

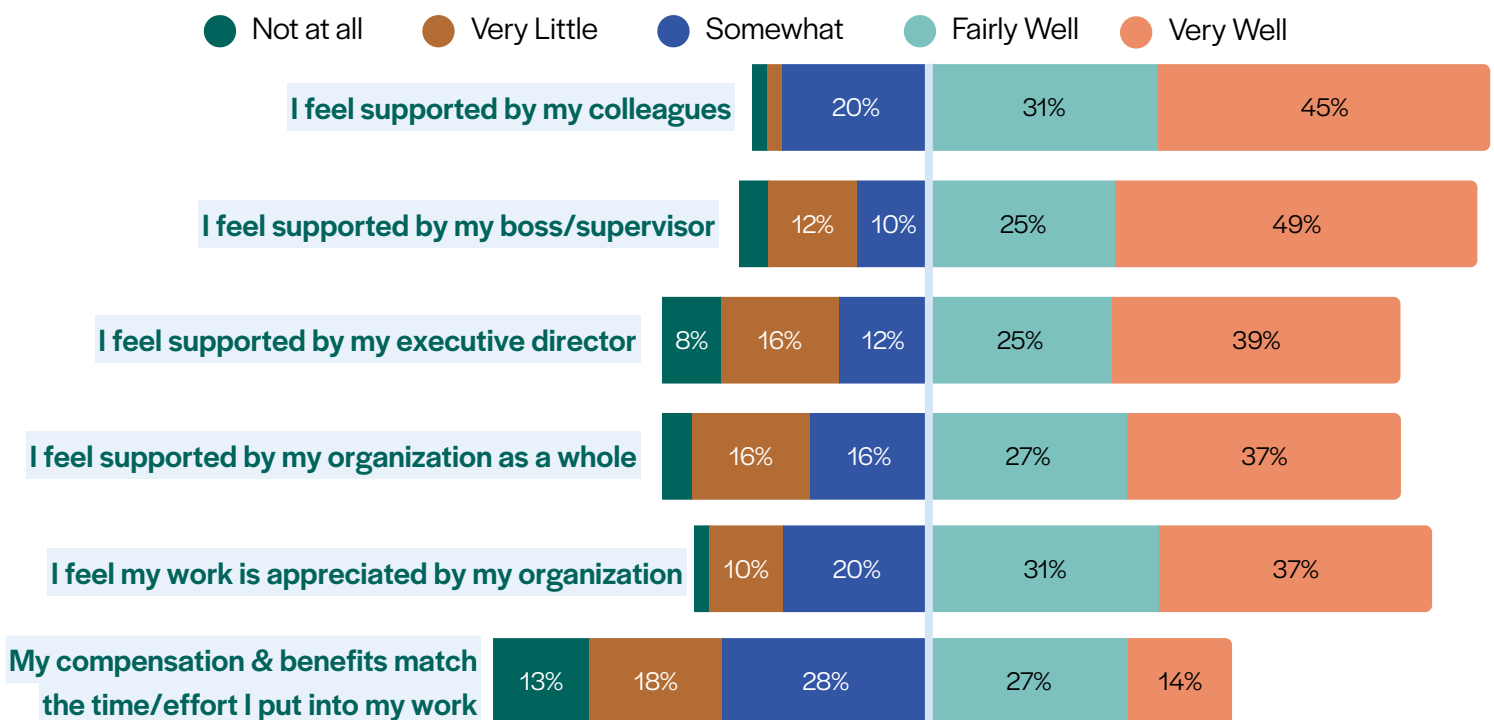
What Works: Insights for Thriving Anti-Violence Organizations

In 2024, RAFT and The SOAR Collective began collaborating to learn more about the elements, characteristics, and norms that allow anti-violence organizations to thrive. Using an appreciative inquiry approach, we are focusing on what does work at anti-violence organizations, identifying strengths and opportunities for others to learn from. RAFT and The SOAR Collective will develop resources for anti-violence organizations to identify changes they can make to positively transform their workplace culture.

