

Friends of NAFI/NFI



Finding and Engaging Committed Employees

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President's Welcome

Dear Friends,

The challenge of finding and keeping committed employees is one that NAFI/NFI has faced several times throughout our 45 years of existence. During these trying periods, there have been conditions that, when they happen simultaneously, create a kind of perfect storm. They occur when the economy is going strong and unemployment is low - a situation that we are currently experiencing. A strain that complicates this further is that private non-profit salaries lag behind state salaries for similar positions, making it difficult to attract new staff. Another challenge is a lack of public appreciation for the critical services we provide, often fueled by a sentiment that government spending is too high. Too often, this fiscally conservative viewpoint is accompanied by a political shift toward punishment versus rehabilitation or resentment for those who are court involved or in need of support.



Unfortunately, history has shown that these circumstances cause people to blame rather than offer help to those who are suffering. There is a failure to feel empathy and have understanding. When this happens, legislatures often cut funds to human services, forcing us to do more with less and lag behind in the area of compensation. Without adequate funding, we experience a manpower crisis with serious consequences for our most vulnerable populations. It then becomes the burden of the provider community to correct this imbalance. It creates extra pressure on programs and services across the human services field to find ways to attract employees and retain them. We have worked hard to negotiate discounted college tuition and reimbursement for our employees, as well as progressive health and benefit programs. With our strong Normative communities, countless staff have rallied, doing increasingly more in order to serve without sacrificing quality of care.

In these very challenging times, it has been remarkable and admirable that managers at NAFI/NFI have continued to find creative solutions - including creating supportive environments for staff and promoting individual learning and growth. A strong indication of the successes we've experienced in creating a good environment is that NAFI Connecticut and NFI North have been named as top places to work for several years in a row. In this edition, we highlight some of the ways we meet our challenges head on as we continue to find and retain committed employees.

My best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Yitzhak Bakal".

Dr. Yitzhak Bakal

Increasing Retention Starts *Before* the First Interview

By Catherine Allen, Clinical Director, Enhanced Outpatient Services, NAFI Rhode Island

Enhanced Outpatient Services (EOS) at NAFI RI is a home and community-based program providing therapeutic evidence-informed assessment and intervention to families of children aged two to twenty who are at risk of hospitalization or out-of-home placement due to behavioral, emotional or psychiatric conditions. Treatment focuses on building sustainable parenting skills to keep children thriving in their homes. The services are funded by state insurance and include psychiatric evaluation and treatment when diagnostic clarification or medication review is necessary for treatment success.

Like every program at NAFI, EOS strives to recruit and retain excellent staff through word-of-mouth advertising, providing stimulating trainings and using a financially sustainable system of reward for strong performance. At EOS our philosophy is that we "begin as we mean to go on" - using the basic operating principles of the program, starting with the first email in response to a resume. Those principles include use of feedback to create a Normative culture of openness and safety, focus on isomorphic relationship-building across every level of the program, and providing structure, warmth and attunement as necessary criteria for staff satisfaction and retention.

It is our belief that strong relationships at any level (between caregiver and child, clinician and client, clinician and supervisor, supervisor and administrator) are built in three levels - beginning with interest, moving to respect, and culminating with warm positive regard (liking). For that reason, when I respond by email to an applicant's first submission, I find something about their resume that interests me and I comment on that. I want the applicant to feel that he/she is someone who has caught my attention, whose career path matters to me.

During our preliminary 20-minute phone interview, I make it a priority to find something that I admire in the story they tell me, and I let them know what it is and why. When we meet in person for the first time, warmth is my first priority. I want them to feel at ease because I believe this is a prerequisite to genuine interaction. Several times during the interview, I give them feedback about something immediate. Usually this is about their level of nervousness - how it has decreased, or how I see it manifested in their style or behavior. I want the applicant to know that I am attuning to them from the very beginning, that I will be noticing and pointing out areas of deficit as well as areas of strength, and that these areas of deficit, even in an interview, are *interesting* rather than disqualifying. It is *how* we talk about these areas that predicts whether the candidate will be a good fit with EOS. I also ask the candidate several times during the interview for feedback - about how the interview is going for them, and what they are thinking about our interaction. These kinds of conversations seem to be far more predictive of longevity in the EOS program than finding out what they have done, or intend to do, with their professional lives.

