Animal welfare work is deeply rewarding, but it can also come with high costs for those who provide such valuable services.

Staff engaged in animal welfare work are particularly susceptible to secondary traumatic stress (STS) because of the vulnerable nature of the animals they care for, the high volume and unpredictable nature of their jobs, and a relative lack of psychological protection.

This inevitably takes a toll on staff well-being and the organization's ability to deliver high quality care and make an impact.

> "Secondary traumatic stress is a trauma condition,
> not a lifestyle failure." - Ginny Sprang

Staff self-care is a necessary component of increasing resilience and reducing the impact of trauma exposure, but not sufficient on its own. Along with individual efforts, there must be organizational investments.

There are a number of practices & policies organizations can implement, over time, to reduce occupational risk and promote staff resilience in order to create a healthier workplace.

> "Shouting self-care at people who actually need community
> care is how we fail them." – Nikita Valerio

Self-Care

Staff understand that caring for themselves is their ethical obligation as helping professionals.

Staff are aware that compassion fatigue/STS/vicarious trauma is a predictable risk of working in a helping profession.

Staff are able to monitor themselves for signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress.

Staff understand link between their personal histories of trauma and how this may impact them on the job.

Staff understand the importance of self-care and make efforts to care themselves physically, mentally, emotionally, etc.

Staff makes an effort to reduce negativity and build supportive, collaborative relationships with peers.

Staff understand the importance of seeking support on an ongoing basis, and after acute or critical incidents.

We-Care

Organization understands that creating a healthy, safe workplace is their ethical obligation.

Organization responds to STS as an occupational hazard, rather than a weakness. Organization proactively integrates STS-informed policies and practices.

Organization promotes continuing education, including professional training in STS, beginning at orientation. Organization provides benefits that include mental health care and/or an EAP.

Organization recognizes link between health/wellness and staff satisfaction and productivity. Devotes resources to incorporate wellness into policies and practices to support self-care efforts (i.e. reasonable workloads, respecting non-work hours, opportunities for wellness activities).

Organization promotes respectful communication and provides opportunities for recognition and for staff to connect (on/off site).

Organization offers regular opportunities for team meetings and one-on-ones with direct supervisor to review cases, reflect, and process work. Critical incident debriefing protocols are established.

self-care to we-care

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Organizational Practices That Support Staff Resilience

In answering the following questions, consider the past 6 months in your organization:	1 = Never	2 = Rarely	3 = Some-times	4 = Often	5 = Always	N/A
1. Does leadership communicate a clear vision and positive focus that supports and articulates your mission and fosters hope for your staff?						
2. Does leadership model a healthy work/life balance?						
3. Are work and non-work hours recognized and respected?						
4. Does your organization provide wellness activities?						
4. Does your org have guidelines to effectively resolve staff conflict?						
5. Does your org show appreciation for staff efforts in a meaningful way?						
6. Does your org offer on-site training on how to address work-related stress and VT?						
7. Does your org support staff attendance of off-site trainings?						
8. Does your org offer 1-on-1 meetings with direct supervisor to address exposure to trauma?						
9. Does your org use protocols to address staff who are affected by stress, trauma, or concerning behaviors?						

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