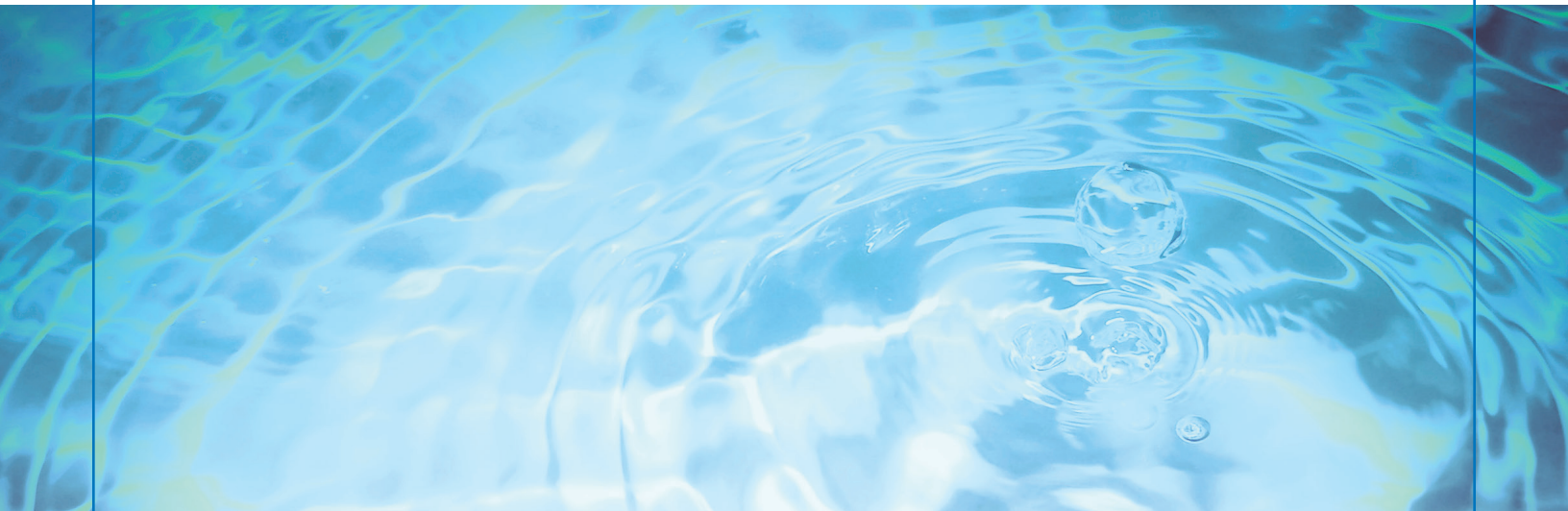


# Wellbeing Resource Manual for Managers

JANUARY 2026



# National District Attorneys Association

NDAA's mission is to be the voice of America's prosecutors and to support their efforts to protect the rights and safety of the people by providing its members with the knowledge, skills, and support they need to ensure justice is attained.

Through the ongoing work of NDAA's Wellbeing Committee, NDAA is committed to building the resilience of prosecutors across the country to best serve their communities. Under the leadership of Committee Chair Lorrin Freeman, District Attorney for Wake County (NC), this resource manual aims to educate managers and support their identification of teammates who are struggling with their wellbeing and how to build cultures where resiliency is fostered. Please visit [www.ndaa.org](http://www.ndaa.org) for additional resources.

As the largest association of prosecutors in the country, NDAA recognizes the vital role that prosecutors play in the safety of local communities. Prosecutors are responsible for ensuring that justice is carried out in a fair and equitable manner, protecting the rights of victims, and holding accountable those who violate the law. NDAA supports prosecutors in their efforts to fulfill these responsibilities and to promote a criminal justice system that is fair, effective, and accountable.

Through training, technical assistance, and other resources, NDAA provides prosecutors with the tools they need to do their jobs effectively and ethically. We also work to raise public awareness about the important role that prosecutors play in our criminal justice system.

We believe that every American has the right to live in a safe and just society, and we are committed to working with our members and partners to make that vision a reality.



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# Introduction

As leaders and managers, the members of our teams are our most valuable resource.

In our roles, we have a responsibility of caring for them and fostering environments where they can thrive. While we often benefit from the deep satisfaction of knowing that we have been part of seeking justice for our victims or helping those in our communities, our work also creates unique and taxing challenges that can leave us feeling depleted.

This resource manual is designed specifically for people who manage prosecutorial teams. Through the information shared here, we hope to educate managers regarding how to identify when teammates are struggling with their wellbeing and how to build cultures where resiliency is fostered. Readers should walk away with developed competencies in identifying the red flags of burnout, secondary trauma stress, and compassion fatigue, in themselves and their team, and with an understanding of how to take steps that build a supportive culture that promotes each of our abilities to continue to do this work. While the universe of resources that address wellbeing is not capable of being reduced to one management manual, our hope is that this workbook will raise awareness, start conversations, and be a catalyst to building a culture that allows us to continue to best serve victims and our communities.

## Objectives for Managers

- Understand the importance of building your team members' resilience
- Develop competency in identifying burnout, compassion fatigue and secondary trauma stress
- Foster a work environment that supports wellbeing

But first, ***what is wellbeing?***

The word wellbeing has catapulted into widespread use in the last decade. But what exactly is meant by it?

If we believe that wellbeing requires the absence of stress or tragedy, then we could easily conclude that there could be no relationship between it and prosecution. We know that hardship cannot be removed from our work, or from the world in general for that matter.

So, if wellbeing is not the absence of stress and tragedy, what is it? While there are many different ways it is articulated or defined, generally, wellbeing relates to a general overall feeling of contentment and peace that includes an ability to effectively navigate hardship without long term negative impacts to your overall health.

Wellbeing extends beyond physical health to include our psychological and social health. Being in good health in these areas is achieved through the steps we take and choices we make. While we cannot ultimately control the challenges that life presents, we do have the ability to be deliberate in building our capacity to withstand them successfully.

Wellbeing is personal. Each person's needs may be different and what aids in their resilience is unique. One prescription does not heal every ailment. But, there are commonalities in what prosecutors face that may undermine their mental and physical health and relationships with others, and in the components of what is needed to overcome these.

So, if it is personal, ***why should we focus on wellbeing?***

# Why Wellbeing?

## Being Our Best

As prosecutors, we hold ourselves to the highest standards in fighting for justice for victims and our communities. Ignoring the risks of burnout, secondary trauma stress, and compassion fatigue erodes our ability to do our jobs effectively. Prioritizing our own wellbeing, and that of our team, is a commitment towards remaining the best at what we do. As we are reminded each time we board an airplane, we must first put on our own oxygen mask so that we may then help others.

## Recruitment and Retention

As team leaders, we want to be able to recruit and retain the very best. We know that quality of life ranks high for employees when it comes to deciding where to work and whether to stay. Building a culture that encourages employees' wellbeing is an important component of creating and keeping a team.



According to the 2022 Work and Well-Being Survey conducted by the American Psychological Association, **more than 80%** of people agreed that how employers support mental health will be an important consideration for them when they look for future work.

