for their mental health support is essential. Further, CVI workers may benefit from similar resources that their participants receive related to food access, housing support, and educational advancement.

Supporting CVI Worker Wellness through Policy

CVI workers should receive a fair and appropriate level of salary, benefits, supports, and protections commensurate with the dire risk, elevated trauma exposure, and unique expertise that they bring to their roles and comparable to other first responder professions.

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