During the course of a clinician's tenure at EOS, their mentor (a hugely important component in their acculturation process) and supervisor are trained to follow the same principles that they are teaching the clinicians to use with the clients and families - provide reliable structure, work hard at attunement by asking for feedback, and exhibit appropriate warmth and genuine positive regard. While we cannot hope to compensate staff enough to stay once they are licensed and have many more options, we are proud that most of them do stick out the two years between graduation and licensure, and go out into the "real world" to improve mental health care across the state.

Creating Leadership Paths Through the College for America Program

By Kim Maynard, Development & Marketing Coordinator, NFI North

Creating a culture of learning in the workplace has always been a powerful strategy for employee retention. Data is accumulating that demonstrates that when companies invest in benefits, consistent schedules, and good training, employees are more motivated, take more pride in their work, and have more ownership over their responsibilities.

By establishing a culture of learning - an environment in which individual growth is actively encouraged - organizations can help employees feel more engaged at work, which has a real effect on the organization's ability to fulfill its mission. Engaged employees have an emotional commitment to their organizations, leading to greater productivity and higher employee

retention. Studies show that workers are eager to learn, which is why NAFI/NFI decided to partner with the College for America program at Southern New Hampshire University.

The College for America program is designed to make higher education accessible to a broader portion of the population. At College for America, there are no semesters. Instead, students sign up for a six-month term for a flat fee. During that time, students can work through projects as quickly as they are able in order to achieve an Associate's or a Bachelor's degree. Students work on real-world projects to develop relevant skills and knowledge that can be applied directly in the workplace.

For Caroline McCarthy, Assistant Program Director at NFI North's Bridge Crossing & Dodge



Caroline McCarthy

House School, the College for America program was affordable and fit into her schedule. It also provided her with the opportunity to advance in her career. Caroline joined NFI North in 1998 and knew that if she wanted to advance to a higher position than a Shift Supervisor, she would need to get a degree. "I started with zero college credits and obtained my Associate's Degree in nine and a half months," said Caroline. "I started the Bachelor's program in August 2018 and I am on target to graduate in May 2020, which means I was able to go from zero college credits to a Bachelor's Degree in two years and nine months, while still working full-time. I recommend this program to anyone who is looking for their degree at an affordable price. The work can be difficult at times, however, it is very rewarding."

The College for America program represents an investment in employees and the future of the company. "One thing we love about the College for America competency-based approach is that our employees tell us how relevant the learning is to their everyday jobs and lives," said Paul Dann, Ph.D., Executive Director of NFI North. "We know that the degree projects often closely mirror real-life situations, so the problem-solving and communications skills employees are gaining are directly applicable to their work. It's satisfying to know that our education investments are paying off by helping improve employee lives and the quality of our services."

The Multi-Generational Workforce: Implications for Recruiting & Retention

By Jackie Ross, Human Resource Director, NFI Massachusetts

Our current workplace makeup is making history. It is projected that in 2020 the landscape of our workforce will include five generations as follows:

- Traditionalists (ages 71-89)
- Baby Boomers (ages 54-70)
- Generation X (ages 34-53)
- Generation Y also known as "Millennials" (ages 21-33)
- Generation Z (20 and under - the newest arrivals)

Although no one should be pigeonholed within their generational group, there are some common characteristics that exist within each age range regarding their work styles and preferences. Being aware of these differences may help us to be sensitive to the different motivations and incentives required to recruit and retain, although we should never allow these general trends to degenerate into stereotypes. Within each generation, individuals vary even more than they do across generations, so there is no substitute for learning as much as we can about each of our team members and potential recruits.