**According to Gallup**, employees who strongly agree that their employer cares about their overall wellbeing, compared with those who don't, are:

- 3x more likely to be engaged at work
- 69% less likely to actively search for a new job
- 71% less likely to report experiencing a lot of burnout
- 5x more likely to strongly advocate for their company as a place to work
- 5x more likely to strongly agree that they trust the leadership of their organization
- 36% more likely to be thriving in their overall lives

**According to the National District Attorneys Association's 2024 National Prosecutor Retention Survey:**

- 93% of prosecutors enjoy being prosecutors (doing justice for community, belief in the mission, trials)
- 31% named work/life balance as one of the most important factors in deciding to work as a prosecutor in their current position
- 57% have seriously considered leaving (of those, 48% in the last month, 70% in the last 6 months, 71% in the last year)
- Of those who considered leaving, 42% named "my own wellbeing" as a primary motivating factor
- "My own wellbeing" examples included exhaustion, stress, anxiety, coping in unhealthy ways, impacts to my health from the work



### Ethical Considerations<sup>1</sup>

In a prosecution office with burgeoning caseloads and crime victims to support, where does wellbeing fall within the list of priorities? Is it selfish for prosecutors and prosecution team members to prioritize their wellbeing? In our noble quest to always prioritize the needs of crime victims above our own, are we creating an unsustainable work practice that may eventually lead to compassion fatigue, burnout, and leaving the profession altogether?

The ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct Rule 3.8 sets forth ethical duties specific to prosecutors and the foundation for meeting those responsibilities is tied directly to our competency and that of our team members. Competency extends far beyond simply keeping abreast of recent case law and developing trial advocacy skills. As much as we may not want to admit it, we are human, and therefore are susceptible to the mental, physical and emotional challenges which may impact our ability to be a Minister of Justice.

Not only are we responsible for ensuring that we personally meet the standards set forth in the Rules of Professional Responsibility but as managers and colleagues we have an affirmative responsibility to support others in maintaining these standards.



Burnout and compassion fatigue can erode our ability to be competent advocates.

**The Model Rules of Professional Conduct** set forth that lawyers with supervisory responsibilities “shall make reasonable efforts to ensure that the firm has in effect measures giving reasonable assurance that all lawyers in the firm conform to the Rules of Professional Conduct.” ABA Rule 5.1: Responsibilities of Partners, Managers, and Supervisory Lawyers

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<sup>1</sup> Contributed by Elizabeth Burton Ortiz, Executive Director, Arizona Prosecuting Attorneys’ Advisory Council.

# The Connection between Our Work and Our Wellbeing

A person's feeling of wellbeing has direct impact on their capacity to perform. The extent to which our work brings us personal satisfaction and the way in which it negatively impacts us influences our ability to sustain effectiveness. Fortunately, as prosecutors and prosecution team members, we find great purpose in seeking justice and helping victims and the public, which in turn serves to fuel our continued dedication. But when the stress of our work and the impact of continual exposure to others' trauma erodes our resilience, the end result undermines our ability to keep going. Understanding and acknowledging these factors and intentionally building systems to protect ourselves and our teams is a critical part of being able to continue our work.

## What Challenges to Wellbeing Do Prosecutors Face?

Prosecutors face specific challenges in their work that may serve to overwhelm them or leave them feeling emotionally drained. High caseloads, insufficient resources, and a never-ending pipeline of cases can make the work seem relentless. Being present with victims who are grieving or witnesses who are processing what they have seen exposes us to others' trauma. Because prosecutors operate in an adversarial system that often becomes contentious during the heat of battle, they often come under attack. Inasmuch as judges and juries are the final decision-makers, prosecutors can be left with feeling a lack of control. All of these factors over time can lead to erosion of an individual's sense of wellbeing.



While there are stressors in any area of the practice of law, prosecutors also are repeatedly exposed to tragedy and face a never-ending pipeline of new cases, often with insufficient resources.

## Unchecked, Where Do These Challenges Lead?

Daily agitations and the pressure to keep going add up over time. The cumulative impact can manifest itself in ways that undermine our ability to do our jobs effectively and detract from how much we enjoy work and life in general. Over time, prosecutors may struggle with secondary trauma stress disorder, compassion fatigue, and burnout.

To best support our teams, it is important that managers understand these conditions and can identify the ways they show up in individuals. For both us and our team members, awareness is really the first step in being able to protect ourselves. Not only should we have a working knowledge of these conditions, but we also should be able to recognize their indicators.



Compassion fatigue and burnout are occupational risks for prosecutors. Managers should educate themselves and team members to identify symptoms and encourage self-assessment.



Awareness that our work impacts us personally is the first step in protecting our wellbeing.

Awareness also requires self-assessment. There are several formal tools that can aid in this type of assessment, but self-reflection and regular “check-ins” must be a routine practice. Once the symptoms of compassion fatigue and burnout are known, they can be more easily identified at an early stage.



Asking the simple question of “how are you doing?” to ourselves and each other creates a reflection point that encourages mindfulness and self-care.

### Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) and Compassion Fatigue

For many prosecutors, the ability to help victims of crime gives great meaning to our work. We often see our responsibility as giving voice to their pain and suffering. Our jobs expose us repeatedly to their trauma and grief. While we remain committed to fighting on their behalf, which requires resolve and strength, it is not realistic to think that witnessing their suffering will not have an impact on us. In her book *Trauma Stewardship*, Laura van Dernoot Lipsky provides a visual description to this reality when she notes, “(i)n the same way that oils splatter on the painter’s shirt, or dirt gets under the gardener’s nails, trauma work has an impact.”

Recognized within the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition, (DSM-5), secondary traumatic stress (STS) refers to the emotional and psychological distress experienced by individuals who are exposed to the trauma of others. Professionals working with survivors of trauma report changes to their worldview and can manifest symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Over time, the cumulative physical, emotional, and psychological effect of exposure to trauma can lead to what professionals refer to as compassion fatigue.

#### Indicators of secondary traumatic stress (STS) and compassion fatigue include:

- Experiencing instances where thoughts and images of trauma intrude into professionals’ thoughts and dreams
- Facing an increase in anger, irritability, and pessimism
- Viewing the world in a more dangerous light, while becoming increasingly vigilant about the safety of yourself and loved ones
- An emotional detachment and numbness in personal and professional life
- A social and emotional withdrawal and disconnection from yourself or others
- Instances of self-medication or addiction to substance use



### Burnout

Burnout is a result of chronic workplace stress and a prolonged sense of being overwhelmed. In prosecution, these feelings are created by caseloads that surpass resources and the fact that new crimes and tragedies continue to occur even as we work diligently to close out existing cases. The inability to ever “complete the task” and being subject to what sometimes feels like the whims of judges and juries adds to a feeling of a lack of control that can lead to burnout.

Burnout emerges gradually and is a result of emotional exhaustion. Although this condition starts taking effect slowly and can be hard to identify, there are ways to recognize that burnout has begun affecting aspects of your professional work.

