



Aligning Residential Services, Inc. Core Values with Positive Support Practices

Introduction

Organizations sustaining positive supports move beyond individual trainings and workshops for staff members since system change requires a shift in culture and systems. This brief describes the journey of an organization that reshaped policies, training systems, and everyday practices to reflect person-centered values. By integrating positive support strategies into every layer of our work, we've seen meaningful, lasting change: fewer reactive responses, a more confident and engaged workforce, and services that truly prioritize the voices and needs of the people we support.

Purpose of the Brief

The information in this brief summarizes how Residential Services Inc., or RSI, is addressing the key features of organization-wide systems with a special focus on actions taken to build supports for staff via ongoing coaching and mentoring in positive supports, regional and community collaboration, and innovative strategies for providing services, especially for those who may need individualized or more intensive supports.

About RSI Services

RSI supports approximately 300 people and employs over 500 staff members in a seven-county area of east central and northeastern Minnesota. These counties include St. Louis, Pine, Kanabec, Carlton, Isanti, Chisago, and Mille Lacs. The types of [services provided by RSI](#) include residential and in-home support for adults and children. Other services include Intensive Residential Treatment Services, Residential Crisis Services, Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services (ARMHS), Housing

Stabilization (prior service), Employment Services, and Outpatient Therapy to people with disabilities including intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), autism spectrum, fetal alcohol spectrum, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and severe and persistent mental illness.

History

RSI has long been committed to fostering a culture rooted in person-centered values and positive supports. Over the past decade, we have continuously invested in transforming our practices to ensure that the people we serve—and those who support them—are at the center of everything we do.

Our journey began in 2013, when two RSI employees participated in a joint project with the [Minnesota Department of Human Services \(DHS\)](#) and the [University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration \(ICI\)](#) to become certified in Positive Behavior Support, also called PBS. One key outcome of this project was the development of a strategic plan to implement person-centered planning and PBS organization wide.

This plan became the foundation for a DHS Performance-based Incentive Payment Program (PIPP) grant, implemented in 2014–2015. The PIPP grant allowed RSI to build a structured training model for both supervisors and direct support professionals. This included the creation of Designated Trainer (DT) roles within each home and a trainer position to support supervisors and the new DT role. These positions laid the groundwork for an internal culture of continuous learning and capacity-building. Trainers received additional pay for their expertise, reinforcing our commitment to embedding person-centered practices and PBS throughout the organization.

From 2015 to 2018, RSI participated in Cohort 1 of the DHS Person-Centered Thinking and Organizational Change initiative through a Technical Assistance Grant. Over these three years, we deepened our understanding of what it truly means to be person-centered. We recognized that these practices must extend to everyone we engage with—people served, staff, and external partners alike. The experience prompted us to listen more intentionally and reshape our services based on what individuals and our broader community needed and valued.

As part of our continued commitment to organizational transformation, RSI developed internal Person-Centered Thinking trainers and joined Cohort-2 in 2018, a regional partnership focused on strengthening local collaboration and enhancing person-centered and positive support practices.

This combination of technical assistance, internal leadership, and external collaboration laid the foundation for several major initiatives that followed. Many of these began as grant-funded pilot programs and have since become permanent, integrated services and employee benefits at RSI.

Additional Key Milestones:

- 2018–2020: Received a DHS Innovations Grant to launch the Community Connector initiative, based on the internal Positive Support Committee PATH planning goals.
- 2019: Received training on Culture of Safety and became a founding member of the State Steering Committee.
- 2021: Awarded a COVID Response Grant to develop Employment and Housing Stabilization Services.
- 2022: Received an Innovations Grant to establish the Employee Resource Specialist position.