Methodology

This process began in the fall of 2024 with a screening survey sent to RAFT listservs, The SOAR Collective contacts, and social media. The survey included questions about how supported respondents felt within their organization and whether they believed their colleagues felt the same. Those who were willing to be interviewed and indicated they felt “very well” or “fairly well” supported and believed most of their colleagues would “definitely” or “most likely” respond similarly were contacted to schedule an interview. Interviewees were reimbursed for their time. The results from the support-related questions of the survey are below. Of the 51 individuals who completed the screener survey, 10 individuals met the criteria and were contacted for interviews. Of those 10, five scheduled and completed interviews with RAFT and The SOAR Collective team members.

Participants were asked to rate the statements below about how they feel about their workplace:



Takeaways and Themes

Initial themes and takeaways have been collected and shared below. In 2025, RAFT and The SOAR Collective plan to continue connecting with thriving anti-violence organizations to expand on these takeaways and create resources for organizations to grow in their positive practices.

Supervisor Support

One theme that appeared almost instantly in each interview was having a supportive supervisor. This support ranged from supervisors who were there to listen and support, understood stressors and the need for flexible schedules and time off, and made an effort to acknowledge work well done. Advocates also appreciated supervisors who asked for their input on how to do the work, supported passion-projects, and advocated on behalf of their staff.

Examples include:

“One of our values is that we engage with the people who are going to be most impacted by a decision and let them be the leaders.”

A supervisor helped an advocate who recently obtained their LCSW gather the necessary information and paperwork to go to HR to ask for a raise.

An Executive Director needed to present on a topic outside their expertise. They invited an advocate with direct service experience to co-present with them.

Transparency and Communication

RAFT’s RAW survey, Self Care For Advocates’ [National Advocates Needs Survey](#), and the [We Deserve Better Project assessment](#) have all revealed that advocates are seeking transparency and open communication from their leadership. Not surprisingly, during the positive organization interviews, clear communication and transparency from both leadership and between colleagues popped up throughout the interview process. When advocates are well-informed about what’s happening in their organization, why decisions are made, and don’t have limitations on who they can ask questions to and learn from, they report having a more positive experience at work.

Examples include:

During a legal investigation at an organization, staff were given the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers from supervisors, the board of directors, and the crisis team as needed.

“I can go to anyone with anything, not just my immediate person I report to. I can go to her always, but if there’s someone else who might know more about a certain thing, I can go there.”

“We were kept informed literally with numbers. This is what it might do to this program... this is what the impact would be. This is how we're going to try and backfill that... this is what we're doing to prevent that...”

Flexibility and Trust

The world has changed since Covid-19 and it is becoming clear that things are not going to return to a pre-2020 workplace. Advocates working in what they perceive as a positive organization are given high degrees of flexibility in where, when, and how they work, and have supervisors and colleagues who trust them to get their work done in whatever way works best for them. Flexible work conditions and trusting organizations were valued highly by the advocates we interviewed.

Examples include:

At one organization, they reduced the work week to 32 hours, allow staff to work any hours as long as they are present for clients and meetings, and only require staff to be on-site 2 days per week. After 3 years of service, staff can take a 6-week sabbatical.

Advocates shared examples of being able to cover for one another and not having to worry while they are out of office. One advocate shared, "If my whole family gets COVID and I'm not able to work for a week and a half, it's fine. They know to look on my calendar for upcoming deadlines, and I can trust that they're gonna take care of them."

A supervisor doesn't require advocates to see clients for a full 8 hours a day and doesn't impose productivity requirements. If a client cancels, the advocate can use that time to plan, organize, do paperwork, or rest.

"Unless somebody's really struggling to execute their deliverables, they don't need micromanaging. You don't need to know where everybody is at 9 a.m. If they're doing what they need to do, then let them work from whenever they need to work. If they need to work from the Philippines for a month, that's fine! It's not called work from home, it's called remote work. You can work wherever."

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