

Feature  
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## Psychologically safe leadership in action

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In the [first story](#) of this three-part series, you heard about Greg Swaine, a direct support professional with Ottawa-Carleton Lifeskills (OCL). We also introduced you to Jocelyne Paul, Executive Director of OCL. Read on to learn more about how her leadership influenced a culture change within their agency.

Greg's LinkedIn profile says this about OCL: "We look to inspire other organizations to rethink how they approach the mental health of their employees and how they address mental health in the workplace."

Without Jocelyne's leadership, OCL may not have realized this vision. **Greg and Jocelyne had to overcome broken trust when Greg's undiagnosed mental illness led to a significant amount of missed time from work and other issues.**

Jocelyne credits Greg with taking a different approach than he had previously, which allowed her to hear him and start thinking about how the agency could do things differently.



**Jocelyne Paul**  
Executive Director, Ottawa-Carleton Lifeskills

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“He came at this from a different standpoint from the original meetings. He came in with a solution to our shared experience. He came in with information, data and a well-thought-out presentation with reams of data behind it,” Jocelyne says, adding that this was not the first instance where a staff member dealt with mental health struggles because of the work they do. “As an organization, we need to support all of our staff,” she says.

Among Greg’s recommendations was aligning their policies and actions with the principles of the [National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#). “I liked the idea and sent it to my HR department to see if they could run with it,” Jocelyne says.

Run with it they did.

**Jocelyne understands mental health issues can result from the stresses of the job and she believes it’s the employer’s responsibility to respond to that stress to the best of our ability and make it a healthy environment for everyone.**

“We’re care providers. We work with people with developmental disabilities, where people can have behavioural problems. In one of our locations, we have individuals who will lash out physically at other individuals – targeting other individuals living in the home or the staff,” she explains, adding sometimes police intervention or medical attention is needed.

When Jocelyne worked as a front-line staff, she learned firsthand about the prevalence of workplace stressors and their impact on mental health. “I think anybody in a caring environment, be it CAS [Children’s Aid Society], in long-term care, in hospitals or the developmental services sector – anybody who cares for another person, who’s dependent on them in some way – will experience some type of mental health issue.”

Jocelyne brought her understanding, empathy and experience to conversations with her team about how the leadership could create calmer living and working environments for the staff and those under their care. “We’re looking at shifting how OCL is being perceived. We’re focusing some of the activities from our culture committee on the results of the [Guarding minds survey](#).

“We’re following through. Our front-line staff are dealing daily with individuals entrusted to our care. As managers and administrators, we’re making sure those barriers to providing that exemplary care are removed. We’re also doing whatever we can to help support the level of care that we want to see,” Jocelyne explains.

“We just had the second release of the [Not myself today](#) modules. People are using the site (an online tool OCL uses to connect, communicate and collaborate) more. I think we’re starting to have more open conversations, one staff person at a time,” Jocelyne says.

In her organization, there has been a concerted effort to improve the culture and mental health for all. “It’s important for us to take this into account as much as it is to provide care to those who are entrusted in our services. Our employees, and how they’re feeling, impacts the level of care they provide to the people we care for. If they’re not well, it trickles down.”

Jocelyne says leadership doesn’t always come from the top. “For staff to show the leadership from the bottom-up, sometimes there’s a struggle in the beginning,” she acknowledges. **She adds that OCL wouldn’t be where it is today in implementing a psychological health and safety program without having the time of struggle with Greg. “If we would have let Greg go, OCL would have lost in the end.”**

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Posted on May 12, 2020