Employee Engagement Survey

June 2024 | Report 11.271

2023

From the Photographer:
Location 14 miles into the Olympic national park is a beautiful valley littered with hundreds of waterfalls. I camped on the river edge waking up at dusk to snap this photo.

– Mark O'Donnell

Washington State
Department of Social & Health Services

Transforming lives

DSHS

WASHINGTON STATE
Department of Social and Health Services

Headquarters located at:
14th and Jefferson Street
Olympia, WA 98501

WASHINGTON STATE
Office of the Governor
Jay Inslee, Governor

▼

DEPARTMENT OF
Social & Health Services
Jilma Meneses, Secretary

▼

Facilities, Finance & Analytics Administration

▼

Research & Data Analysis Division

RDA

Abstract: DSHS employees are committed to transforming lives: 69% of employees are satisfied with their jobs, 69% are proud to work for DSHS, and 81% find meaning in their work. They also appreciate their supervisors, are confident they know how to act if discrimination or harassment occurs, and value flexibility and the work-life balance it supports.

In addition to these strengths, employees also identified areas of improvement for the agency. Employee satisfaction was lowest in areas related to change management. They would like better support during organizational change, clearer communication from leadership on the reasons behind important changes, and more involvement in decisions that affect their work.

The 2023 Employee Engagement Survey was completed by over 12,126 DSHS employees, a 72% response rate. Under the direction of the Office of Financial Management (OFM), the 2023 questionnaire was significantly redesigned and provides a new baseline for employee engagement survey results moving forward.

The Employee Engagement Survey is an important component of Governor Inslee's Results Washington initiative for performance management and continuous improvement. Results are used by DSHS to inform strategic planning and to improve employee engagement at every level of the organization.

The photos in this report were all submissions to the DSHS Photography Contest, which is held in conjunction with the Employee Engagement Survey every two years.

"Prusik Peak, Enchantments, Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area" •
Secretary's Choice
DSHS Photo Contest • By John Plotz, with permission

"ALL the photos are beautiful! I loved every single one! But I choose #200, Prusik Peak Enchantment at Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area. The natural beauty is outstanding. The geology, the water, and the clouds are gorgeous. It represents Washington in a peaceful yet exotic way."

Jilma Meneses, Secretary
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
View the 2023 DSHS Photo Contest Winners here:
https://www.dshs.wa.gov/ffa/research-and-data-analysis/2023-dshs-photo-contest-winners

2023
DSHS Employee Engagement Survey

Appendices are available with this report on the RDA Website:
https://www.dshs.wa.gov/ffa/rda/research-reports/

Research Methodology ● Standard Statistical Report ● Categories for Coding Narrative Comments
Modeling Employee Engagement ● Employee Perceptions of EDAI-PEAR

From the photographer:
This view is from the dock on McNeil Island, after arriving from Steilacoom on the morning boat. I'm on the discharge team, and this is the best place I've ever worked.

"Monday Morning" • Second Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS in Action
By Judy Louderback, with permission

Executive Summary

DSHS EMPLOYEES FIND SATISFACTION AND MEANING IN THEIR WORK SERVING THE PEOPLE OF WASHINGTON. Overall, DSHS employees are satisfied with their jobs and are proud to work for DSHS. They appreciate their supervisors, they are confident they know how to act if discrimination or harassment occurs, and they value flexibility and the work-life balance it supports.

In addition to these strengths, employees also identified areas of improvement for the agency. Employee satisfaction was lowest in areas related to change management. They'd like better support during organizational change, clearer communication from leadership on the reasons behind important changes, and more involvement in decisions that affect their work.

The 2023 Employee Engagement Survey was completed by over 12,000 DSHS employees, a 72% response rate. The survey was in the field from October 2 to November 13. Under the direction of the Office of Financial Management (OFM), the 2023 questionnaire was significantly redesigned and provides a new baseline for employee engagement survey results moving forward. The new survey design means that trend analysis for 2023 is not available, but future surveys will allow us to assess DSHS' continued strengths and improvements relative to this new baseline.

Bright spots

DSHS employees are positive about many aspects of the employee experience. Overall, 69% are satisfied with their jobs and 69% are proud to work for the agency.

Meaningful Work

> *I really like the mission of our agency and I like helping others. I feel our services are valuable to the people we serve and that the work we do makes a tremendous difference in their lives and our community.*

DSHS employees are committed to the agency's mission and find their work meaningful.

- 81% strongly agree or agree that they find meaning in their work and 66% see a clear link between their work and the agency's vision.
- Over one-third of employee comments (37%) mentioned feeling positive about helping clients and doing meaningful work.
- Meaningful work is the top predictor of job satisfaction.

Manager Support and Teamwork

> *My team is very friendly and helpful. I love the mission of this job. My supervisor and second level are helpful and kind.*

Questions related to immediate supervisors are among the most positive in the survey.

- 85% strongly agree or agree that their supervisor treats them with respect.
- 77% strongly agree or agree that their supervisor is a good leader.
- 77% strongly agree or agree that their supervisor creates an environment of openness and trust.

Employees are also positive about their teams and how they are expected to contribute.

- 76% have a clear understanding of expectations.
- 69% feel safe on their team to take social risks, such as asking questions, making mistakes, and highlighting problems.
- Employees who referred to their co-workers in their open-ended comments were overwhelmingly positive, praising their commitment to the work and the supportive environment they create.

Work-Life Balance

> *[I like] the ability to telework and flex my schedule. I love my job and that added benefit is amazing for work-life balance.*

Employees appreciate having flexibility because it fosters a healthy work-life balance.

- 73% are satisfied with their schedule flexibility.
- Among employees for whom it is relevant, 72% are satisfied with telework and remote work opportunities.
- Employee comments also expressed high levels of satisfaction with telework: 77% who mentioned the topic were pleased with telework or wanted even more.

Equity, Diversity, Access, and Inclusion

> *It is refreshing to have a career that encourages the sharing of various cultures and openly values diversity and inclusion.*

Most DSHS employees support the agency's initiatives related to equity, diversity, access, and inclusion (EDAI) and pro-equity anti-racism (PEAR).

- 72% agree that the agency demonstrates commitment to PEAR and 66% agree that the agency empowers them to take PEAR actions.
- 85% of employees say they know the steps to take if they encounter discrimination or harassment.
- In the comments, nearly two-thirds of employees who wrote about EDAI or PEAR were supportive or wanted more.

Opportunities for improvement

Respondents also identified areas where DSHS can improve the employee experience.

Change Management

> *I would like to see better communication and transparency of upper management. Many decisions seem to be made without the input of people who could provide information of value.*

Throughout DSHS and statewide, change management was the lowest scoring area on the survey. Less than half of respondents gave positive responses to these questions.

- 43% of DSHS employees feel supported during organizational change.
- 46% strongly agree or agree that leadership communicates the reasons behind change.
- 47% feel they are appropriately involved in decisions that affect their work.
- In their comments, employees asked for more information from management and for management to listen to and collaborate with line staff. 83% of comments related to management communication were requests for change.