#### **Common indicators of burnout include:**

- A prolonged feeling of depression and/or anxiety
- Use of substances to combat emotional and physical exhaustion
- Decreased motivation
- Lack of interest in social activities
- Increased desire to quit
- Examining the meaning of life and questioning whether your work aligns with that meaning

# How Do We Protect Our Teams' Wellbeing?

If our goal as supervisors is to retain our team, care for them, and encourage their peak performance, we must take an interest in supporting a good quality of life for them. By the time people are entering the zones of burnout and compassion fatigue, it often takes significant intervention, and may be too late, to help them find a sustainable path.

Fortunately, prosecutor offices across the country have started to introduce the idea of wellbeing and building resilience into the workplace. These efforts take many different forms. Some offices have developed formal programs, while others have found informal activities to best fit the culture of the office. Some offices have brought in professionals trained in caring for others, while other offices have set up robust peer support programs. A successful effort will take into consideration the needs and atmosphere of the office, and what resources are available. While offices may take different approaches to supporting their teams, all effective wellbeing initiatives involve some basic principles.



There is “no one size fits all” model to supporting our team’s wellbeing. But, there are some core components to any successful effort.

## Building a Culture of Resilience

The word resilience has become part of popular vocabulary much in the same way that “wellbeing” and “self-care” have. Generally, resilience has become the catch word for the ability to navigate and overcome challenges. A person’s level of resilience may be influenced by many things, including their life experience and their natural personality characteristics.

A person’s resilience is not static. Our ability to manage stress at any moment may be impacted by a number of factors including what else we have going on in our lives at that moment. It is also true that resilience can be developed and expanded with intentional effort over time. As managers of individuals who face significant difficulties as part of their work, it is important that we support and encourage the continued sustainability and development of this capacity for our teams. We should embrace our responsibility in building a culture of resilience within our offices.



It is commonly thought that how well someone navigates and overcomes challenges depends on how resilient they are. More recently, it has become understood that a person’s resilience can grow over time with effort.



As managers, if we want our team’s ability to handle the hard aspects of our work to grow, then we must be committed to helping them increase their resilience.

## How Do We Protect Our Teams' Wellbeing?

It is not productive to encourage our teams to prioritize taking care of themselves when they witness our failure to do so personally. Good leaders lead by example. If we model for our prosecutors a workstyle that fails to make space for our personal health and relationships, then efforts to promote self-care for our teams are wasted. Your team members adopt their framework of what you as their boss value by watching what you do.



As leaders, if we fail to take care of ourselves, we broadcast to our teams that it's not important to do so or—worse yet—that to meet our expectations, they should ignore self-care.

### Creating a Safe Space

Perhaps the most important thing we can do for our teams to combat compassion fatigue and burnout is to create an environment where people feel safe and accepted in discussing how their work is impacting them. For many years, the standard practice in prosecution was to ignore the stress and trauma of our work by detaching from, numbing, or burying the emotional toll we experienced. Vulnerability was frowned upon and a culture of “being tough enough” to do the job was championed. “There’s no crying in baseball!” actor Tom Hanks yells as he scorns a player in the movie *A League of Their Own*. No crying in baseball . . . or prosecution. For many years, our profession failed to acknowledge the impact that our work may have on each of us and on our ability to be at our best as we fight for justice.

Creating a culture where people are willing to admit when they are struggling and feel comfortable sharing the way they have been impacted by a case, or interactions with a victim, or experiences in the courtroom, requires initiating these conversations. This can be as simple as checking in with our teammates by asking the simple question, “How are you doing?” Signaling that it is normal and expected that our work takes an emotional and psychological toll allows people to feel comfortable opening up. An important ingredient to building this type of safe space is a willingness to be vulnerable about our own struggles.



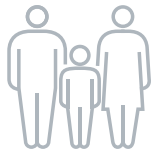
Creating a safe space for our teams to share that they are struggling requires our own willingness to be open and vulnerable about our own experience.



Simply asking a team member how they are doing following a challenging moment signals that it is acceptable to acknowledge that our work impacts us emotionally and psychologically.

### Encouraging Healthy Boundaries

In her book *Set Boundaries, Find Peace*, Nedra Glover Tawwab writes that “the root of self-care is setting boundaries.” As managers, it can seem counterintuitive to instruct our team on the importance of being able to disengage from our work, and yet, if we do not help them establish appropriate boundaries, then we can guarantee that they will burn out over the long haul. We know how all-consuming our work can be, for example, during the height of a serious trial. There are simply times in our profession where long days are required. It is also true that technological advances such as email and cell phones have increased the difficulty in setting our work aside. We can invest a lot of time in wellbeing initiatives, but if we fail to encourage our team members to truly unplug from time to time, then we undermine such efforts.



The ability to maintain healthy boundaries with work is crucial in avoiding burnout and compassion fatigue. A failure to set limitations on how work intrudes into the other areas of life can undermine the investment made in our wellbeing.

The capacity to face challenges depends in part on the extent to which we allow ourselves to replenish our internal resources through rest and activities that bring us joy. Chances are that we have all personally experienced what it feels like to run on an empty tank. While what brings restoration to each of our team members may be uniquely personal, as managers we play an important role in encouraging and reminding them to be intentional in refilling their reservoir. For example, by doing something as simple as sending people home once a jury returns a verdict, we send a message that pausing to refuel is important and acceptable.



We have all heard the adage that you cannot pour from an empty tank, and we must encourage our team to replenish their reservoir through rest and engaging in those things that bring them joy.

### Accentuating the Positive

As prosecutors, we have a tremendous opportunity to have a real impact in our community and the lives of the victims we serve. We often receive and can feel the gratification that comes from helping others. We benefit from serving in positions that provide a sense of purpose and feelings of self-fulfillment. These positive outcomes from the work that we do play a powerful role in being able to prevent compassion fatigue and burnout. Compassion satisfaction, a term used to describe the sense of satisfaction that comes from helping others, can be cultivated with effort. One important way to increase our team's feeling of wellbeing is to create a practice of acknowledging and celebrating the positive moments within our work and the impact we have. While compassion fatigue can be draining and cause negative impacts, compassion satisfaction can be a powerful motivator and tool in building resilience.



As prosecutors, we are able to experience the positive feelings that come from helping others. Compassion satisfaction is a valuable antidote to compassion fatigue and burnout, and being intentional about recognizing and celebrating positive work outcomes increases our sense of satisfaction.

### Encouraging Connection

The existence of strong interpersonal relationships is consistently identified as a key to maintaining resilience. As social scientist Brené Brown writes in her book *Daring Greatly*, “humans are hard wired for connection.” Being part of a supportive network goes a long way in helping to overcome challenges. Conversely, multiple studies have demonstrated that the lack of social connection and support is harmful, including to our personal health. It is particularly helpful to have relationships with those with whom we share the common experience of our work. There is an understanding that comes from facing similar challenges and realities that makes our relationships with colleagues uniquely valuable. As managers, we should actively work to provide opportunities for those connections to grow.



We benefit from being part of supportive networks. Creating space for these connections to be fostered is an important part of building resilient offices.