Positive Supports Included in Organization-Wide Planning

RSI has integrated the following practices into its organization-wide planning:

- **Person-Centered Practices** — Strategies and tools to help all employees actively listen to others, nurture meaningful relationships, and empower people to achieve their dreams for the future. These practices are applied to employees and the people served in the same manner.
- **Positive Supports** — Positive supports are broad, person-centered approaches used to improve quality of life for individuals. It focuses on creating environments and relationships that are respectful, safe, and empowering. Rather than reacting to problems, positive supports proactively help people succeed by building on their strengths, honoring their choices, and supporting their social, emotional, and physical well-being. This approach is applied not just when challenges arise, but as an everyday foundation of care and support leading to meaningful and fulfilling lives.
- **Positive Behavior Support** — PBS is a specific, evidence-based approach used to understand and address challenging behaviors. It involves identifying the reasons behind a person's behavior, and then creating proactive, respectful strategies that teach new skills and reduce the need for those challenging behaviors. PBS is about creating supportive environments, teaching positive alternatives, and helping individuals thrive. PBS is grounded in the belief that everyone benefits from consistency, encouragement, and positive reinforcement.
- **Culture of Safety** — A shared commitment within an organization to recognize that most incidents or errors are not caused by individual negligence, but rather in systems, processes or conditions. Instead of assigning blame, the organization focuses on learning, shared accountability and prevention to reduce harm and promote well-being.
- **Trauma-Informed Supports** — An approach to providing care and services that recognizes the widespread impact of trauma, understands its signs and effects, and responds with practices that promote healing, safety, trust, and empowerment. Trauma-informed support avoids re-traumatization and emphasizes physical, emotional, and psychological safety for both the people receiving services and the staff providing them.

Three-tiered Positive Support Framework

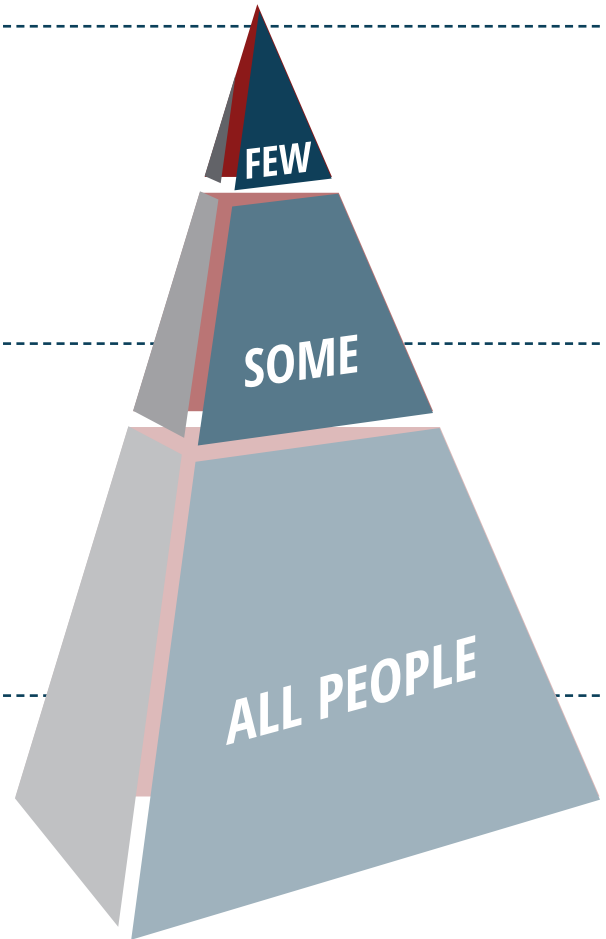
RSI uses a three-tiered approach as a strategy to meet the needs of people across the agency. RSI is invested in using systems, data, and practices to ensure that people who may have more complex and intensive support needs will be able to receive services that are tailored to their needs. Table 1 is an example of how RSI addresses individual needs for positive support includes systems that organize positive support across a continuum of intensity.

