



Eric J. Holcomb, Governor  
Eric Miller, Director

*"Children will live in safe, healthy and supportive families and communities."*

*If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, call the Child Abuse & Neglect Hotline at (800) 800-5556.*

## **DCS' Worker2Worker program provides peer support, mentoring to help improve lives of Indiana child welfare workers**

**INDIANAPOLIS (July 12, 2024)** – The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS), in partnership with the National Center for Peer Support and Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care, has launched an innovative peer support service to help its staff manage the daily challenges of child welfare work.

The Worker2Worker Indiana program is designed to provide wellness support to staff. The program offers a free and confidential hotline to better support frontline DCS staff, who routinely experience highly stressful situations where the welfare of children is at stake. The program offers peer support, on-call mental health clinicians and provider referrals, in addition to wellness- and resilience-building events for all DCS workers. Importantly, the hotline is staffed by retired DCS workers who have been trained as peer counselors and understand and relate to those experiences.

"Our case workers wake up every day and choose to help families and children during their most challenging times," said DCS Chief Deputy Director and Senior Advisor Sarah Sailors. "Our staff are our most valuable resource, and it's essential that they have the support they need to feel their best – and, in turn, do their best."

Child welfare workers are often faced with challenging circumstances and exposure to trauma, which often leaves them vulnerable to absorbing the distress of the children and families with whom they interact. This results in a form of trauma called [secondary traumatic stress \(STS\)](#). Up to 50 percent of child welfare workers nationally are at high risk of STS, or other related conditions such as post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD).

The retirees staffing the Worker2Worker hotline represent more than 130 years of collective experience in serving children and families.

"For 40 years, I never put myself first. The last few years of my career, I started advocating for my staff to practice self-care. Worker2Worker Indiana allows me to offer that to current DCS workers," said Susan Lesko, a retired DCS staff member who now serves as a Worker2Worker Indiana peer counselor.

Cherie Castellano, program director for the National Center for Peer Support, commended Indiana for recognizing the importance of supporting its child welfare workforce.

"The Indiana DCS staff are unsung heroes who selflessly serve families in their communities and deserve this culturally competent peer connection to support their self-care," she said. "We see Indiana DCS



workers often as first responders who require innovative trauma and crisis response services to sustain their well-being and effectiveness in their efforts.”

Since January, the Worker2Worker Indiana program has hosted 70 trainings and events with more than 500 participants. Following the launch in April, more than 120 calls have been made to the helpline. Learn more about W2W Indiana [here](#).

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