

Staying well to serve others



By Takenya Lindsey, paralegal and Daniel Yozwiak, staff attorney

Takenya Lindsey and Daniel Yozwiak are valued members of the Community Legal Aid team. Takenya has been with the organization for almost 16 years as a legal assistant and then paralegal and Daniel since 2022 as a staff attorney. When Daniel started in his legal aid role as a newer attorney, Takenya was there to support him. From the beginning, they've been an inspiring office duo - checking in on one another, sharing ideas for stress management, and working to improve well-being at CLA. In chatting about this article, Daniel quoted a line he remembered (nearly a year later!) from an email Takenya sent him on his first day.

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"Hi Daniel!!

I am your assigned paralegal extraordinaire!! Not sure where they have you stationed right now, so I can pop over and say HI!! I know your first week will feel like you were thrown in a volcano. I am your water..LOL!! So whenever you have some time we can talk and I can let you know how I can support you.

I hope you are having a great day! And I am here if you need anything. My office is on the corner by the big white board. ☐☐

Takenya”

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It's not every day you come across a law blog about health, wellness, and camaraderie.

But today, in honor of [Well-Being in Law Week](#), we are sharing some ideas we have to keep legal professionals well that have stemmed from our office friendship. As a legal aid paralegal and lawyer working every day in a helping profession, we bring deep care to our roles. And we can't help but absorb some of the constant crisis and hardship our clients experience. We all feel the heaviness, and deal with it in different ways. Protecting our personal well being as legal professionals is critical in our ability to serve others. There's plenty of information about wellness floating around, but implementing and sticking with a personal strategy is another matter.

Truth is, mental health challenges and [addiction](#) are ravaging our community. Things have only been [made worse by pandemic stressors](#) and the isolation of work-from-home arrangements. And we're not just talking about lawyers. Judges, magistrates, paralegals, admin pros, and victim advocates are all touched by these issues.

It's time to bring these conversations into the light. And for each of us to double down on our efforts - both at the individual and organizational level - to make improvements.

First, we must take care of ourselves. As with the emergency oxygen mask on the airplane, if you don't help yourself first you won't be able to help anyone else. Some things that have helped us and might help you:

- Find a support system, or at least a support person, at work. This is someone you trust, someone you can confide in, and someone you can be honest with about where you're at mentally. If you can't find that person, start with your HR department as a safe first step.
- Seek professional mental health or addiction services. Explore resources like Employee Assistance Programs that may have free or reduced cost services. When you discover these resources, which may be unknown to your colleagues, share them broadly. You can also reach out to the [Ohio Lawyers Assistance Program](#), a nonprofit supporting legal professionals struggling with substance abuse disorders and mental health challenges.
- Don't be afraid to talk about your struggles and your experiences seeking help. It can help remove stigma and help others feel comfortable to do the same.
- Set work-life boundaries and stick to them. Share them with your colleagues so they can support you. This means different things for different people, but may look like silencing notifications when you're off, taking a self-care lunch break every day, or setting up dedicated work spaces at home.
- Revisit physical fitness. We may not all be star athletes, but even a habit of a simple walk in the fresh air can have a multitude of physical and mental health benefits. Even better, go with your support person or a group so you can encourage one another to keep a schedule.
- Lean on your faith and explore faith-based tenets that are new to you. Consider talking about faith and its role in wellness, maybe even with someone from a different generation. Ground yourself in some sort of peace and meaning.

No matter how hard we work on individual well-being, however, mental health doesn't happen in a vacuum. Our places of employment play an important role in developing a healthy culture. Some ways employers can support their front-line legal professionals include:

- Prioritize providing affordable access to mental health care. A big part of this can be educating employees about the benefits available to them.
- Actively support mental health days as legitimate sick days.
- Put in place practices that incentivize true work-free vacation time and set up systems so employees can return without overwhelming workloads caused by their absence.
- Provide a forum for employee input and listen to their suggestions. Often, employees know what they need. Simple solutions - like more schedule flexibility, dedicated quiet spaces, lunchtime fitness gatherings, or healthy snacks can make a tremendous difference.
- Support work-life boundaries. This could be through modeling, the implementation of policies, or the selection of tech solutions that streamline and minimize interruptions.
- Organizing educational and social support opportunities for employees who are interested in actively bettering their well-being.

Although this information is offered in the context of legal professionals, these needs and our suggestions really apply to all of us. Find your people - talk to them - and check in on one another. Together we can remove stigma from the need for mental health and improve our collective wellness.

Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988

Ohio Lawyers Assistance Hotline: 1-800-348-4343

This article is part of Legal Aid's ["Big Ideas" series](#).

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