### What Steps Can We Take to Build a Supportive Culture?

Ultimately, as managers, we cannot take over the care of our team members. Each person has to make a commitment to practice self-care and intentionally grow their resilience. However, we can put into place programs and systems that encourage team members to prioritize their wellbeing. All of these efforts boil down to creating a supportive culture.

In the next section, we will examine ways to start a wellbeing program, and some success stories from around the country. It is important to note that none of these efforts started on their current scale. The pivotal element is not how grand an initiative we can start—it is just getting started.



# Building a Supportive Culture: Starting a Wellbeing Program<sup>2</sup>

A person's overall wellbeing is largely considered to include a number of components including physical and mental health, social connections, a sense of self-fulfillment, and financial security. Given this broad scope, the ways in which we can support our teams' wellbeing are limitless. Creating a wellbeing program within an office can serve to educate our teams about the personal impact of working in our field and ensure that team members are taking steps to take care of themselves. It also can be a great way to build a network of support within an office. Finally, creating a program sends a strong message to employees that you care about them as individuals.

Many district attorneys' offices around the country are rolling out internal wellbeing programs to address the evolving needs of their teams. While it may seem overwhelming to establish this type of resource, a program can start small and grow over time. Knowing where to begin can be daunting. The following steps provide a framework for guiding the process.

## 1. Assessment.

Taking an inventory of your organization's needs and strengths is a good place to start. Options to assist in doing this include hiring a consultant, using one of several established questionnaires, or interviewing people at every level of the organization. The assessment will offer clarity on the office's unique pressure points and needs. For example, is office morale struggling because of a perceived lack of support? Are people feeling isolated or overwhelmed? Have team members adopted unhealthy means of handling the stress of the work? Are they observing symptoms in themselves of secondary trauma stress?

During this phase, it is also important to identify your team's strengths, so your plan can build on what is already working. For example, maybe you have a good peer network or supportive leadership. It can be helpful not only to look internally but to take stock of what resources external partners may be willing to share. For example, perhaps employees already have access to an employment assistance program, or your local Bar organization has developed resources that can be useful. Keep in mind that the National District Attorney's Association has a number of online resources, and members get access to the free NDAA Prosecutor Wellbeing App powered by Cordico. Once you have a good understanding of the needs and available resources, it is easier to begin to design a program that will be helpful to your team.

## 2. Get buy-in.

For a successful program, it is essential to have active participation from employees, leaders, and—best-case scenario—funders. Organizers should communicate a commitment to investing in the long-term health and happiness of the staff, early and often, and seek input from those who are interested—and especially those who are resistant. Emphasize the data supporting the benefits and cost-effectiveness of wellbeing in the workplace, showing that wellbeing programs have a significant impact on medical costs, absenteeism, and employee longevity.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from blog "Considering standing up a wellbeing program in your office but don't know where to start?" by Kirsten Pabst, former Missoula (MT) County Attorney and author of *Thriving Through Chaos: Survival Gear for Criminal Justice Professionals*.

### 3. Establish a committee.

Many organizations have started by gathering two or three interested employees, establishing an ad hoc committee, and putting them to work on developing recommendations. Consider hiring a coordinator to work with your committee if that is feasible, though it is not necessary. If your organization has a human resource department, check there for suggestions on consultants and resources including potential financial support. Additionally, have your committee reach out to nearby prosecutors' offices and law enforcement agencies that have wellbeing initiatives in place, and consider pooling resources and collaborating with others.

### 4. Build wellbeing into your office policies and mission.

Incorporate language prioritizing wellbeing, resilience, and sustainability into office materials including those used at onboarding. Consider drafting a policy outlining your approach to wellbeing. Other strategies include incorporating resiliency skills into the organization's written professional competencies. Once employee wellbeing becomes a structural part of your organization's framework, it is more likely to become part of the office culture, and you are better equipped to approach potential sources of funding such as grants or your county government.

### 5. Identify a facilitator.

This seems daunting, but with a little local research, you should be able to identify someone with a background in secondary trauma, mindfulness, or stress management, even if "wellbeing" is not part of their resume. New trainers are being trained every day. Get recommendations from other prosecutors and law enforcement agencies in your area. A facilitator can be a good resource to provide training and as an advisor for the committee.

### 6. Build a custom wellbeing plan.

You, your committee, your coordinator, your facilitator, or even an interested employee can draft a wellbeing plan. Ideally, a plan includes a mix of education opportunities on topics such as burnout, compassion fatigue, and resilience along with activities designed to allow team members to briefly step back from their work and rejuvenate. A wide range of activities have been found to add to an individual's sense of wellbeing and can be incorporated into the workplace with minimal disruption to productivity. For example, a visit by a trained therapy dog, a jigsaw puzzle set up in the common area, or a scheduled brown bag lunch amongst peers are inexpensive examples of activities that could be part of a wellbeing plan. Because connection with people facing similar challenges is such an important tool in building resilience, any plan should include peer support either through a formal program or informal opportunities.

### 7. Draft a budget and/or locate resources.

While an office can stand up a plan with a minimal budget, resources to bring in trainers or fund activities can expand the benefits your committee is able to offer. In addition to your budget source, consider other potential sources for funding and/or programming including grants, employment assistance programs, medical benefits, or employee associations. You may also be able to receive private donations of time or money if accepting these benefits is not in violation of your code of ethics. For example, there may be a yoga instructor in your community willing to donate her time to teach a class at your office. Also, consider pooling wellbeing money with other criminal justice agencies and collaborating on initiatives.

### 8. Monitor, evaluate, and adapt if necessary.

Find ways to invite input from the team about whether the programming being offered is of value to them. Conducting quarterly surveys or evaluations may be a simple way. Do what is useful for your people and don't be afraid to change what is not working.

#### ► Wellbeing Program Success Stories

##### **San Diego (CA) District Attorney's Office "DA ServeWell" Wellbeing Initiative: Enhancing Service to Others by Enhancing Wellbeing<sup>3</sup>**

The San Diego DA ServeWell initiative is an umbrella of wellbeing supports designed to keep DA employees healthy, engaged, and committed to the mission and ensure we are best accountable to those we're privileged to serve. These include 1) access to the no-cost NDAA Prosecutor Wellbeing App, 2) routine email notifications and reminders about wellbeing resources such as our contracted confidential therapy and Peer Support Programs, 3) routine visits from facility and therapy dogs to our office locations, and 4) voluntary participation in a menu of wellness activities designed to take advantage of the outdoors and the beauty of our region.

Employees are permitted two, four-hour blocks of paid time during the workday to participate in a menu of wellness activities throughout the county with their colleagues. The time spent on DA ServeWell activities is coded as "DA ServeWell leave" within our employee timecard system. Employees are authorized two activities per year and must obtain approval by their supervisor to take the leave.

Examples of the DA ServeWell menu activity items include: walks around San Diego's Mission Bay, nature hikes throughout the San Diego region, beach and park beautification, serving meals at the local senior center, rock painting in Balboa Park, a book club hosted by employees, interacting with horses and puppies at our local animal shelter, stretching and yoga in Coronado, learning to play golf outdoors, playing pickleball outside, and even a barbeque cooking class where competition-level district attorney investigators teach employees the art and science of preparing and cooking (and then eating) barbeque meals.

