

On the Shoulders of Giants - Workforce Resilience

NIFVS Forum Summary

On 8 November 2016, over 60 participants explored strategies to enhance workforce resilience in a forum co-hosted by Northern Integrated Family Violence Services and the Northern Indigenous Family Violence Action Group. Participants heard about the impact of work induced trauma, what organisations can do to build a resilient workforce and reflected on their own self care needs.

“family violence work is stressful, emotional and fatiguing. This stress is exacerbated by difficulties accessing services and resources for their clients, lack of time to respond to the complexities of client needs, and limited access to supervision.”

(Royal Commission into Family Violence:
Report and recommendations, Vol VI, 2016: p179)



Building Resilience

Psychologist Shawn Goldberg outlined that organisations can build resilience by ensuring workers:

1. Are able to cope with the demands of their jobs
2. Have a say in how they do their work
3. Have adequate information and support from colleagues and managers
4. Are not subjected to unacceptable behaviour (e.g. bullying)
5. Understand their role and responsibilities
6. Are engaged frequently when undergoing organisational change

It was recognised that Aboriginal services face particular challenges as service users are often known to the workers.

Workers deal with complex issues for family and community members both at work and outside of work.

Features of supportive workplaces

Participants reflected on features of workplaces that build the resilience of staff including:

- A compassionate, empathetic and respectful culture
- Acknowledging and valuing staff strengths
- Flexible work arrangements (not just for parents)
- Promotion of diversity
- Consistent, clear and progressive wellbeing policies and processes
- Regular, high quality individual and/or group supervision (not just line management)
- Open communication and transparency and open door policy of managers



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On the Shoulders of Giants - Workforce Resilience

Panellists from Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL), The Salvation Army and Darebin Community Health shared their views on what individuals, organisations and the government could do to address workforce resilience. Advice included:

Individuals

- ◆ Look after yourself
- ◆ Ensure your workload isn't excessive
- ◆ Strive for variety in your work (e.g. individual, group work, community development)
- ◆ Develop good boundaries
- ◆ Find and utilise supervision
- ◆ Ensure a work life balance
- ◆ Get involved in broader action (e.g. Week Without Violence)

Organisations

- ◇ Acknowledge the difficulties of family violence work
- ◇ Address compassion fatigue as an occupational risk and manage this risk (e.g. supervision and debriefing)
- ◇ Provide separate line management and clinical supervision
- ◇ Provide PD opportunities, a nurturing environment and ensure team time out and fun
- ◇ Celebrate success and provide positive feedback

Government

- ◆ Fund collectivised staff support (small organisations can't afford the same as large ones)
- ◆ Recognise that workforce resilience is essential to effective family violence work
- ◆ Address the gender pay gap and transferability of long service leave
- ◆ Ensure funding allows appropriate time to respond to the needs of clients

Recommendations to enhance workforce resilience

Participants made a series of recommendations on creating supportive workplaces including:

Ensure managers' skills

- ⇒ Emotional intelligence
- ⇒ Management training
- ⇒ Leading by example
- ⇒ Know staff personally and professionally

Provide staff support

- ⇒ Be supportive, consistent and flexible
- ⇒ Consult and check in with staff, particularly in times of change
- ⇒ Promote self-care

Recognise workers' skills

- ⇒ Recognise staff's professional experience, not just provide directives
- ⇒ Ensure staff opinions are taken into account
- ⇒ Acknowledge staff with meaning and evidence

Further Resources

[Guidebook on Vicarious Trauma: Recommended Solutions for Anti-Violence Workers](#)

[Headington Institute - free resources on stress, resilience, and humanitarian work.](#)

[Health and Safety Executive Management Standards for Work Related Stress](#)