Table 1. Definition of Each Positive Support Tier

Tier 3 — Tier 3 provides intensive, individualized support for a **small number of individuals** with more significant behaviors that interfere with quality of or life, create barriers to learning, or place someone at risk of physical harm, resulting in 911 calls to the police or a mental health crisis center/line. These supports are based on functional behavior assessments and delivered through personalized plans, data tracking, and professional collaboration.

Tier 2 — Tier 2 strategies are used to support **some people** who need more structure or teaching of specific positive behaviors. At this level, monitoring is conducted to identify early signs of minor issues affecting quality of life, social interactions that are interfering with relationships, and/or indications someone might be experiencing minor social or emotional challenges. The goal is to intervene early to improve quality of life, assess routines and settings to make changes before more serious challenges occur.

Tier 1 — Universal strategies are applicable to **all people** receiving services within the organization. Tier 1 strategies focus on prevention of challenging behaviors and include teaching social skills, reinforcing positive actions taken, demonstrating social and emotional wellness, and consistent responses when challenges occur. Strategies are implemented to create a person-centered culture that is positive, predictable, and promotes a sense of safety and emotional security. Most people respond well to Tier 1 strategies alone.



RSI's goal is to teach people with lived experience, staff, and family members to understand how to make a referral to each of the tiered positive support teams. The roles for each team are communicated in a way that people can easily understand and the types of data gathering and people are involved at each tier.

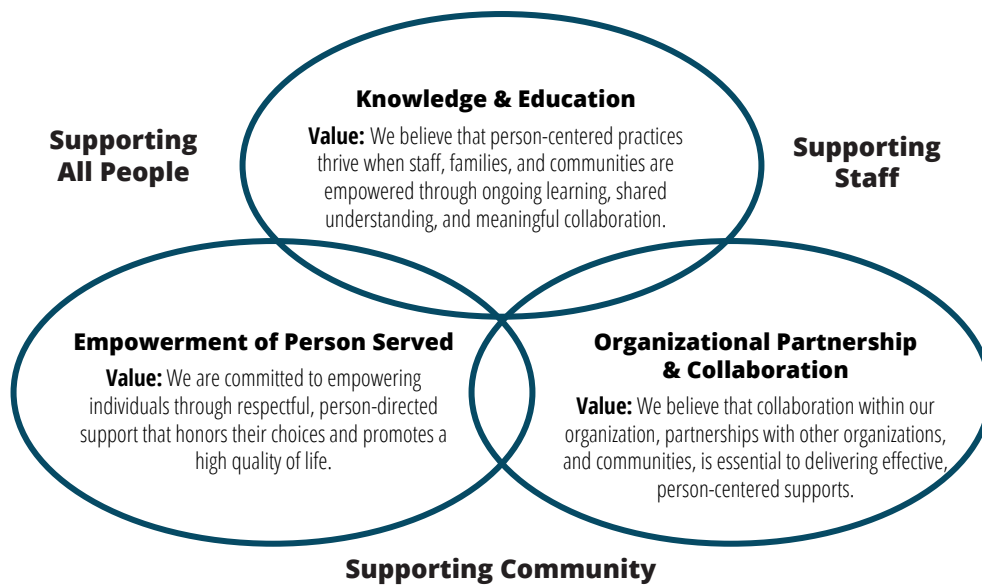
Integrating Company Values and Positive Support Practices

RSI has integrated positive support strategies into its core agency values and is using data-driven decision making to support organization-wide changes. The agency evaluates progress over time by aligning its values with multiple types of data. Table 2 summarizes these key values, along with the strategies developed and measures used by the organization-wide team to review and act on the information. Figure 1 highlights how the agency's mission—to advance positive support for *all* — is embedded in its work with individuals served, staff teams, and the surrounding community.