Workload, Retention, and Career Advancement

> *I would like to see more opportunities for growth and career advancement. I want to continue working for DSHS, but I'm not sure if I necessarily want to do the same line of work. It would be nice to learn about different departments and see what kind of jobs they do.*

DSHS employees seek new job opportunities and would like more opportunities for advancement.

- 49% of employees rarely look for a new job. This suggests that 51% of employees are open to new job opportunities.
- 52% strongly agree or agree that they have opportunities for advancement at their agency.
- Employee comments express concern about workload and its effects on staff turnover. They'd also appreciate opportunities for cross-training and professional growth.

Equity, Diversity, Access, and Inclusion

> *I would like to see more upper management participation in REDI [Respect, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion] efforts. … This matters. Just being present in the room shows you support this work and that it's more than a check box.*

Some employees would like senior leadership to do more to demonstrate inclusion and develop a diverse workforce. They would also like managers to respond more effectively when discrimination occurs.

- 57% of employees strongly agree or agree that senior leadership demonstrates inclusion and that leadership is committed to a diverse workforce.
- 62% of employees strongly agree or agree that they have equal access to advancement opportunities as others in their workplace.
- 60% of employees strongly agree or agree that managers take action when discrimination occurs.
- Many comments suggested that managers need better training on how to respond to discrimination. Employees also asked for more accountability for employees who behave inappropriately and for managers who look the other way.

Employees' perceptions of EDAI and of discrimination vary by demographic group.

- Employees who identify as LGBTQ+, women, gender non-binary, veteran, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black, and having a disability are less positive on one or more of the EDAI and PEAR questions. In addition, employees who identify as White are more positive in these areas.
- Employee comments suggest that EDAI efforts should pay more attention to disability (including invisible disabilities), language access, and neurodiversity.

Policies and Processes

> *Continued breaking down of silos, leveraging great work no matter where it comes from, more collaboration, greater inclusion, greater responsibility and accountability, shared vision for the future, acceptance of mistakes as learning opportunities and growth, and amplification of impact internally and externally.*

Comments about DSHS policies and processes were primarily suggestions for improvement.

- 91% of comments related to general work policies and processes noted a need for improvement.
- Employees were concerned about stressful work expectations, lack of person-centered processes, and work silos that get in the way of effective collaboration.

Predictors of employee engagement

In addition to measuring overall satisfaction levels, the survey also allows for analysis of which workplace factors are most associated with employee engagement outcomes, including general job satisfaction and likelihood of recommending the agency.[1]

Meaning, belonging, and feeling valued are the strongest predictors of job satisfaction and recommending the agency as a great place to work.

- Employees who find their work meaningful are over 5 times more likely than other employees to be satisfied with their job – the strongest predictor of job satisfaction. They are also twice as likely to recommend the agency as a great place to work.
- Sense of belonging is the strongest predictor of recommending the agency, with employees who feel that they belong being almost 3 times as likely as other employees to recommend DSHS as an employer. It is also the second highest predictor of job satisfaction.
- Feeling valued as an employee is also important for both job satisfaction and recommending the agency. Employees who feel valued are 2.3 times more likely than other employees to be satisfied with their job and 2.6 times more likely to recommend the agency.

"I love my job and the fact that I get to help people every day to gain access to services and resources that help them live their best lives. I also feel incredibly fortunate to work with amazing, unique, diverse people."

About the survey

The goal of the survey is to reach out to each of the almost 17,000 employees at DSHS, obtain candid feedback about their workplace experiences, and provide actionable results at every level of the organization.

The 2023 Employee Engagement Survey was:
- Available to all employees from October 2 to November 13, 2023.
- Completed by 12,136 DSHS employees — a 72% response rate.
- Revised significantly from previous years. Under the direction of the Office of Financial Management (OFM), the survey includes 26 new standard questions and a new response scale. Because of this, trend analysis is not included in this year's results.
- Standardized across DSHS, with the option to add questions to meet specific needs of individual programs.
- An opportunity for employees to share feedback in open-ended comments that were analyzed thoroughly.
- Distributed widely. In addition to this comprehensive report and the many work group reports, the survey findings have been made available through a PowerBI dashboard, presentations, and individual consultations.
- An important component of action plans developed by DSHS Assistant Secretaries to guide the next cycle of performance improvement.

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[1] We calculated logistic regression models to predict the independent contributions of each survey question to employee engagement outcomes, while controlling for the effects of all other factors. See Appendix D for more detail.

Common acronyms in employee comments

ALTSA – Aging and Long-term Support Administration	ESA – Economic Services Administration
APS – Adult Protective Services (ALTSA)	ESH – Eastern State Hospital (BHA)
BHA – Behavioral Health Administration	FFA – Facilities, Finance and Analytics Administration
CSD – Community Services Division (ESA)	HCS – Home and Community Services (ALTSA)
CSO – Community Services Office (ESA)	HRD – Human Resources Division
DCS – Division of Child Support (ESA)	REDI – Respect, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion
DCYF – Department of Children, Youth, and Families	SCC – Special Commitment Center (BHA)
DDA – Developmental Disabilities Administration	WFO – Workforce Optimization (ESA)
DVR – Division of Vocational Rehabilitation	WSH – Western State Hospital (BHA)
EDAI – Equity, Diversity, Access, and Inclusion	

"Unloading Papers" ● Third Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Values
By Mark Kester, with permission

From the photographer:
Rainer School clients unload rolls of newspapers at Pike Place Market. Rainier clients have been generating newspaper rolls used by Pike Place Fish Market for a quarter century. They use the newspapers to wrap their seafood offerings.

Responses to standard questions

Percent of employees answering "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

RECOGNITION AND BELONGING

Question	Percent
In my team, it feels safe to take social risks (such as asking questions, making mistakes, highlighting problems).	69%
I feel as if I belong at my agency.	63%
I feel valued as an employee at my agency.	59%
I regularly receive recognition when I do a good job.	58%
I am appropriately involved in decisions that affect my work.	47%

MANAGER SUPPORT

Question	Percent
My immediate supervisor treats me with respect.	85%
My immediate supervisor creates an environment of openness and trust.	77%
My immediate supervisor is a good leader.	77%

COMMUNICATION AND VISION

Question	Percent
I find meaning in my work.	81%
I have a clear understanding of what is expected of me.	76%
I can see a clear link between my work and my agency's vision.	66%
I am encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things.	61%
I receive the information and communication I need to do my job effectively.	60%
Senior leadership at my agency do a good job of communicating the reasons behind important changes that are made.	46%
I feel supported during organizational change at this agency.	43%

Responses to standard questions, continued

Percent of employees answering "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, ACCESS, AND INCLUSION

Question	Percent
My agency demonstrates a commitment to pro-equity and anti-racism (through policies, practices, and actions).	72%
My agency empowers me to take pro-equity anti-racism (PEAR) actions in the workplace.	66%
People are treated fairly in my work group.	64%
Senior leadership at my agency are genuinely committed to attracting, developing, and keeping a diverse work force.	57%
Senior leadership at my agency demonstrate inclusion (through leadership, communications, participating in related activities, etc.).	57%

DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

Question	Percent
I know the steps to take if I observe or experience discrimination or harassment at work.	85%
I have similar access to advancement opportunities (e.g., promotion, career development, training) as others in my workplace.	62%
Managers and other leaders take action when discrimination or harassment occur in my workplace.	60%

ACCESS AND RESOURCES

Question	Percent
I have access to the resources (e.g., materials, equipment, technology, etc.) I need to do my job effectively.	72%
I have the training I need to do my job effectively.	69%
My agency provides me with the opportunity for learning and development.	63%
I have opportunities for advancement in my agency.	52%

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Question	Percent
I am satisfied with my flexibility (the ability to adjust scheduled hours as needed).	73%
I am satisfied with my telework and remote work opportunities.	72%

Responses to standard questions, continued

Percent of employees answering "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

SATISFACTION WITH JOB AND AGENCY

Question	Percent
In general, I am satisfied with my job.	69%
I am proud to work for my agency.	69%
Overall, I am satisfied with my agency as a place to work.	65%
I would recommend my agency as a great place to work.	59%
I rarely think about looking for a new job with another employer.	49%

From the photographer:
This is a photo I took of a river in the Granite Falls area.

"Long Exposure River" • Honorable Mention
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Technical
By AJ Barker, with permission

Major comment themes

Comments were made in response to these two questions:

1. What do you like best about your current job?
2. What changes would you like to see in your workplace?

Percent of the 7,687 respondents who made comments in 2023
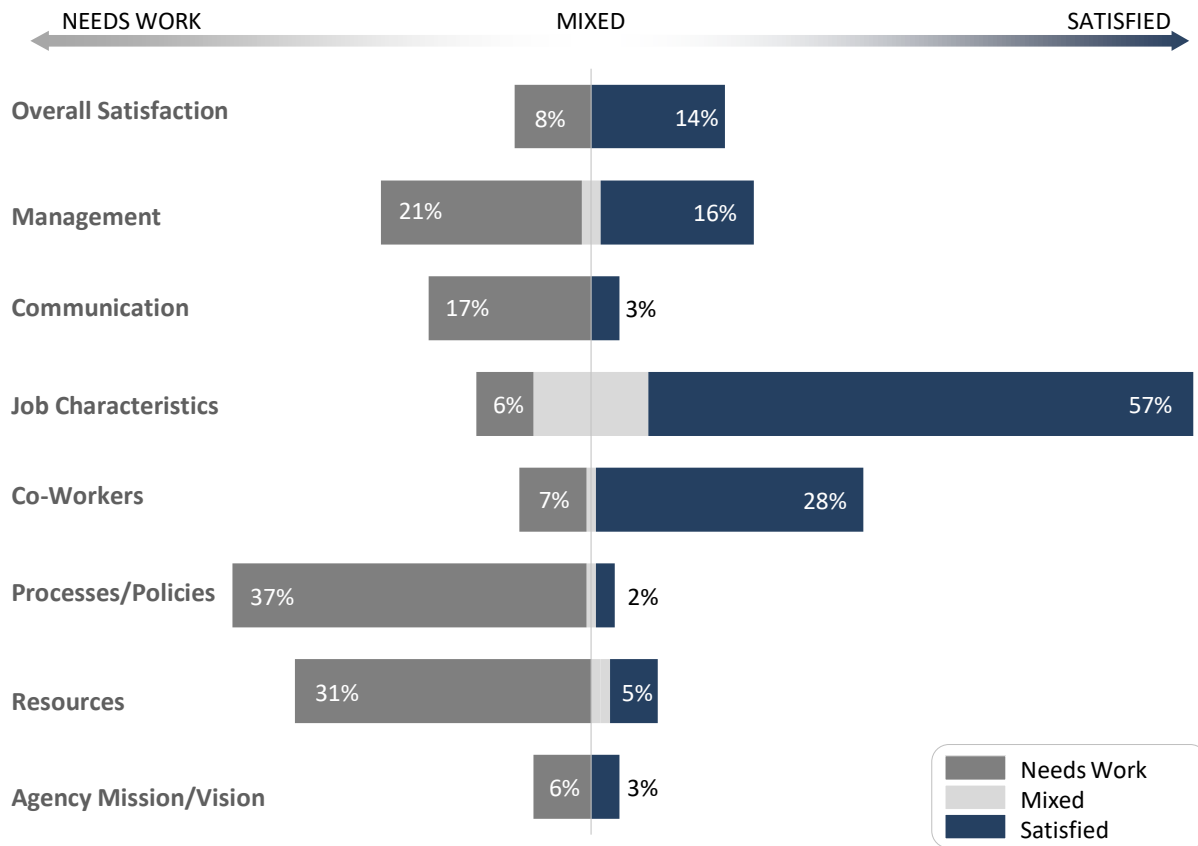
NEEDS WORK	MIXED	SATISFIED

Overall Satisfaction — 8% | 14%

Management — 21% | 16%

Communication — 17% | 3%

Job Characteristics — 6% | 57%

Co-Workers — 7% | 28%

Processes/Policies — 37% | 2%

Resources — 31% | 5%

Agency Mission/Vision — 6% | 3%

Legend:
- Needs Work
- Mixed
- Satisfied

CHAPTER 1

Recognition and Belonging

RECOGNITION AND BELONGING ARE KEY FEATURES OF THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE. Most DSHS employees agree that they are appropriately recognized for their contributions and like that the work environment fosters a sense of belonging. They also feel safe asking questions and learning from mistakes.
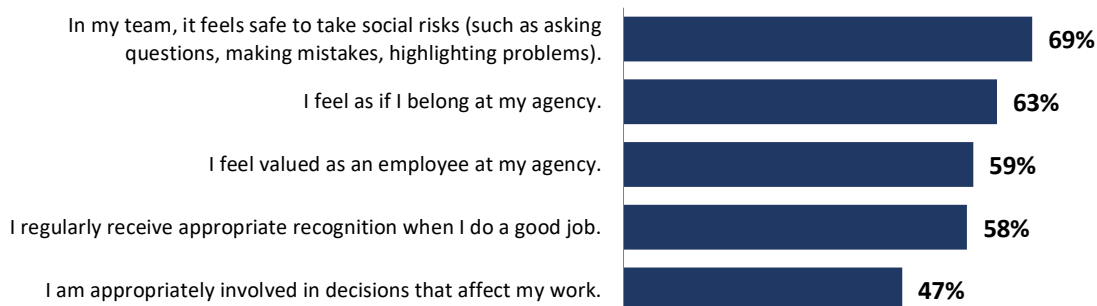
In their comments, employees expressed appreciation for their colleagues and shared many positive experiences of support in the job. They like having opportunities to share their ideas and appreciate when management recognizes their hard work. However, some employees also expressed frustration that their contributions were not appropriately recognized. Others said that there were limited, if any, opportunities for them to share their experiences and suggestions for process improvements. Although most say they like their co-workers, some respondents doubt their colleagues' commitment and complained about a lack of accountability to quality work.

