Moving Towards Organizational Best Practice

# Operations: Training and Development

Street intervention workers repeatedly highlighted the benefit of standardized training available through Metropolitan Family Service’s “Peace Academy”. In the Academy they receive over 40 hours of training on various dimensions of street intervention practice that is eligible for credit in the City of Chicago Community Colleges. The noted that some of the content of Peace Academy covers trauma, where they learn about PTSD and associated symptoms. Beyond the Peace Academy, however, study participants’ responses varied when it came to ongoing training and professional development. Some received additional training on a variety of topics (not trauma related) made available by their organizations. Others received no additional training but reflected a desire to receive more information and opportunities for growth.

The reflections of street intervention workers are consistent with the observations of supervisors interviewed. First, supervisors reflected there is no clearly defined career pathway in street intervention work. Much effort has been allocated to developing a pipeline of street intervention worker (for example, via the FLIP program), with little thought given to how to develop workers once they are employed so they may become supervisors or assume other positions in nonprofit organizations.

*“Street outreach to me is not effective if you’ve closed off the door for the next generation to be coming in. You know what I mean. But-but you have to have a balance, um, and an exit ramp. So, you know, we’re bringing new people in that are getting new skill sets.”*

Indicative of the lack of profession development for street intervention workers, some study participants reflected that there is no “off ramp” from street intervention work which may disadvantage both workers and their organizations. Street intervention workers may get ‘stuck’ in their roles, where they feel like they do not have professional skills or other career opportunities available to them beyond street intervention work. This disadvantages workers as it could exacerbate burnout and impact their engagement with clients. This may be a precursor to a moral crisis, where workers feel ‘used’ by their organization with little support for the harm they have experienced.

*“Like we’re pushing people to work, you know, when violence is happening. So, summertime, we might want you to work two, three o’clock in the morning, if you’re 40-plus years old and you got a family at home, you know what I mean? Do you even wanna be out, you know, stomping the streets, trying to talk people out of shooting? You know what I mean? Like they’ll do it because they—I think a lot of people, they still have a passion for it, and they don’t really see, uh, the alternative where they can still earn a living... I’ve seen a lot of outreach workers that really need an exit ramp.*

This situation also disadvantages community-based organizations. Many nonprofits who employ street intervention workers are community-based and hire workers from within the same community they are located in. Street intervention workers are part of the public safety infrastructure of their community; by not investing in their development, organizations may be undermining the violence reduction potential of their programs.

# Food for Thought

* + After orientation, what kinds of professional development opportunities are available for street intervention staff?
  + Does our organization provide opportunities for upward mobility of street intervention workers (promotions, pay raises, etc.)?
  + What mechanisms does our organization have in place to identify opportunities for professional growth among workers? Is this a regular part of supervision and performance evaluations? Are supervisors trained on how to facilitate the growth and development of street intervention workers?