Additionally, division- or team-specific activities can be built by individual groups that meet the spirit of the initiative. Some examples of those team-developed activities have included walks throughout historical bridges in San Diego, park day with a cross-fit activity designed for all skill levels, and a division-wide pickleball tournament.

Since the program was launched in February 2024, 260 team members have participated in 48 different activity items hosted around the county by 17 different district attorney employees serving as activity ambassadors. Activity ambassadors included team members from each level including our chief deputies, paralegals, support staff, and district attorney investigators. We ask participants to complete a pre- and post-activity survey designed to learn their ideas and inform future menu activities as well as evolve the program based on employee input. The post-activity surveys show a 4.9 of 5 in satisfaction and enhanced connectivity and engagement in the office.

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<sup>3</sup> Contributed by Tracy Prior, Chief Deputy District Attorney, San Diego (CA) District Attorney's Office.

### **Erie County (NY) District Attorney's Office Wellness Committee<sup>4</sup>**

The Erie County (NY) District Attorney's Office created a Wellness Committee in late 2022 when the District Attorney at the time saw the myriad issues his attorneys and staff were facing from their everyday caseload, compounded with the reopening of the office after Covid shutdowns. The Wellness Committee's goal is to offer services, trainings, and other activities to promote the emotional wellbeing and community of the office. The Wellness Committee is comprised of attorneys, support staff, and administration to provide differing perspectives on what wellness means and what needs the staff members have.

Examples of activities that the Wellness Committee have sponsored include: guided meditation sessions, lunchtime learning sessions about stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue, access to the NDAA Prosecutor Wellbeing App, creation of a support group for employees dealing with caregiving for family members, an ice cream social afternoon, a walking club, attending a minor league baseball game, a bowling night, and providing staff with eclipse glasses during the 2024 solar eclipse.

Additionally, the Wellness Committee assisted in renovating the physical office space including creating a Quiet Room for employees who need a break from their desks, new furniture and appliances for the office breakrooms, and the sponsoring of local high school students to create artwork that is hung in the office hallways. Research shows that art can reduce stress and promote wellbeing by calming the mind, encouraging reflection, and creating connection through conversation about it. Improvements to the work environment can be an important part of fostering team wellbeing.

### **Missoula County (MT): Being Intentional About Wellbeing<sup>5</sup>**

Creating a culture where wellbeing is a priority doesn't require a lot of resources if you are intentional about it. The Missoula County (MT) Attorney's Office became mindful of caseload burdens and whether people were using the personal leave time they were accruing. When possible, when someone needed respite, they were moved temporarily into a "recovery" position where they were handling less demanding cases. The office started an employee engagement committee to organize social events and fortified their existing mentoring system by making sure people were paired and that structures were in place that encouraged connecting. They also formed a secondary trauma group involving prosecutor team members, law enforcement, and judges to serve as case-specific trauma response teams.

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<sup>4</sup> Contributed by Brian Dassero, Assistant District Attorney, Erie County (NY) District Attorney's Office.

<sup>5</sup> Contributed by Kirsten Pabst, former Missoula (MT) County Attorney.

# Building a Supportive Culture: Implementing a Peer Support Program<sup>6</sup>

A Peer Support Program is modeled after programs nationwide in the field of law enforcement that are designed to provide an internal resource for employees to deal with the daily struggles and pressures in a hypervigilant profession, by having a trained colleague with whom to consult. Often, a person just needs someone to listen, and to know they are cared about and heard. However, a problem could be much more serious, and a peer supporter can be the bridge to an employee assistance program or seeking professional help.

## What is Peer Support?

When an employee's personal or professional problems are negatively affecting their work, family, or self, a Peer Support Program offers them an opportunity to debrief, and the assistance of a trained colleague with access to appropriate support resources. A key part of this assistance is the fact that it remains confidential, unless information shared indicates a violation of law, ethical responsibilities, or office policy.

## Who are Peer Supporters?

Peer supporters are volunteers from within the office who complete a series of formal trainings and commit to the guidelines established by the office. There is no additional compensation or financial gain offered to be a peer supporter. Along with the tremendous value found in helping a fellow employee, the training provided gives the supporter additional skills and understanding they can apply to their own lives.

A peer supporter is someone who is trusted by others, maintains a good reputation, and has an assignment that would allow some flexibility for peer support duties. A peer supporter is not the office gossip, goofball, or know-it-all. Some offices use an email asking for interest to create a list, or use a strictly peer nomination process, while others look to management to recommend those they feel would be a good fit for the team. Questionnaires may be used, or interviews conducted, depending on the size of the group and the specific requirements. Having a diverse team with people of all backgrounds provides a rich pool of experience, comradery, and understanding from the smallest to the most extensive issues.

### A Peer Support Program is designed to:

- Provide emotional support during and after times of personal or professional crisis to other employees who express a need for assistance
- Promote trust, allow anonymity, and preserve confidentiality for persons using peer supporters within the guidelines of the program
- Develop peer supporters who can identify personal conflicts and provide guidance or referral to professional/alternate sources as required
- Maintain an effective training and response program
- Support those who have had a family tragedy or are dealing with illness

Source: The Counseling Team International  
*Manual and Guidelines*,  
Nancy Bohl-Penrod, Ph.D.

<sup>6</sup> Contributed by Mary Ashley, Deputy District Attorney, San Bernardino County (CA) District Attorney's Office.



An informational meeting should be held with potential candidates to explain what the program is and what will be expected of them. It is recommended that those who may serve on the team complete a basic peer support class that consists of all general aspects of being a peer supporter. Once a person has attended the basic class, it can help the coordinator and the individual decide if they should move forward and become an active member of the team.

### Why Peer Support?

Most people are unfamiliar with or mistrustful of employee assistance programs and are afraid to share their struggles with supervisors. People generally feel more comfortable and safe reaching out for help to a peer whom they trust. The peer supporter is not a counselor, therapist, or mental health professional. A peer supporter is there to actively listen, not offer personal opinions or instruct. A peer supporter is the link through which someone might feel secure in making an initial call for counseling.

The key to an internal peer program is having peer supporters who understand the employees' jobs, atmosphere, and experiences within the profession. Peer programs have done well in the fields of law enforcement, emergency, fire, and first responders because—to be blunt—cops trust cops. We are all more likely to trust someone who has walked in our shoes and appreciates the demands we face. Without personal understanding, it just doesn't work the same way. When a prosecutor loses a major child abuse trial, the support from another prosecutor who has been in that situation and can empathize is the key to valuable support. Often, we rely heavily upon our victim advocates to assist not only our victims, but our staff members as well. But, who is there for the advocates? What happens when an entire organization is impacted by an event?

As managers in an office, we are compelled to think about risk management, liability, and the duties owed to our employees. Budgets now must factor in all of the money that will be needed after the damage is done—stress leaves, disability, ongoing mental health costs, alcohol and drug treatment, depression, job dissatisfaction, disruptions in the workplace, lawsuits, and so on. What about working on the front end—as a prevention and intervention tool rather than a way to mop up the mess after the spill. Can we stop *some* of these problems before it is too late? For the most part, the answer is yes. Peer support is real and demonstrates an office's commitment to employees' competence, safety, wellbeing, and resilience.