Recognition and belonging

Most employees feel valued and recognized for their contributions and agree that they feel safe to take social risks. Fewer employees feel adequately involved in decisions that affect their work.

Percent of employees answering "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

In my team, it feels safe to take social risks (such as asking questions, making mistakes, highlighting problems).	**69%**
I feel as if I belong at my agency.	**63%**
I feel valued as an employee at my agency.	**59%**
I regularly receive appropriate recognition when I do a good job.	**58%**
I am appropriately involved in decisions that affect my work.	**47%**

Employees have a positive view of their teams with 69% agreeing that their team is a safe place to ask questions, make mistakes, and highlight problems. Many talked about their teams in the open comments as well – more than 1 of 4 (27%) of all respondents who commented talked about their team, 91% of whom spoke positively about immediate teammates and other colleagues across the agency. Positive interactions with colleagues may play into the positive response for employees' sense of belonging, with 63% agreeing that they feel they belong at DSHS.

Most employees agree that they feel valued as an employee (59%) and that they receive appropriate recognition for their good work (58%). However, in the comments, respondents were more likely to express concerns about how they are recognized by management and leadership.

Less than half (47%) of respondents agree that they are appropriately involved in decisions affecting their work, indicating an area for improvement. This question was among the lowest scoring items on the survey, and many elaborated on their experiences in the open comments.

Successes

Respondents were overwhelmingly positive in their comments about teamwork and support. Many said that their co-workers were supportive, encouraging, and willing to help with questions and increased workload. Others attributed the positive team environment to their co-workers' friendliness. Though most simply said that they like their colleagues, a few shared more detailed stories of positive interactions like being welcomed as a new employee or working collaboratively across teams. A few also talked about how they have adjusted to the remote work environment to maintain or even strengthen team cohesion. Though few use the term "belonging" in their comments, respondents made a clear connection between their team environment and feeling as if they belong in the agency.

> *I have a strong team that works together to ensure we are providing the best services to our clients and stakeholders. Remote work has been a big benefit to my work life balance, and the use of Microsoft Teams has actually increased contact with my team members to provide better services and problem solve possible issues.*

Many employees also expressed appreciation of colleagues who demonstrate commitment to the agency's mission. Respondents often mention professionalism and knowledge as qualities they appreciate among their co-workers. Many also like that people work well together as a team to accomplish goals.

Some respondents indicated they felt valued and listened to in their comments. Many said they are grateful for the opportunities they had to give feedback, particularly if it led to process improvements. Some talked about how they liked that their work unit was proactive in addressing challenges and coming up with solutions across all levels of the organization. Others praised leaders who took care to recognize their team's hard work and made sure it was rewarded.

Challenges

Although employees mostly agree in the standard question that they receive appropriate recognition, comments show some challenges in this area. Some respondents felt that they were only recognized when something went wrong and that they rarely receive positive feedback. Others want different types of recognition, such as monetary incentives. Many of these comments also note that management or leadership does not recognize the value of their contributions. A few said they wanted proper credit for their ideas and their contributions to the agency.

> *I would like to see my supervisor create an environment that each team member's idea is valued, and each team member plays a role in planning and decision making.*

Similar to the responses to the standard question, some employees' comments also show that they do not feel appropriately involved in decisions that affect their work. Of those who talked about leadership listening, 75% had criticisms. Many were frustrated that they were not included in decisions prior to implementation, especially when they could have provided crucial insight into the way policies affect not only their job, but the clients they serve. Others felt that even if there were opportunities to present their perspectives, they were ignored as they did not see any evidence of their ideas being considered. Some shared stories of leadership being disrespectful and dismissing their ideas and perspectives.

In addition to challenges with leaders, employees also expressed some frustration with their colleagues. Although most of the comments show that respondents like their teams, 5% of all comments brought up concerns. For example, many expressed disappointment with colleagues not contributing equally to the team or not following policy, often leading to more work for themselves.

"I love the department I am part of. My co-workers are easy to work with and always helpful. My boss makes me feel important and part of the team. My input is always appreciated and valued."

"Reflections" • Second Place (tie)
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Technical
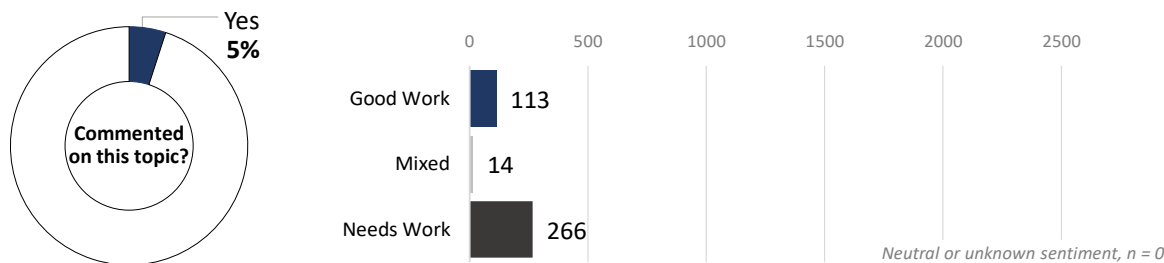By Staci Dilg, with permission

From the photographer:
During the Covid years I tried to pick up a few hobbies. One was getting a dog and the other was learning how to take pictures on my cell phone. This picture was my dog laying on my lap with his head on a glass end table. I shot this from my cell phone in Studio Mode with high contrast and was shocked with the results.

COMMENTS. Employee recognition

393 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed employee recognition.

Commented on this topic? Yes 5%

Good Work	113
Mixed	14
Needs Work	266

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 0

▶ **What DSHS employees said …**

Some employees feel valued.

"I feel valued by my supervisor."

"My supervisor is incredible and does a great job of promoting accountability while making me feel valuable."

"I appreciate my direct supervisor's leadership and feel like a valued team member."

"I feel valued in my new office. Although my commute is longer now, it is worth it."

"I do see employees are valued here and it shows."

"I feel seen as a person and for what I bring to the organization."

Others noted the appreciation they receive.

"I love that we are appreciated and told how much we are appreciated."

"[I like] knowing that the CEO recognizes and acknowledges all the hospital staff."

"I feel very appreciated in this new job, and it makes me a stronger counselor and a person to be able to work and support my clients."

"Super positive, supportive, valuing environment. Low on stress and high on thanks."

They praised supervisors who provide encouragement.

"My supervisor is very supportive and encouraging."

"My current supervisor is amazing. She supports the team to do their best work through encouragement and demonstrating her best work."

Many employees say appreciation is lacking.

"I would like to see employees being appreciated/honored for devotion to customers and getting work done."

"I work in a field office and feel that there is an overall lack of appreciation."

"More thank yous when you are helping with tasks in other places or covering other units."

"More recognition and show appreciation on a consistent basis."

