

Small shifts to your organizational practices and norms could create big impacts!
Are you looking for ways to strengthen support for your team?

We have 10 ideas you can start with right now! Below are some ideas sourced from our [What Works: Insights for Thriving Anti-Violence Organizations Project](#). Anti-violence staff shared real strategies currently in practice; approaches that, while often simple, make a significant difference in staff experience and sustainability.

1. Participatory Leadership

Multiple advocates described leaders who intentionally minimize hierarchy and actively share the workload alongside staff. Examples included directors and supervisors taking on frontline responsibilities such as on-call shifts, supporting community events, and covering the crisis line.

As one advocate shared, “It doesn’t feel like our Executive Director is above anyone else; she doesn’t pull rank to avoid work.”

Participants also emphasized that these leaders consistently seek staff input and involve them in decision-making. As one director noted, “You can be in charge and not know things,” highlighting the importance of relying on the expertise and perspectives of frontline staff.

2. Supportive & Relational Supervision

Advocates praised supervisors who extend support beyond routine check-ins, emphasizing the value of leaders who are approachable, invested in staff growth, and willing to advocate on behalf of their teams.

One supervisor reflected, “Every skill I have used in advocacy are skills I use as a leader,” noting the importance of compassion and connection. Examples included supervisors sending brief messages of encouragement before difficult tasks, prioritizing staff safety during client meetings or inclement weather, and remaining available for informal conversations outside scheduled supervision.

At one organization, the Executive Director holds quarterly coffee chats at each office location to listen to staff concerns; Advocates described leadership as receptive to feedback, transparent, and intentional about maintaining personal connection.

3. Honoring Humanity & Capacity

Leaders and frontline staff emphasized the importance of a human-centered approach that recognizes employees as whole people with lives and responsibilities outside of work. One leader noted that it is possible to “balance client needs with staff retention,” highlighting how this approach contributes to staff longevity.

Multiple advocates shared experiences of taking time off due to burnout, medical leave, or personal circumstances, and upon their return, supervisors adjusted workloads to reflect current capacity.

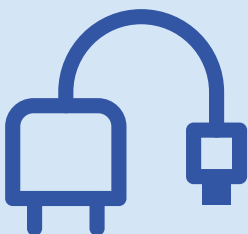
Many also described feeling able to take time off without guilt and being encouraged to set strong boundaries and practice self-care, with “no expectation to go above and beyond when you shouldn’t.” Some organizations proactively ask employees about their support needs early on, rather than waiting to figure it out during a crisis, prioritizing staff wellness.

4. Psychological Safety

Psychologically safe workplaces allow staff to take interpersonal risks without fear of punishment or retaliation.

Advocates across multiple organizations described cultures where leadership encourages them to show up as their authentic selves, share ideas and opinions openly, and speak in “first draft” as they process their thoughts. In these environments, raising concerns—including calling out issues or microaggressions—is welcomed as an opportunity for meaningful dialogue and change.

One advocate noted that after bringing forward a concern, leadership was receptive and demonstrated changed behavior. Others emphasized that supervisors and leaders genuinely value staff input and remain open to suggestions; even when ideas are not implemented, staff still feel respected and heard.



Wellness Recharge Room

One organization created a dedicated Wellness Recharge Room to offer staff a supportive space to decompress after stressful situations. The room features a reclining chair, soft lighting, eye masks, weighted blankets, and a walking pad.

To ensure the space truly met staff needs, leadership invited employee input on what would be most helpful and intentionally worked to provide those items.

5. Trauma-Informed Approach

Advocates emphasized that trauma-informed principles should extend beyond client services and be embedded in internal workplace practices. As one advocate shared, “We have to treat ourselves the way we want survivors to be treated... We are all coming to the workplace with trauma.”

Another advocate noted how her agency “lives and breathes being trauma-informed,” by offering flexibility, patience, and meaningful support during difficult life events, including bereavement and burnout. Other practices included setting clear expectations, dedicating time to address vicarious trauma, and openly acknowledging the emotional weight of crisis work rather than minimizing it.