A program can be designed, customized, and tailored to meet the needs of any organization. Every office has its own culture and set of personalities. However, the issues are human issues and are often the same. When people walk through the door in the morning to work, every single person on any given day brings a piece of something that is going on in their lives. Whether it be a marital issue, coping with an illness, bereavement, caring for an elderly parent, grief, alcoholism, handling a child having issues at school, financial crisis, or depression, it's there on every level. From elected on down, we each battle our own difficulties, and it does impact others whether we realize it or not. It does not take a major catastrophe to know that people need each other and want ongoing support from their organization.

Peer support can work in any size organization, but it can be particularly effective in a larger organization where not every employee knows the others. If any office is too small to have a "team," the training remains invaluable for staff in their professional and personal lives. In environments where there is often change and movement, people can even be more comfortable speaking to a member of the office they do not normally interact with every day or is not already a friend or manager.

### How Do You Start Your Own Program?

Starting a Peer Support Program begins from the top down. The elected/appointed leader and executive staff must first invest resources and support. A coordinator/team leader must be prepared to do the initial work. A written guideline/protocol/policy must be drafted and put into place—example models exist in numerous law enforcement, first responder, and prosecutor offices in many states. These guidelines are essential to make all aspects of the peer support program clear, transparent, and accessible. Many states now have laws that govern peer support and can be incorporated into the policy. These laws, often in the state government code, provide rules of confidentiality and the exceptions, liability protection, and subjects for the necessary education and training. Once the office has decided to create a team and drafted the guidelines, then recruitment of interested volunteers is key. While many people may be interested in “helping” others, not everyone is suited to be a peer supporter.

**Training.** Volunteers must be trained. It is possible that someone within a partner law enforcement agency has conducted this training and will be willing to offer it to your office. Alternatively, you may be able to bring in trainers from another prosecutor office that has started a program. After members are trained and selected, there should be several meetings together as a group. It is important to build trust among team members and get to know one another better. It may take a few months for everyone to feel comfortable and practice the skills learned in the initial training. Peer supporters are taught active listening skills, suicide prevention techniques, and when they must break confidentiality in an emergency. Role playing and mock scenarios help develop those skills. Within a few months, an advanced peer support class should be attended to polish the basic skills and take them even further. Throughout each year, some kind of training should be done with the team, whether in person, online, virtually, or attending a conference that focuses on wellbeing and/or peer support.

**Record keeping.** Once your team is trained and ready to begin, a record keeping system should be developed and put into place. While peer support is primarily confidential, having a way to keep track of time spent, number of contacts, if referrals are being made for professional help, and the general type of problems is helpful in determining the utilization of the program. Peer supporters do not take written notes or record conversations. An office, along with their technology department if available, can create a simple way to document individual peer support contacts and events when they occur without violating confidentiality. At the end of each year, a review should be done to assess how often peer support is used and the areas identified of concern and for potential training.

**Counseling service.** The next step is creating a relationship with a competent counseling service. Having a contract directly with therapists who understand the nature of law enforcement, first responder, and prosecution is essential. Most law enforcement agencies have contracts with services for a variety of reasons, including clearance to return to duty after a shooting incident. While the services are not unlimited, they provide the gateway to getting professional help much faster than a standard employee assistance program with a city or county. Many of these specially trained counselors can make 24/7 crisis contact available. This does not come free of charge, but it is a huge investment in the wellbeing and safety of your staff. Some teams are fortunate to have a counselor as part of their coordinator team. However, at the very least, maintaining a current and accurate list of counseling resources to provide immediately to a person in need is important.

**Program launch and promotion.** Several hurdles to success may be getting the word out about the new Peer Support Program and getting employees to trust and utilize it. The leader of your organization may want to announce the creation of the program and encouragement to use it through email, internal newsletter, or an office event. Posters, flyers, and contact cards can be placed in break rooms

and appropriate communal areas. Hosting a social event during work hours that features information, refreshments, and an opportunity to meet and greet the peer support team is very effective, as is providing a guest speaker on a topic such as mindfulness, meditation, fitness, nutrition, addiction, resiliency, etc.

Peer support team members may have polo shirts or jackets that can identify them at a crisis scene or an office event. Some teams have logos, note cards, stress balls, and other identifying items or tokens signifying peer support.

Some offices may be able to obtain or purchase a license for a wellness app such as Cordico, which provides resources, articles, information, crisis intervention, and how to reach someone on the peer support team.

We know from the use of facility dogs that go to court with victims what a huge impact they have in relieving stress and helping victims through difficult interviews and testimony. While these dogs can provide comfort for the staff, their primary function is to support victims at court. Having a peer support dog and handler on a team is an incredible resource, albeit rare due to the expense and long-term commitment.

It can take years before a peer support team becomes well known in the office as well as accepted, trusted, and utilized. Once enough people have had positive experiences either directly with peer supporters, through office peer events, or with a counselor, the word spreads that it is legitimate and helpful. A program that maintains its integrity through confidentiality will eventually become successful.

### Use of Peer Support following a Critical Incident

When an unexpected incident, such as a death, affects your office, it can be difficult to know how to respond to distraught employees. It can be a huge help for a supervisor to be able to call on peer support for assistance. Your Peer Support Program can arrange for team training in Group Crisis Intervention and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) so they are able to engage in debriefings for staff and assist other agencies in crisis.<sup>7</sup>

Peer supporters can respond to a location; set up a “debriefing” room; provide water, tissues, and hopefully a facility dog; talk with employees about what happened; and listen to their pain. Peer supporters can refer people for professional grief counseling, if needed, and later follow up with how they are responding to the crisis. Or, the Peer Support Program can arrange for a professional counselor to be available on site to speak with those in need.

When a major incident occurs, it is imperative to provide a forum for discussion and stress release. A managed, structured discussion is far more effective than letting employees cope individually. Providing advice to employees about how they can expect to react and ways to cope strengthens resiliency within the staff. And, ongoing access to a peer support team long after the incident is over is essential to persons in crisis or distress. When the immediate condolences, cards, flowers, care baskets, and texts fall off, they may be left alone and feeling forgotten.

When an organization has a peer support team trained in CISM, it is able to “lend” peer supporters to other agencies when they are in need, often giving care to the caregivers when they are overwhelmed or personally involved in the tragedy.

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<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey T. Mitchell, Ph.D., CCISM, University of Maryland, International Critical Incident Stress Foundation

### ► Wellbeing Program Success Story

#### San Bernardino County (CA) District Attorney's Peer Support Team<sup>8</sup>

The San Bernardino County (CA) District Attorney's (SBCDA) Peer Support Team, which started in 2015, consists of fifteen to twenty members from all levels and roles within the office who attend an initial 3-day class training and then participate in ongoing trainings annually. Peer supporters are bound by a memorandum of understanding where they agree to rules of confidentiality.