"I would like to be assigned to a supervisor that values me and encourages me to pursue my goals."

"We hear that we are valued but actions say otherwise."

They asked for positive feedback.

"Would like to hear and see more positive reinforcement for the small successes so it's not just negative all the time."

"More praise for doing a good job, instead of only being noticed when I do something wrong."

"Staff are rarely shown any appreciation. We are constantly told what we are doing wrong but never what we are doing right."

"Give true recognition to employees. At this point, I feel like punishment is all we see with the audits and standards of error rates, too much pressure being placed on employees."

"I admit that no amount of praise for being accurate on my calls and my work quite makes up for the feeling of failure when I am reminded weekly that my times aren't good enough."
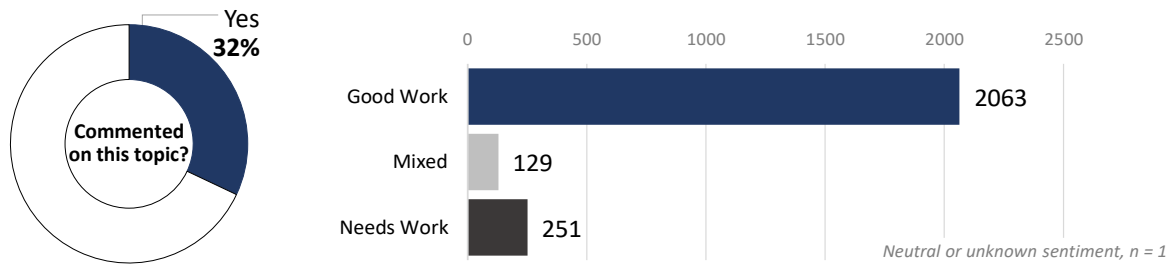
Some requested different forms of recognition.

"Would like to see more innovative appreciation practices for the facility staff when they do something well."

"More praise and incentives when employees are performing outstandingly."

"More employee appreciation or fun activities."

"Increase incentives or perks. We need better recognition for folks that served at DSHS for many years, just an announcement on an all staff is not enough. They deserve a proper gift and recognition."

"We don't want hospital muffins as a thanks for staying when so many left! We want to be heard and treated like valued employees!"

"Recognition for doing a good job. Recognition for years in service - in cash and not a certificate or medal."

Others want credit for their ideas and work.

"Better recognition of who actually thought of an idea vs. taking credit."

"I feel my team has little exposure and it has damaged my teammates and my ability to advance into other positions because no one knows what we do and do not give us credit for the program knowledge and skills we have."

COMMENTS. Teamwork and support

2,444 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed teamwork and support.

Commented on this topic?
Yes **32%**

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500
Good Work						2063
Mixed	129					
Needs Work	251					

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 1

► What DSHS employees said …

Many employees praised their co-workers.

"I am very grateful to be working alongside my amazing teammates!"

"My co-workers are awesome."

"The people I work with, we work as team, and it feels good."

"I can't imagine working with a better group of people."

"I'm new to this work group and everyone seems to be team players and it just seems like a healthy and happy place to work."

"I truly feel like it is a team and not just everyone for themselves."

"I like my co-workers and the culture we have developed."

"What I like best is the work environment and my co-workers who make it feel like we are a family."

"Though my team is small, it is the best team I have ever worked with."

"All in my unit work together very well and we all get along. It's a comfortable feeling."

"The people I work with are amazing."

They appreciate the friendliness and support.

"Everyone is friendly and willing to lend a helpful hand when anyone has questions or needs assistance."

"Everyone is friendly and happy to help."

"I like the people. Everyone is helpful and willing to help. We have a great team."

"My team is very close and supportive. Makes it easy to do the work and work through difficult work issues as they arise."

"I like that my co-workers are very supportive, and we help each other out. I hardly ever feel overwhelmed because of this."

"My co-workers are amazing and support decisions made by each other."

"The level of support, training, and trust my team provides motivates me every day to be the best employee I can be."

"I like the people that I am working with, everyone seems to be approachable and friendly."

Others mentioned kindness and respect.

"I appreciate the team I work in and the level of respect amongst each other."

"The unity, respect, and courteousness amongst us in our department. It enables us to do our job easy, fun, and coming to work daily. With this attitude in our department, it radiates into good vibes to our patients/clients which I believe is vital especially with the type of work we do."

"I like that I can ask questions if I need help and my questions will be answered without people laughing."

"I like our team. Everyone is friendly and there is never any degradation when an individual makes a mistake or needs help."

"The team I work with is very collaborative and we work well together. We respect each other."

"I am fortunate to have co-workers who value me as a person. We honor and respect each other, utilizing our strengths and weakness in balance and support."

"Each worker is committed to having a working environment that promotes positivity. I finally feel valued and respected. I feel safe."

Co-worker positivity was notable.

"You can feel in the air just how much everyone wants to be here, and how much they care."

"I really appreciate my team, their positive outlook."

"I love the positive spirit and supportive teamwork I witness on a daily basis as we work together to provide treatment."

Some want more opportunities for teamwork.

"Increased camaraderie."

"More opportunities for collaboration and sense of belonging to a team."

"Changes in attitudes amongst colleagues."

"More focus on team building."

"I've witnessed a lot of gossip happening within the staff, and it makes me uncomfortable to see co-workers talk about each other."

"I would like to see more teamwork."

COMMENTS. Co-worker contributions

753 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed co-worker contributions.

Yes
7%

Commented on this topic?

Good Work	314
Mixed	28
Needs Work	410

0   500   1000   1500   2000   2500

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 1
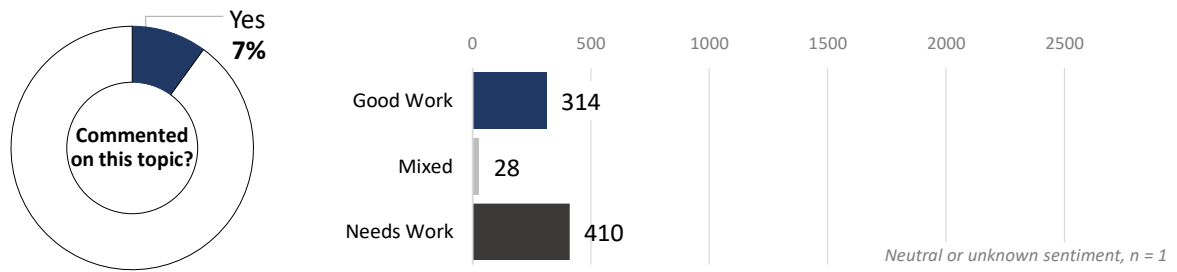
▶ What DSHS employees said …

Employees praised co-worker commitment and skill.

"We have a strong and knowledgeable team."

"Excellent group, very smart and committed."

"The staff is outstanding at their jobs and prove everyday how involved and knowledgeable they are about the people they are guiding."

"The quality and professionalism of the people I work with is outstanding."

"I am honored to work among people of high integrity."