Table 2. Examples of Positive Strategies

Knowledge & Education	Empowerment of People Served	Organizational Partnership & Collaboration
Value: We believe that person-centered practices thrive when staff, families, and communities are empowered through ongoing learning, shared understanding, and meaningful collaboration	Value: We are committed to empowering individuals through respectful, person-directed support that honors their choices and promotes a high quality of life.	Value: We believe that collaboration within our organization and partnerships with other organizations and communities is essential to delivering effective, person-centered supports.
<i>Actions Driven by These Values</i>	<i>Actions Driven by These Values</i>	<i>Actions Driven by These Values</i>
Training & Resources: • Person-Centered Thinking training (Quarterly – internal & external) • PCT Coach Training (Yearly internal & external) • Person-centered plan facilitator training (Yearly – internal & external) • Trauma-informed training (Monthly - internal) • Positive behavior support for supervisors training (twice a year –internal) • Diversity equity & inclusion (DEI) training • Employee resource specialist • On-call manual	Development of Services: • Intensive Residential Treatment Services • Residential Crisis Services Jefferson • NextStep (alternate supervision technology/ transition home) • Employment services • Housing stabilization (prior service) • Community connections • Expanded community residential settings for children • 24-hour emergency assistance, personal emergency response • Respite services • Small group social skill development	Internal Strategies Implemented: Developed internal training Facilitators in person-centered thinking, PCT coach training; Person-centered planning & trauma-informed support • Internal positive behavior support committee • Policy/procedure updates through a person-centered lens • Data reviews (quality of Life indicators) incident/ On-call review system • Embedding culture of safety
<i>Measures Used for Decision Making Addressing Values</i>	<i>Sources Where Data are Gathered Addressing Values</i>	<i>Groups Using Data for Decision Making to Address Values</i>
Data for Communication Feedback Loops: • Tiered Onsite Evaluation Tool • Welcome & Stay Interviews • Energage Employee Engagement Survey • Quality of life satisfaction surveys for people we support and their team members to measure quality of life • Staff attrition, vacancies, supervision data • Worker's Compensation • Behavior Intervention Report Form data, • Maltreatment alerts • Incidents reports, Emergency response data (911) • World Café and qualitative input • Data on quality of life, goals met, skills improving, social activities • Nursing data reports	Organizational Development: • Three-tier positive support model evaluation data • Grants (Community Connections, housing from prior funding) • Emergency response/respite services/on-call systems • Therap data system • Services tailored to person's goals & needs – summarized individual support plan data • Positive Support Plans • Person centered plans and • One-page descriptions • World Café events	Collaboration: • Internal PCT Coaches Community of Practice • Arrowhead Positive Supports Community of Practice (COP) • Person-Centered Planner COP • Person-Centered Thinking facilitator of community of practice • Arrowhead Regional Quality Council committee members • Person-Centered Incident Matrix (PCIM) Group • Foster Care Provider Group

Figure 1. Aligning Positive Support Strategies with Core Values to Guide Organizational Change



Using Data to Evaluate and Inform Decision Making

At RSI, organization-wide planning is rooted in the belief that good decisions are guided by meaningful information. We collect data from a wide range of sources to evaluate our progress, identify trends, and continuously improve the quality of services for both the people we support and the staff who work alongside them.

Data is gathered from sources such as satisfaction surveys (from people receiving services and their teams), annual staff job satisfaction surveys, incident and maltreatment reports, 911 calls, on-call logs, behavior data, medication error reports, staff injury logs, nursing notes, vacancy trends, and collaborative World Café brainstorming sessions.

This data can be used to help us make decisions in the following areas:

- **Identifying Strengths and Gaps** — Survey results highlight what's working well (e.g., respectful staff interactions, individualized supports) and where improvements may be needed (e.g., access to social activities or housing choices). This can help leadership prioritize initiatives and recognize positive practices.
- **Improving Quality of Life** — Behavior and outcome data show whether people are learning meaningful skills, reaching goals, and engaging in their communities. This helps teams modify support strategies to better align with personal goals and quality-of-life indicators.