The team meets quarterly and responds to crisis situations as needed. Office members can contact peer supporters through the Cordico Wellness App, by phone or email, or in person.

The peer team hosts annual events to offer information about the wellness app and counseling services available. Highlights include "Rootpeer Floats," Nachos & Peers, Cocoa & Cookies with the Peer Support Elves, Ice Cream Social & Peers, and Fall into Fitness. The program is in the process of having a peer support K-9 join their team.

When issues become more than the peer support program can handle, employees can be referred by SBCDA to counseling through a contract the office maintains with The Counseling Team International, that specializes in treating law enforcement, first responders, and criminal justice professionals.

The SBCDA peer support team members are called upon by other agencies to provide services, and they have been deployed to numerous different partner agencies to offer help.

Both the peer supporters and those receiving support have great things to say about the program. In a recent exit interview, a retiring peer supporter stated, "The training provided helped me both personally and professionally. I learned different listening techniques to be a better listener. I also learned how to guide peers to find their own solutions to their issues, keeping my bias and opinion aside. Working with my colleagues gave me a new understanding and profound respect for them and the work they do in the District Attorney's Office. We had supervisors, advocates, attorneys, investigators, and upper management part of the team and it brought to light the needs of our peers, and seeing the unity of all involved was uplifting. Giving employees of the department trusted colleagues to be able to talk to showed that the department really cares for the employees' mental health and wellbeing."

An employee who benefited from the program commented, "(I) never would have sought counseling but for the information provided by the peer support coordinator." The employee, who had suffered a trauma, described the counseling as "life-saving," helping her overcome anxiety and return to work as a productive and positive employee.

These stories go on and on, from the people inside and outside the support team.

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<sup>8</sup> Contributed by Mary Ashley, Deputy District Attorney, San Bernardino County (CA) District Attorney's Office.

# Building a Supportive Culture: Bring in Trained Professionals

While, as managers, we can encourage and support the development of wellbeing programs and peer support teams within our office, it is important we remember that our training and experience is not as a mental health provider or someone who has treated individuals who have suffered from trauma. Being able to recognize when our team members are struggling and need access to professionally trained providers can be a daunting task for managers. It is also appropriate that we maintain a proper boundary with our employees. Ultimately, our responsibility is to the office as a whole and our community. At times, this can dictate that we are not able to provide the support an employee needs.

In order to provide access to assistance from someone who is a mental health provider, prosecutor offices across the country rely on various resources. Sometimes, the best we can do is provide a list of reputable therapists in the area that have experience working with professionals exposed to trauma, or refer an employee to an employee assistance program. Some offices have begun to go a step further by bringing in a licensed professional to provide some private sessions for staff members, or bringing on board someone who has this professional background and will be part of the administration or human resource team. For those offices that are moving in that direction, having appropriate memorandums of understanding and policies in place that address the manner in which confidential information obtained during the therapeutic relationship will be handled is crucial.

## ► Wellbeing Program Success Stories

### **Maricopa County (AZ) Attorney's Office Wellness Trainer<sup>9</sup>**

The Maricopa County (AZ) Attorney's Office has created a position within its agency for a Wellness Trainer. Currently, the individual serving in this role is a licensed professional counselor with three decades of experience working within the legal system as a therapist, forensic interviewer, expert witness, educator, and author. The primary goal of this position is to support and enhance each employee's capacity to reach their full potential. To accomplish this goal, the Wellness Trainer creates a variety of presentations and hosts group discussions on topics related to mental, physical, emotional, financial, and spiritual wellbeing. The foundations of these interactive presentations and discussions are derived from the Wellness Trainer's professional experience and are tailored to meet the specific needs of individual positions within the office. Examples of these trainings have included:

- The Biology of an Ethical Prosecutor
- The Limbic System of an Ethical Prosecutor
- Cognitions of an Ethical Prosecutor
- Neurodiversity: The Untapped Potential
- Navigating Crucial Conversations: Effective Communication in the Legal Field
- Resilience and Adaptability: Thriving Through Chaos
- Engagement & Communication: Leadership by Design

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<sup>9</sup> Contributed by Chris Schopen, Wellness Trainer, Maricopa County (AZ) Attorney's Office.



Another important role of the Wellness Trainer is connecting one-on-one with employees at all levels. Confidential sessions are provided to promote a sense of trust and dependability, foster agency, and build coping skills that guide employees as they face personal and professional challenges. While therapeutic sessions are not conducted in the workplace, the emotional support and resources given to employees are tailored to assuage stress levels, decrease burnout or compassion fatigue, and increase resilience.

Additionally, the Wellness Trainer collaborates with intra- and interagency experts to host informative training sessions, fostering a sense of belonging and appreciation by increasing employee awareness of available in-house benefits and countywide resources. Further, in partnership with the Director of Diversity Programs, creative and engaging events are hosted throughout the year to encourage relaxation, promote connection, and increase attention and focus.

### **Mohave County (AZ) Attorney's Office Special Victim Unit Check-Ins<sup>10</sup>**

For those prosecutors assigned to handling special victim cases such as child abuse, the Mohave County (AZ) Attorney's Office has developed a system of continual mental health check-ins with a clinical psychologist who has extensive experience working with first responders and others who experience exposure to secondary trauma. In setting up this resource, the County Attorney identified trained professionals with experience in secondary trauma who would be a good match for the team and worked with them to make sure the goals of the initiative were clear.

Additionally, an internal personnel policy was developed setting forth specific requirements for those handling special victims' cases. The check-ins include a wellness check within three to four months after starting in the unit, followed by recurring check-ins every nine months while in the unit. Upon leaving the unit, within three months, prosecutors and advocates participate in an exit wellness check.

Team members have found this to be an important outlet where they can debrief about the very difficult details of their cases. As one prosecutor participant stated, ". . . I go from talking with kids about the worst parts of their lives, to getting my own kids at school, and having our evening at home like everything is normal. It's a weight that gets heavy quick. So, having a safe space to just get it out of my head was immensely helpful."

The office has recently expanded this resource to include all victim advocates.

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<sup>10</sup> Contributed by Amanda Claerhout, Chief Criminal Deputy County Attorney, Mohave County (AZ) Attorney's Office.

# Building a Supportive Culture: Responding to Crisis within the Office<sup>11</sup>

Prosecutor offices are not immune to having tragedy hit within. Whether it be a car accident, suicide, or violent crime, we can never be fully prepared for the death of a coworker. However, there are steps that leaders can take to make the experience more manageable for employees. Developing a plan or at least thinking through these things in advance will go a long way in helping you provide the support your team needs in this time of crisis.

