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The COVID-19 pandemic followed by unprecedented staffing shortages highlighted the dedication and strength of youth justice workers as they met new and greater challenges keeping facilities safe, providing effective services and supervising young people in their care. The Center for Improving Youth Justice (CIYJ) added questions to its Staff Climate Survey in October 2022 to better understand the impact of the stressors on staff and provide agency leaders with information to respond to their staff needs. Results from the April 2024 surveys indicate that agencies listened and responded with new and increased efforts to improve staff well-being and recognition.

### Key Learnings

**Burn Out:** In April 2024, slightly more staff reported “rarely” or “never” feeling burned out (31%) and slightly fewer (15%) reported feeling burned “often” than in 2023. Staff who reported “always” feeling burned out stayed at 11% both years. Staff burnout was the top reason cited by participants in a national survey for the current challenges hiring and retaining staff.

**Job Satisfaction:** More staff said they are satisfied with their job than one year ago: 35% strongly agreed and 48% agreed. High job satisfaction helps to keep experienced staff and overall staff retention. More than money for most, recognition and the ability to positively impact young people increase job satisfaction.

**Making a Positive Impact:** The reason many staff say that they enter and stay in the youth justice field is to positively impact young people. Nearly 95% of staff said they’re making a positive impact in 2024, with 41% saying they “always” are, an increase from the 35% who reported always making an impact in 2023.

**Meaningful Recognition:** More staff said they received meaningful recognition in April 2024 – 76% compared to 73% in 2023. Nearly one-quarter of those said they “always” receive meaningful recognition, a 5% increase from one year ago.

Maintaining robust wellness and recognition programs for youth justice staff is pivotal in balancing the rewarding aspects of the job with the challenges that can lead to burnout. Recognizing and valuing staff empowers them to make a meaningful impact on the young people in their care.

The Staff Climate Survey, administered twice a year, is a part of CIYJ’s Performance-based Standards program, which provides agencies with a data-driven continuous improvement process to guide and monitor youth justice facilities, community-based residential programs and reentry services. An average of 3,000 staff respond to our bi-annual Staff Climate Survey.

*This CIYJ Perspective was written by Kim Godfrey Lovett, Executive Director. The CIYJ Perspective is published twice yearly in January and July.*

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