- **Enhancing Staff Support** — Data on job satisfaction, injuries, vacancies, and challenging situations assists in understanding staff needs and address burnout, turnover, or safety concerns through better training, staffing, and supervision practices.
- **Reducing Risk and Increasing Safety** — Incident reports, maltreatment alerts, and emergency response data (like 911 calls and On-call logs) are reviewed to identify patterns and respond with targeted interventions that reduce harm and increase health and well-being.
- **Ensuring Accountability and Transparency** — Real-time nursing and medication data ensures prompt follow-up and supports compliance with regulations and clinical standards, while also supporting proactive health interventions.
- **Driving Innovation and Collaboration** — World Café sessions and other group brainstorming methods allow RSI to gather qualitative input, surface creative ideas, and ensure that people at all levels—including those receiving services—have a voice in shaping services.

By using data in a thoughtful, integrated way, RSI ensures that decision-making is informed by lived experience, measurable outcomes, and real-time feedback. This approach helps us continuously improve services, enhance quality of life, and build a responsive, person-centered organization.

Tiered Onsite Evaluation Tool

Fidelity of implementation means that an organization is implementing positive supports in the manner in which it is intended. The fidelity tool called the Tiered Onsite Evaluation Tool or TOET is one way to assess fidelity. This simple team checklist is used to gather evidence that person-centered practices and positive behavior support are being used in the way they are intended. The TOET was completed for RSI by a university professional from ICI as an external evaluation rather than a self-assessment of fidelity. You can see in Figure 2 that the team started the TOET in 2017 and continued it about every 2 years through meeting with

the staff from the Institute on Community Integration and sharing evidence of their work.

Each subscale in Table 3 has questions related to major categories including forming a team, person-centered practice, positive behavior support, cultural responsiveness, monitoring data, supporting and teaching staff, visibility of positive supports, and the overall total. There are 29 items across the different sections with each item and the scoring included 0= indicating an item has not been started, 1=actions are started but not finished, and 2= the work is completed.

Figure 2 shows the organization's ongoing growth over time as it continues to intentionally embed positive supports throughout its systems and practices.

