

Learning, Leading, Changing

Child Welfare Staff Engagement & Retention in Washington, DC: Alternative Work Schedules, Telecommuting & Other Supports (Webinar, August 2013)

What are these resources?

- Washington DC's Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) program permits participating employees to fulfill bi-weekly 80-hour requirement while maintaining one of various work schedules available through the program.
- Flexible Core Hour Schedules: employees work an 8-hr workday that can start as early as 7:00 a.m. and end no later than 3:30 p.m. or begin as late as 9:30 a.m. and end no later than 6:00 p.m. (or any variation in between).
- Compressed Time Schedules allow employees to work longer days for part of the workweek in exchange for select shorter days or a day off during the same pay period.
- Telecommuting Program provides a flexible and innovative work arrangement for employees to perform their assigned work outside of the office, generally within their homes. Telecommuting limited to 2 days per week; employees must be accessible: response time of 1-hr for email and phone. Home work space is approved by agency.
- HR director regularly meets with all program areas, and attends agency director's monthly management meetings (along with supervisors and training staff) where internal operational issues/needs are addressed.

What are the critical findings?

- High annual turnover rate has been significantly reduced. AWS resulted in improved work-life balance of participants; high interest and longevity of participants; and positively impacted ability to recruit potential candidates.
- As employees gain greater control over their time, they balance work and family responsibilities more readily and take greater advantage of volunteer activities and educational/career development opportunities that support their effectiveness.
- Access to, and understanding of how to use, technology was essential for telecommuting success.
- Staff who telecommute report greater productivity and telecommuting is seen as a positive benefit for prospective employees, aiding the agency in recruiting and retaining high quality, tech-savvy staff.
- Leadership at all levels needed to be committed to ensuring that the retention plan is implemented and that the efforts are genuinely supported from the top down.
- Top down/bottom up flexibility has been essential to utilization of flexible work schedules. Supervisors have had to adjust to staff not being physically present for the entire 5-day work week and staff have had to adjust to supervisors managing remotely.
- Relationship-building between HR and program areas was supported by top leadership and helped move plans forward in timely, focused fashion. Involvement and input by union leadership in developing programs was invaluable, as was input from employees and support of agency director and executive leadership team.

What are the implications for our work?

- There is no magic bullet or single answer for addressing retention but all organizations can take at least a few steps to minimize staff going through a revolving door.
- There must be discussion and support for HR priorities at the leadership level.
- Exit interview information is critical to gain insight into problems and issues that employees feel strongly about.
- Need someone positioned to take the pulse of agency climate and culture on an ongoing basis. Employees need a platform for workforce-related communication and problem-solving.
- Look at successful efforts at major companies and make use of varied benefits and HR strategies/programs that have been implemented at these companies, modified to fit the child welfare context.
- Develop your own vehicle for labor-management-employee communication and problem-solving.