"I love working with my team. Everyone brings something unique to the table and has experience with hardware/software that the others do not."

"My team members are the best. Everyone is reliable, knowledgeable, and trustworthy. I trust them to pull their weight and to ask for help when they need it."

They appreciate dedicated, caring colleagues.

"I appreciate that most people I come in contact with at work have a passion for the population we work with."

"I like being part of a team that cares about clients, values and finds meaning in our work, and treats clients and each other with compassion and respect."

"The kind demeanor that all workers show to customers here really stands out in my mind as the best thing about this job."

"My experience is that most ESH staff are supportive and committed to doing the best they can and that makes for a positive work environment."

"I admire the dedication of people in the administration to help others."

"I am part of a competent and dedicated team of professionals who care a great deal about the work and are committed to the vision and mission of our program."

"I work with talented and caring people who strive to do their best work every day."

A few mentioned issues with professionalism.

"More professionalism."

"[I want a] culture of professionalism throughout the workplace, throughout all levels of staff."

"A more professional work environment."
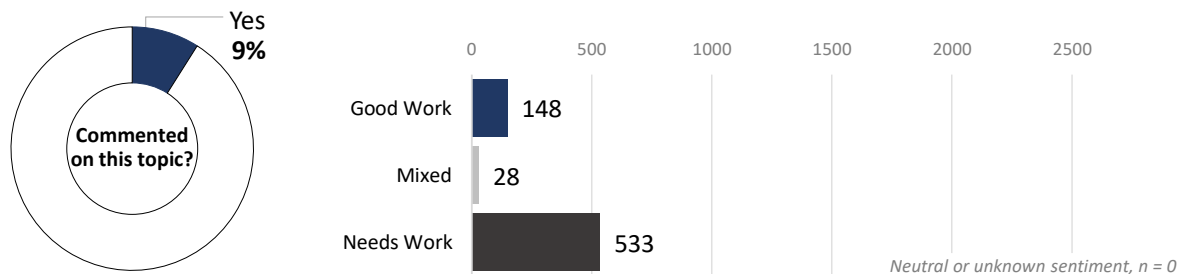
Some described inequities among co-workers.

"Sometimes I feel like a few handfuls of people carry the rest of the crew. More initiative needs to be taken by some of my co-workers."

"Some employees don't work as hard as others even if we are monitored."

"Good employees get stacked with the work of complacent employees. It's very difficult to watch really talented people struggle to keep up while others are allowed to skate by."

"We have employees who sleep at their desk, disappear for very long periods of time, and it is burning out the good employees."

Others requested more accountability for work quality.

"I would like to see people held responsible for their work or lack of work."

"Holding people accountable for not doing their jobs, making false statements, harassing other staff, and generally being a detriment to the workplace."

"More accountability/training for individuals that need help with their work. I feel that there is some subpar work, and, when asked to help in a teaching opportunity, I have been told, 'we don't throw people under the bus.' With that attitude, items are missed or forgotten in assessments, and level of care is not at a high level."

"More accountability for those producing below standards or not engaging in work at all."

"Accountability for attendance and quality of work."

"People being held accountable for their actions and how they treat clients."

"I'd like to see a standard of quality work upheld. There's a lot of variability from case manager to case manager with many people doing things incorrectly or producing work that is not of a very high quality."

"More employees owning culture of excellence/quality."

"More accountability/ownership over quality of work. We are all in this together. I feel like 'scope' tends to be an excuse for not making things right. The customer's case should be worked correctly."

COMMENTS. Listening to staff input

709 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed listening to staff input.

Commented on this topic?
Yes **9%**

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500
Good Work	148					
Mixed	28					
Needs Work	533					

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 0

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Employees praised leaders who encourage input and listen.

"Staff ideas are put into action and staff are involved in that work."

"My supervisor is supportive and welcomes any input that I may have."

"The supervisors are open to hear any concerns within the department."

"Our leadership is very approachable and open to hear what the team thinks."

"I get a voice when strategic and tactical decisions are discussed."

"Our team lead understands that she has a skilled and creative crew and encourages our input and suggestions."

"When I bring up ideas, my supervisor listens and seems to truly consider them."

"I think regional leadership is strong, and I feel comfortable being myself and stating my opinions when I have something to say, and I am confident it will be given thought, regardless of whether action is taken."

Some asked for management to act on their input.

"Management actually listening to staff feedback beyond giving lip service."

"Supervisors who will listen and ACT on ideas, not just pretend to listen."

"Management needs to listen to staff's complaints and take action."

"I wish leadership would listen to concerns and make real meaningful changes as a result. Most people feel as though no one is listening to them. The people in my department are truly kind and caring, and it is sad to see so many people feel as though their voices do not matter."

"[I want] management to listen and then use ideas from staff."

"More feedback from front line staff when decisions are made that affect our work and not just asking for feedback but genuinely giving it the weight it deserves."

"Make use of employee feedback."

"Our concerns are disregarded and not addressed."

They want to be included prior to change implementation.

"We are always told that we are included in changes, but we are not. By the time management comes to us about a change, they have already decided what is best. Our opinions about change and more work don't matter."

"It does not feel like staff are involved in the decision making, even on small changes."

"The entire process of change is significantly smoother when the field is consulted before a decision for change is made or a new process is implemented."

"Would appreciate being involved in conversations about change that directly impact our positions. Recent changes were made without consulting anyone on our level, with very short turnaround and escalated workload."

"There are a lot of issues that could be avoided if headquarters would roundtable their plans with some of the field staff prior to implementing them."

"More receptiveness to direct employee feedback. We employees see things on a day-to-day basis that upper management does not, and it would be meaningful to feel like our experiences are being taken into consideration when policy and standards are implemented."

"I think there needs to be more line worker input in what supports need to be added or changed as they affect us the most."

"None of the hands-on staff seem to be involved in any decisions. Why? They are experts in what actually happens, but nobody asks them."

Others mentioned that courteous treatment was lacking.

"Leadership does not listen or, if it is heard, it is not acknowledged."

"Management needs to listen more to ideas without judgment."

"Effective leadership should incorporate input from all parties involved, but especially all those the changes affect. When our management team is brought a new idea or is given additional suggestions to help resolve a problem, they label the folks with the suggestions as troublemakers or problems which is very deflating and frustrating as an employee doing the work."

"Office Space" ● Honorable Mention
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS in Action
By Josephine Nakimuli, with permission

From the photographer:
DCS, Tacoma office, One of the Support enforcement officers keeps himself inspired by his artwork.

"Fall in Cle Elum" ● Honorable Mention (tie)
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Values
By Cynthia Johnson, with permission

From the photographer:
This was taken in the fall. I love when the leaves turn color and add depth to my photos. I take my camera everywhere I go and just take photos when I see something I like and find beauty in.

From the photographer:
This picture of Mt Rainier was taken with my cell phone at Reflection Lake. As a DSHS employee I work hard to help my clients through very difficult and challenging times. I feel this photo reflects the peace I hope I can bring into their lives.