Leaders also recognized that exposure to trauma is not limited to direct-service roles; one director intentionally ensured that prevention staff received the same level of support, noting that they frequently receive disclosures in the field.

6. Upholding Values & Mission

Advocates described a strong sense of pride and motivation in working within mission-driven organizations, fostering shared sense of ownership of the work. As one advocate explained, “We’re all here to help the survivor. I’m not typically in counseling, but if someone needs something, I don’t mind taking that phone call.”

Others highlighted the importance of their organization’s commitment to systems change, social justice, and an anti-oppression lens, emphasizing that “the mission and work doesn’t change even though the climate might.”

Advocates also noted that these values are not just stated, they are actively practiced. Leaders were described as consistently grounding decisions in organizational mission and values, intentionally assessing options through that lens.

7. Board Engagement & Support

Several organizations highlighted the value of meaningful engagement between staff and their Board of Directors. In some cases, leaders intentionally create opportunities for advocates to train board members, recognizing that frontline staff are “the ones in the trenches,” and can offer critical insight into the work.

One organization shared that their board visits the office twice a year and participates in team-building activities alongside staff. At another agency, board members regularly attend events, with some even volunteering for hotline shifts. As one advocate noted, “it’s not a problem” if staff want to speak directly with the Board.

Additionally, some organizations foster transparency by sharing summaries of board meeting notes with staff, ensuring everyone stays informed about key decisions and organizational changes.

8. Feedback Supports Growth

Regular, constructive feedback emerged as a key component of both staff development and organizational culture. As one HR Specialist shared, “Actionable feedback, when given with respect and compassion, can inspire growth in an individual and really help to build a positive, healthy culture.”

Multiple supervisors described using strengths-based approaches that balance accountability with coaching and support. One leader implemented feedback training shortly after stepping into their role, recognizing that their team was conflict-averse and wanted to normalize timely, direct communication.

Others emphasized the importance of offering grace when mistakes happen using feedback as an opportunity to guide staff toward their strengths. As one supervisor explained, “It’s fine to expose people to new things and try new skills; but once you see someone isn’t good at something, stop setting them up for failure—find people’s strengths and let them grow there.”

9. Prioritizing Fun & Team-Building

Advocates emphasized the importance of intentionally creating space for fun and connection in the workplace. Several organizations regularly host engaging team-building activities that help staff build trust and strengthen relationships.

One advocate shared that leadership “tries to make things fun,” describing events such as outdoor staff meetings with complimentary food trucks and group outings to the movies. Others noted that these opportunities are designed to help colleagues connect as people—without pressure to share personal details.

As one director reflected, “It’s important to have fun, build trust, and build relationships.”



Creating Inviting Environments

To foster welcoming spaces for both survivors and advocates, some organizations encourage staff to personalize and decorate their work areas in ways that feel comfortable and reflective of who they are.

After one agency relocated to a new building, the Executive Director visited the space, invited staff to share ideas for making it more welcoming, and then actively pursued funding to bring those ideas to life.

10. Recognition & Appreciation

Many agencies underscored the benefit of consistently recognizing and celebrating staff contributions. Advocates shared that simple, genuine appreciation—such as acknowledging a job well done or publicly affirming that “none of this would happen without this team”—can have a powerful impact on morale.

Some organizations offer personalized tokens of appreciation, like wellness baskets tailored to each staff member’s preferences. Others create fun incentives tied to professional development, such as earning a chance to spin a prize wheel for attending training. As an advocate explained, “It makes things fun and we’re being recognized for the things that we’re doing.”

What are 3 small actions, based on these ideas, that you can implement with your team or at your organization?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What stands out across these organizations isn’t one big solution—it’s a pattern of small, intentional choices: the way people are listened to, the way care is practiced, and the way values are carried into everyday decisions. These actions may seem simple on their own, but over time, they create workplaces where people can stay, grow, and continue showing up for this work—building cultures where advocates are empowered to care for themselves and the communities they serve.

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