## In the Moment

- If the staff member lives in your community and the event implicates your professional duties and obligations, your office will likely have a conflict of interest in handling the matter. Making appropriate notifications to required parties so that a determination regarding conflicts can be made, and someone can be assigned to handle the investigation, should be done at the start.
- Bad news travels fast. Make sure to account for how you will notify your staff as soon as possible (i.e. via email or in person).
- Account for how the news will impact your staff. If the event is not during work hours, anticipate that those closest to the person and/or those with the same duties will want to gather. Your leadership team should be present to support them. Consider how you will address their reporting back to duty (which may be different than the general staff).
- You should have a Line of Duty Death Funeral Policy in place. Even if this incident is not a line of duty death, you can use parts of the policy as a playbook.
- The leadership team should prepare to visit the family within hours of the event. You should consider taking along the deceased's closest associates from work if it would be helpful (i.e. academy classmate, union leadership). Be prepared that family members may ask you to break the news to other family members.
- The leadership team should be present when staff at large arrives to work. If the event happens on a weekend or at night, you should consider opening up your office so that individuals may gather. Encourage leadership (official and informal leaders) to be present to console and commiserate with others.
- Prepare a public announcement. Plan out how you will notify public officials who need to know. Make sure they are notified prior to (or at least simultaneously with) the public announcement.
- Appoint someone to run point for the outpouring of support you will get from the community.

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<sup>11</sup> Contributed by Hon. Jennifer Webb-McRae, Cumberland County (New Jersey) Prosecutor and NDAA President-Elect.

### In the Days Immediately Following the Event

- Check in with your team. Share how you are feeling. Don't be afraid to be vulnerable.
- Call in agency chaplains if you have them. Having crisis intervention trained chaplains is very helpful. Chaplains know how to sit in silence, which is sometimes invaluable after a traumatic event.
- Organize a debrief session for the staff. It should be voluntary, not mandatory. The debrief should be run by experienced facilitators. If you don't have them on staff, check with your partner agencies including at the state and federal level.
- Create spaces and opportunities where individuals can speak with resiliency trained professionals privately.
- Provide staff with resources they can access offline if they are struggling with grief.
- Make sure to regularly check on those at the office who were closest to the deceased person.
- Consider bringing in emotional support animals in the days leading up to the funeral.
- If charges are filed regarding the tragic loss of your coworker, make sure to notify all staff as soon as possible so they hear about the charges from leadership.

### Prepare a Fitting Honor

- Consult your Line of Duty Death Funeral Policy. Even when the death is not a line of duty death, there may be pieces that you would like to consider (i.e. color guard, detectives guarding casket; assigning someone to be a liaison with the family).
- Consult with the union to see what they would like to do to honor the deceased.
- Designate a point person to help organize any pieces of the funeral in which the agency will participate.
- Consult with the family. Remember to always honor their wishes but be ready to share that there may be a large outpouring of support which must be considered (i.e. larger venue, longer hours for viewing, procession to burial site, etc.). You should have a plan of how the agency and/or union would like to participate before you have this meeting.
- If the funeral is on a weekday, consider how you will allow staff to pay their respects but keep the office operational (i.e. no court sessions, mutual aid from other agencies, etc.).
- Consider doing something with the staff that signifies unity (i.e. everyone wears black, a particular color of ties for the men and flowers for the ladies). Consider paying respects together in a procession and/or sitting in a reserved section.
- Consider how to receive dignitaries at the funeral (i.e. government and/or union officials, professional counterparts, etc.).
- Consider releasing a follow up agency statement on the date of the funeral.
- As the leader of the agency, be sure to write personal thank you notes to each entity that provided support leading up to the funeral.

### Prepare for the Aftermath

- Having a Wellbeing Committee prior to suffering a tragedy is very helpful. If you don't have one, plan now. The Wellbeing Committee will have contacts with emotional support animal handlers, resiliency professionals, etc., if you allow them to organize before a tragedy.
- Consider periodic visits from emotional support animals.
- Remind staff of wellbeing supports on site (i.e. wellness room, gym).
- Intentionally consider how you will support the family in the coming months (i.e. meals, check-ins, connection to resources, help with processing benefits, etc.).
- Recognize that healing takes time. Everybody processes grief differently and healing happens on a continuum. Take moments to remind staff of available resources and encourage everyone to support each other.
- Periodically check in on the deceased's closest coworkers.

### Honor the Legacy

- Consider placing a memorial plaque in your building.
- Consider what you will do for the first anniversary of the deceased's death (i.e. memorial service, room dedication, scholarship, moment of silence).
- Allow those who were closest to the person to participate in the planning of memorial activities.
- Consult with the family and invite them to the memorial activities.
- Invite the appropriate public officials to the memorial activities.

#### Cumberland County (NJ) Prosecutor's Office

The Cumberland County (NJ) Prosecutor's Office (Bridgeton, NJ) lost Detective Sergeant Monica Mosley by way of a tragic homicide on October 15, 2024. In the days following that tragic death, the resources on preparing for crisis that they had created thinking they would never need them were the ones that kept them upright during their time of collective grief. Team members took advantage of debrief strategies, access to resiliency officers, and frequent check-ins by team leads. These initiatives continue to carry them through this unfathomable experience. They continue to grieve the loss of Detective Mosley but honor her legacy by focusing on how she lived and not how she tragically died. #CCPOProud, #CCPOOneFamily, #CCPOStrong

# Conclusion

For most of us, our work becomes a central part of our who we are. We spend more time in our roles as prosecutors than we do in other aspects of our lives. While there is tremendous personal fulfillment to be gained by the help we provide to victims and our communities, we cannot afford to be oblivious to the ways in which the difficult aspects of our job take a personal toll. As leaders and managers, we owe a special duty to our teams to support their resilience. Not only is it the right thing to do for them, it also will result in making sure that they are able to best serve the public over the long run.

There is a vast world of resources on the topics of secondary trauma stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout, and how to combat them and build resilience. It is our hope that this manual has at least introduced these concepts within the framework of prosecutors' offices in a way that sets you on a quest to learn more, while providing some useful starting places to better equip your offices.

The National District Attorneys Association, through its Wellbeing Committee, is committed to taking this journey with you by continuing to provide resources, trainings, and information on related topics.

## Still trying to figure out where to start?

There is a deep well of materials available on the topics of secondary trauma, burnout, wellbeing, and resiliency. Below, we have assembled a list of books that fellow prosecutor leaders have found helpful.

- *Dare to Lead* by Brené Brown
- *Daring Greatly* by Brené Brown
- *Deep Human Connection: Why We Need It More than Anything Else* by Stephen Cope
- *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being* by Martin Seligman
- *The Let Them Theory* by Mel Robbins
- *Right Thing, Right Now* by Ryan Holiday
- *Set Boundaries, Find Peace: A Guide to Reclaiming Yourself* by Nedra Glover Tawwab
- *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain* by John J. Ratey and Eric Hagerman
- *Stop Missing Your Life: How to be Deeply Present in an Un-Present World* by Cory Muscara
- *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* by Bessel van der Kolk
- *The Great Work of Your Life: A Guide for the Journey to Your True Calling* by Stephen Cope
- *The Power of Moments: Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact* by Chip and Dan Heath
- *The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles* by Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatte
- *Thriving Through Chaos: Survival Gear for Criminal Justice Professionals—Staying Well in the Trenches of Trauma* by Kirsten Pabst
- *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others* by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky

## What other resources are out there?

The U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime has developed an online [Vicarious Trauma Toolkit](#) for those serving victims, which includes a searchable Compendium of Resources complete with research literature, videos, podcasts, training curriculum, and policies from the field.