"Reflections of Peace" • First Place (tie)
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic
By Cathleen Hansen, with permission
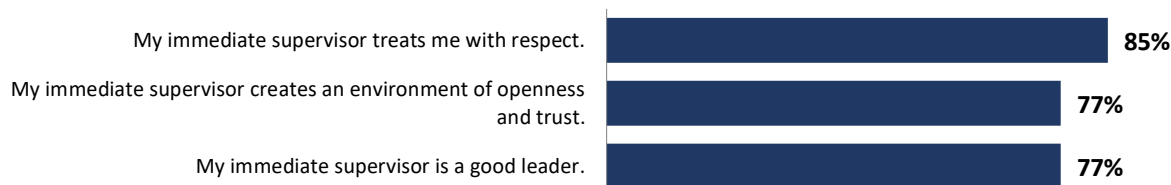
CHAPTER 2

Manager Support

MANAGER SUPPORT IS A MAJOR INFLUENCE on employees' experience within the agency. Responses to questions about managers were among the most positive in the survey, with an average of 80% positive across the three questions.

Although responses to the standard questions are positive, employees' comments show a mixed perspective. Many reiterated that they like their immediate supervisors, but employees also used the open comments to describe challenges and frustrations they had in working with various levels of management, such as insufficient support and perceptions of unfairness. These comments suggest that employees look to management to address ongoing challenges and respond to employee needs and may be disappointed when expectations are not fully met.

Manager support

Questions about immediate supervisors had some of the most positive results in the 2023 survey.

Percent of employees answering "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

My immediate supervisor treats me with respect.	**85%**
My immediate supervisor creates an environment of openness and trust.	**77%**
My immediate supervisor is a good leader.	**77%**

Manager respect has the highest percent positive response in the survey, with 85% of respondents answering "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." More than 3 of 4 employees also agreed that supervisors create a positive working environment (77%) and are good leaders (77%).

Almost 4 of 10 respondents (39%) also talked about supervisors or leadership in their open comments. In contrast to the structured questions, the comments were more likely to reference challenges with management. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) who talked about manager respect noted a need for improvement. More than 9 of 10 respondents (94%) who mentioned management fairness felt there were challenges such as unfair hiring or promotional practices. Employees tended to be more positive when talking about general management support, with 55% of the related comments sharing positive experiences. Others said they appreciate managers' leadership skills, commitment to the work, and understanding demeanor.

Successes

Most employees were positive about the support they receive from supervisors. Approximately 14% of employees who provided comments talked about manager support, mentoring, and availability, with over half (55%) praising their supervisors. Many shared experiences with supervisors who advocate for them and empower employees to grow in their positions. Similarly, a high number of respondents agree that their supervisor creates an environment of openness and trust (77%) and see their immediate supervisor as a good leader (77%).

> *My supervisor understands my work and empowers me to make changes/improvements when I identify an issue or problem.*

Employees also appreciate working with managers who treat them well. As described above, 85% of respondents agreed that their immediate supervisor treats them with respect. In addition, 33% of those who talked about respect from management in the open comments shared positive experiences. Some of the comments mention supervisors treating employees as individuals. Others praised management for helping to create a positive environment of psychological safety and support, allowing employees to make mistakes and learn from them.

Many of those who talked about other topics regarding managers simply noted that they liked their supervisor or leadership. Others mention specific leadership skills their managers show, including their knowledge, encouragement, and trust in their colleagues. Some said they like their supervisor's management style, often citing a culture of transparency and lack of micromanagement.

Challenges

Although the standard questions indicate positive perspectives of immediate supervisors in DSHS, many of the comments expand on challenges employees have encountered with management. Of the respondents who mentioned manager respect, 66% said that managers need to treat their colleagues with more respect. Many of these comments simply asked for more respect, often citing respect to line workers or less senior positions, but some shared more detailed interactions to illustrate the lack of courtesy they experience.

My supervisor is very condescending, and I feel like I am walking on eggshells.

Many respondents also feel that management needs to be more fair. Of the 540 comments that talked about manager fairness, 94% said it needs to improve. Complaints tend to focus on hiring practices and fears of retaliation, with some also noting unequal workload distribution. Some also said that if you were not part of the "in-crowd," support and engagement from management was limited.

Some employees noted a disconnect between upper management and direct service staff that left them feeling unsupported. They noted that leadership often did not know what their jobs entailed and felt that announcements or site visits from leadership were insincere as they rarely led to any noticeable improvement. Others mentioned being unable to reach their supervisors if they had questions or if they needed assistance with workload. They mentioned a lack of regular one-on-one meetings to assess progress and needs.

Among other topics related to management, holding people accountable was a frequent theme. Respondents want their supervisors to hold their colleagues accountable to standard work expectations, and they want executive leadership to hold supervisors accountable to their responsibilities. Some feel that there are too many positions in upper management, making the organization top-heavy and contributing to the disconnect between leadership and direct service employees.

"My supervisor provides an open, honest, and trusting work environment. I feel that my ideas and questions bring value and that my skills and experiences are respected. If my supervisor has a question, needs further clarification, or if I feel as if we are not on the same page, we have open communication without fear of a condescending response, reprisal, or assumptions getting in the way of our professional relationship and work."

"Sunrise in Ocean Shores" • Third Place
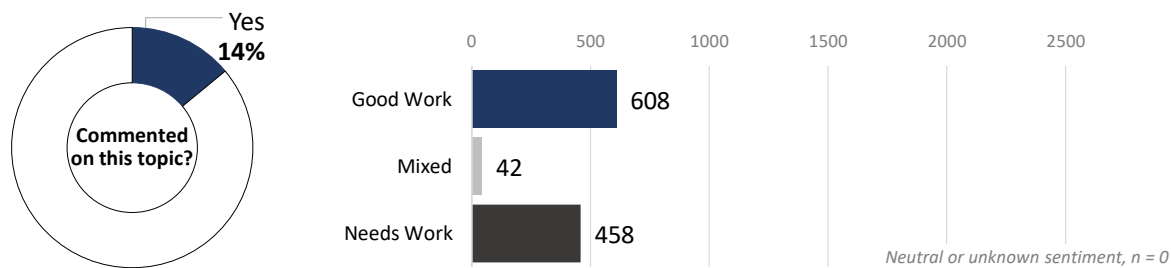DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic
By Ronda Wolfskill, with permission

From the photographer:
This is the view of the golf course from our home in Ocean Shores. This particular morning I had to grab my cell phone to capture what I saw. This is a good example of why work/home life balance is important. This view helps to keep me calm and happy while helping our clients.

COMMENTS. Manager support and mentoring

1,108 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed manager support and mentoring.

Yes
14%

Commented on this topic?

Good Work		608
Mixed		42
Needs Work		458

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 0

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Employees praised supportive managers.

"My supervisor is supportive and makes my job enjoyable and a fun place to work."

"My manager is amazing, understanding, and very supportive."

"I would say my supervisor is what I like best about my job. I feel encouraged, supported, valued in the work I am doing for the agency."