Figure 2. Tiered Onsite Evaluation Scores from 2016, 2017, and 2020

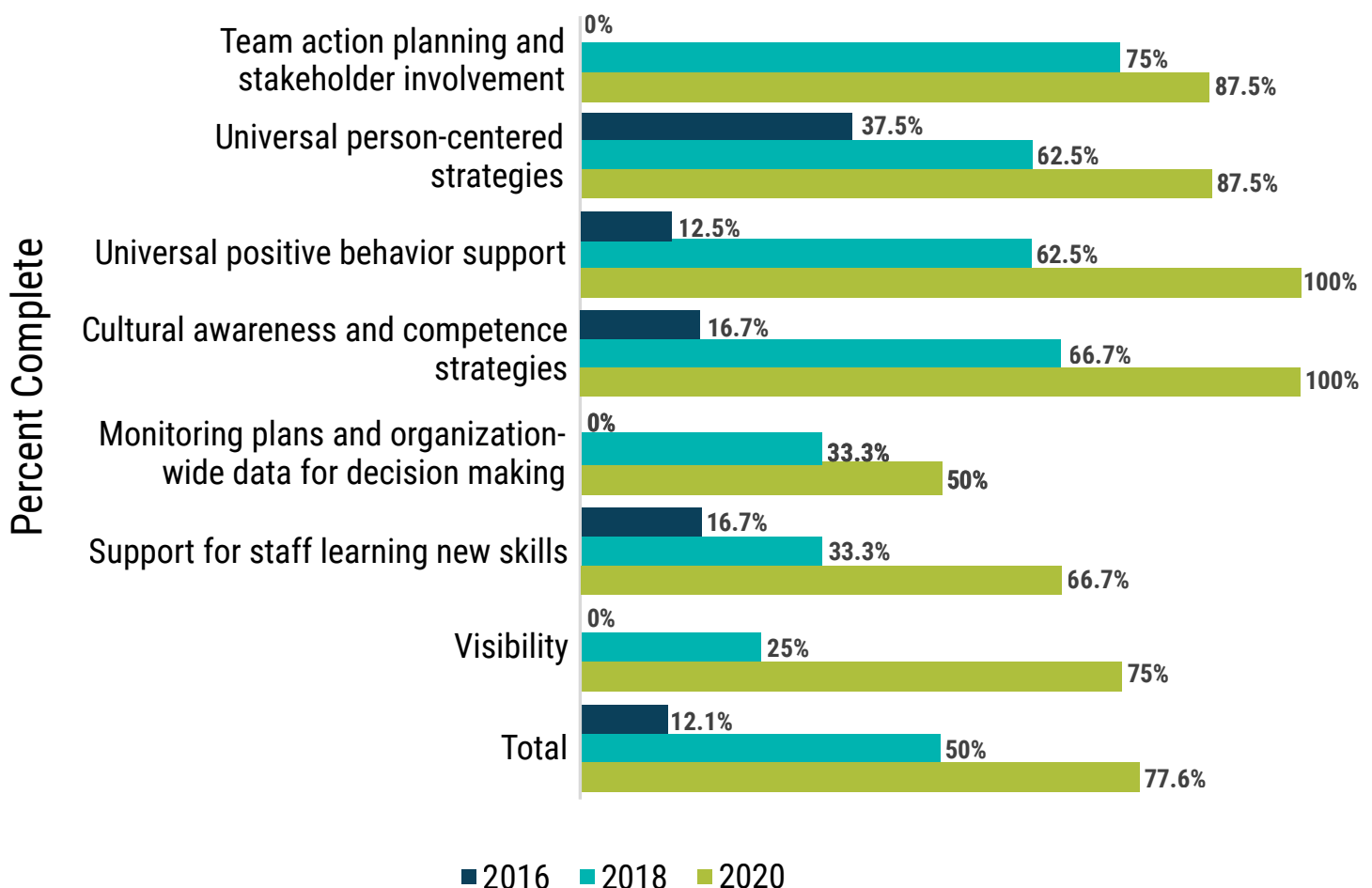


Table 3. TOET Scores May, 2025

Team Action Planning and Stakeholder Involvement	75%	6 (out of 8)
Universal Person-Centered Strategies	100%	8 (out of 8)
Universal Positive Behavior Support	50%	4 (out of 8)
Cultural Awareness and Competency Strategies	100%	6 (out of 6)
Monitoring Plans and Organization-wide Data for Decision Making	66.7%	8 (out of 12)
Support for Staff Learning New Skills	91.7%	11 (out of 12)
Visibility	100%	4 (out of 4)
Total TOET Score	82.8%	48 (out of 58)

Universal Primary Person-Centered Practices and Positive Behavior Support

RSI has made progress with four TOETs completed from 2017 to 2025. Areas of strength are clear from Figure 2 and Table 3 show that RSI have achieved 100% of the criteria for universal person-centered practices with 8 points from a total of 8 points possible), cultural awareness and competency strategy items (6 out of a total of 6 points possible), and visibility (4 out of a total of 4 points possible). A TOET score of 91.7% has been achieved on support for staff learning new skills (11 points from a total of 12 points). The areas RSI are still working on include updating team action planning (75%; 6 out of 8 points), universal PBS (50%; 4 out of a total of 8 points), and 66.7%; and a score of 8 out of a total of 12 points possible for monitoring plans and organization-wide data.