The following shows the different concerns across our workforce:

Older employees are concerned about:	Younger employees are concerned about:
My paycheck	My purpose
My satisfaction	My development
My boss	My coach
My annual review	My on-going conversations
My weaknesses	My strengths
My job	My life

So, what does all this mean for leadership within organizations and how we connect employees across all generations? Our senior leadership needs to be careful not to be too judgmental of what the younger workforce is seeking; true engagement means meeting people where they are and embracing the diversity of thought that new ways of thinking and working bring. We can learn from and be respectful of one another, as each generation brings strengths and challenges, especially when applied to an industry where the work cannot all be done from the comfort of a home office. It is even more important that we develop and build communities where all members are engaged, voices are heard and contributions celebrated.

NAFI/NFI has long been ahead of the curve thanks to the elements that are captured within the Normative approach. We have been focused on uncovering and leveraging individual motivation in our supervisory skills classes for decades; however, the current environment requires us to continue to stretch our mindsets and shift our ways of leading and managing. The wide generational spread and the call from our workforce is commanding our evolution. Let's both rise to the challenge and be ahead of the game!

NFI Massachusetts Hosts Legislative Breakfast

By Lydia Todd, Executive Director, NFI Massachusetts



Dennis Everett (left) speaks during a recent legislative breakfast.

On September 27, 2019, NFI Massachusetts hosted a legislative breakfast along with six sister organizations - Bridgewell, Centerboard, CLASS/Lifelinks, Northeast Arc, KEY and Wayside. The breakfast was held to gain additional support for two bills that are in the legislature now: student loan repayment for provider employees and wage equity.

More than 140 people attended including staff and clients along with some family members. Two dozen legislators were invited and eight were in attendance. Three staff - all who also have lived experience with the system - spoke about the value of the human service field and the need for staff to make a living wage. NFI's own Dennis Everett, pictured above, described how amazing it was to go from being a client to an assistant program director followed by the disappointment of needing to leave the work that he loves in order to support his growing family.

Click below to see a short video of Lydia talking about the critical need to raise wages.



NFI MA Executive Director Lydia Todd - Regarding Wages

Legislation gains momentum!

On October 7, 2019, Massachusetts Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders announced that the student loan repayment bill we have been lobbying for will be going through. Details and timing are yet to be determined, but in short this will allow employees who make under \$50,000/year to receive student loan payments of up to \$150/month for up to 48 months. It is our hope that this will reduce turnover and provide a valuable incentive and benefit to our staff. Employee tenure is directly correlated with positive client outcomes. Here's what our consumers are saying:

"I am so happy seeing the same staff; I feel much safer." - Client

"You worked with my oldest child and am so happy the same people are now working with my youngest." - Parent

Massachusetts is also entertaining legislation that will make it possible for provider employees who do similar work with the same clients as their state employee counterparts to be comparably paid. If approved, this bill will be very expensive to implement, and may need to be staged in over years, but it is the right thing to do from a justice and client care perspective. As it stands now, provider employees are often recruited into similar but more lucrative state jobs, meaning clients in group homes experience a lot of turnover. This situation does not support what we know about permanency and the need for clients to have as few caregivers as possible in order to forge lasting, supportive relationships.

For more information on these two bills, visit the Massachusetts Council of Human Service Providers website by clicking [HERE](#).

November 11th is Veterans Day
*Thank you for your service,
Veterans!*



Did You Know?

- Paul Dann, Ph.D., Executive Director of NFI North recently co-authored a new textbook: [An Introduction to Human Services: Policy and Practice, 9th Edition](#) (Schram, Mandell, Dann & Peterson, 2020). This text is written as an introduction to the human services profession and shows "how history, politics, and the economy shape social welfare programs and policies." Click [HERE](#) for more details. Congratulations Dr. Dann!
- In the past, there were times when the need for staff was so great, we ended up looking overseas. We successfully waged recruitment campaigns in Canada, England and the Caribbean!



2019 Conference Edition
*Highlights from our 45th Anniversary
Celebration!*

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