Table 4. Satisfaction Survey for People Receiving Services

(Data Collected from August 17, 2022 to June 26, 2025)

Positive Support Survey Questions	Strongly Agree & Agree
Staff are friendly and helpful and treat the person with respect.	100%
The person receives individualized support/instruction.	99%
Staff promote and reward positive social interactions.	98%
The person is making progress toward accomplishing their goals and outcomes.	97%
Services and supports are person-centered and provided in a manner that reflects the person's preferences, daily needs, activities and desired outcomes.	96%
The person learns skills that are useful and meaningful to their daily life.	95%
The person has opportunities to celebrate and connect with others with similar cultural backgrounds.	95%
The person is offered the choice of where they live and with whom they live.	94%
Staff teach the person strategies to effectively manage their own mental health.	94%
The person is given the opportunity to participate in a variety of preferred social activities.	93%

A total of 96 respondents contributed to the satisfaction survey including 25 people receiving services and 71 team members. Responses were measured using a 4-point scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

Survey responses show overwhelmingly positive experiences from individuals receiving services and their support teams. All selected questions received agreement rates above 90%, indicating strong alignment with person-centered values.

- **Top Strength** — 100% of those responding agreed that staff are friendly, helpful, and respectful.
- **Personalization** — 99% of participants said they receive individualized support.
- **Social & Emotional Support** — 98% of respondents agreed that staff foster social interactions, and 94% indicated staff teach mental health strategies, and offer choices in living arrangements.

- **Growth & Inclusion** — 97% of participants feel they are making progress toward goals; 95%–93% of these individuals also affirmed opportunities for cultural connection and preferred activities.

Overall, the data reflects a respectful, empowering, and inclusive support environment, with opportunities to continue strengthening social and community engagement.

Employee Feedback Survey

RSI started completing an annual employee engagement survey in 2020. The survey is outsourced to a company called Energage. The survey asks questions about the organization's culture drivers and assesses the employee's overall engagement. It asks questions like: are new ideas encouraged, and are different points of view appreciated? Each department at RSI uses survey feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of practices and make changes as needed. Each year we ask employees to use three words to describe RSI and the top words each year are person-centered, respectful and innovative. The highest scoring points are that RSI operates by strong values and my job makes me feel like I am part of something meaningful. The results of the survey are used by the Star Tribune to rank workplaces, and RSI is regularly ranked as a top workplace in Minnesota.

Staff Retention and Turnover

One of the goals of positive support is to create a work environment that encourages employee retention. Many factors impact retention making it difficult to pinpoint what is most affecting staff turnover. RSI used feedback from supervisorial staff, PCT Coaches and the Energage survey to take action by applying for an Innovation Grant to create a new program and position called Employee Resource Specialist. This role conducts both welcome and stay interviews to get more feedback on factors like pay, benefits, pandemic, short-staffing, mandated shifts, and other reasons an employee stays at RSI.

The Employee Resource Specialist helps employees navigate both work-related and personal challenges. The position is like a social worker who helps connect employees to internal and community resources. The help might look like extra training for a challenging work problem, or a financial grant to help pay for fixing their vehicle or connecting to a community source for assistance with other personal issues. The idea is to give our employees the same support we give to the people we support and help them solve problems that might otherwise lead to them leaving their jobs.

RSI has seen a twenty percent drop in our employee turnover rate. Again, at the same time as we have been implementing positive supports for employees, we have also been working hard to increase their pay and improve staff benefits. We do know from the data we have collected and analyzed that experiencing positive support as an employee has helped with RSI's retention. Most of the turnover is among part-time weekend DSP's and includes employees who simply learned this work was not for them. RSI has many long-term employees who provide consistency in care that makes positive support so effective for everyone.

Conclusion

When reflecting on our journey, RSI recognizes that implementing positive support practices has transformed nearly every aspect of our organization. We've learned that meaningful change is a marathon, not a sprint—and that small, consistent steps create lasting impact. By celebrating incremental progress and using data to guide decisions, we've become more responsive to the needs of both our employees and the people we serve. Our organization-wide planning now emphasizes informed decision-making, using multiple forms of data to continuously evaluate our progress and ensure our efforts remain person-centered and effective.

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