"My supervisor is supportive, professional, and really one of the most kind people I know."

"Having a supervisor that supports us, teaches us, and helps us to learn and grow has been amazing."

"[I like] having a supportive supervisor who removes barriers for me to do my work better."

"I love my supervisor. She supports and understands me."

"My division leadership is invested in my success and very supportive."

"I have a very supportive chief who genuinely cares about my wellbeing. She leads by example, and I find that very refreshing."

Some described manager responsiveness and availability.

"I really appreciate my direct supervisor. She has been extremely understanding and accessible, especially as I have navigated this new role."

"My supervisor is a very open, honest person. He is always friendly, never judgmental and lets me bounce ideas off him whenever I'm having trouble coming up with solutions."

"I feel very supported in my job and appreciate frequent check-ins with my supervisor and our larger team to ensure we are all on the same page and can brainstorm and troubleshoot together."

"Responsive direct supervisor and available upper management to assist with questions or provide support."

"[I like] being able to communicate with my supervisor with questions and have her always respond with positive feedback and encouragement."

"My managers do their best to solve issues that I bring to their attention."
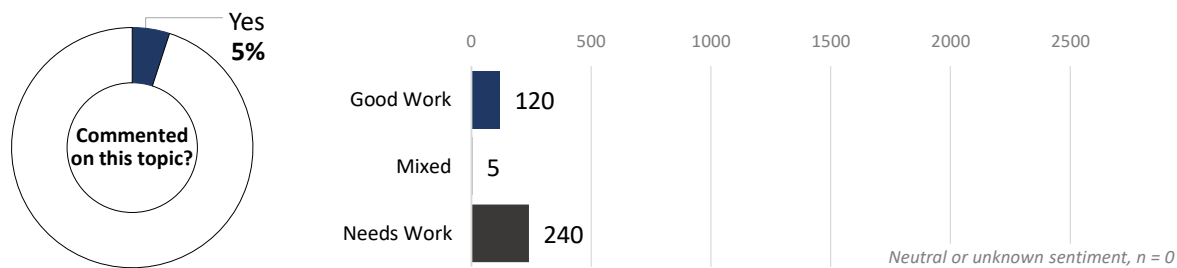
They are unsatisfied when support is lacking.

"I love trying to help the people of Washington, and I wish that there was more support from management to do this."

"I want to help my clients and be supported by those above me. And that's not just my supervisors. I want my company of employment to WANT to support us. They know we are struggling. Help us. Or you'll lose the best of us to Costco or Amazon. So much for changing lives. What about ours?"

"Supervisors are often so overwhelmed by their workload that they are unable to provide adequate support to staff."

"DSHS to practice what the DSHS mission is. Give the employees and team members the same consideration, care, and support that we expect to give our clients, community, and upper management. We matter. We make a difference. We are valued. We are more than just FTEs. More than just numbers on paper. We are human and we count."

"For the leaders to help instead of seeming like they just show up when there's an important event or important people that come around."

"I would like to see and feel more support from upper management. I've been in this job for 5 years and we still have the same issues as when I started."

Others say access is an issue.

"Upper management needs to really be sincere to help and support their staff and check in regularly with their staff."

"My direct supervisor will not talk about anything without an appointment, even if it is for a very simple question. I don't feel like I can go to my supervisor with questions."

"[I want] a supervisor who acts as that role to coordinate workload, projects, lead/coordinate project, and support their team."

"Meet with employees more frequently. Create goals for employees."

"More willingness from leads to help with questions and not seem irritated or frazzled by them."

COMMENTS. Manager courtesy

365 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed manager courtesy.

Yes
5%

Commented on this topic?

Good Work	120
Mixed	5
Needs Work	240

0   500   1000   1500   2000   2500

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 0

► What DSHS employees said …

Some employees said they're treated with respect.

"Current supervisor treats us with respect and caring."

"I like that my Administrator is also respectful of us, supports our decisions and fosters an open, respectful, honest team."

"Respect and dignity in the workplace."

"I feel respected by my leaders."

"We are treated like people, not a number."

"My direct supervisor and management are awesome, treat me well, and make me feel valued as an employee."

"I like how I am treated with respect but also pushed to be a better employee."

"I work for a great boss who treats me with respect."

"HCS treats its employees fairly and with respect."

"I appreciate the trust and respect my supervisor gives me."

"I am a part of the solution, and I am treated as an adult."

"My current supervisor respects and encourages me to thrive."

"My supervisor treats the team with respect."

"Treated as a responsible adult."

"My current CSOA is an amazing supervisor who makes me feel seen, valued, respected, and appreciated."

Employees want managers to communicate respectfully.

"Supervisor needs to learn how to treat his team members with respect in person and through emails. All team members deserve respect. DDA is not part of the army platoon."

"Supervisor needs to communicate with respect to all staff especially Nursing LPN. No one should yell at the nurses."

"We are being talked down to and treated like trash."

"Eliminate micromanagers and all upper management who do not treat their staff with respect. I have been to several management meetings with upper management and have seen them being totally disrespectful to the line workers. This was very inappropriate. They should not be allowed to belittle people. I have seen managers ride their supervisors to the point the supervisor comes out of the meeting in tears."

They noted some condescending treatment.

"I would like senior leadership at CSD to value the employees on the front lines. I would like for them not to be condescending and combative to those employees."

"There is a feeling of condescension when spoken to by supervisor. Even when he 'compliments,' it feels forced for him to say things positive."

"I would like to see more respect from management as to how they treat people. Management at times is condescending, dismissive, rude, and does not want to hear what staff have to say."

"It would be nice to have a supervisor who is not rude, does not roll eyes, glare at you, mock, or belittle co-workers."

"DON'T treat us like kids. We are adults."

"It's stressful to have someone always on your back. We are all grown adults, not kids."

"Administration staff treating junior staff like human beings who have the ability to reason."
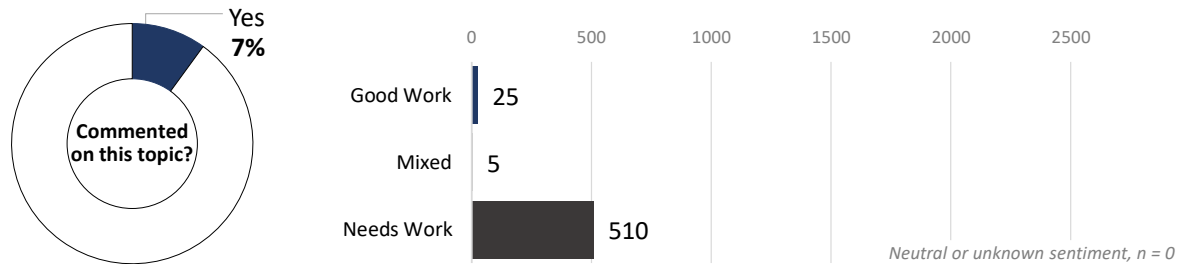
Others say they are devalued.

"The senior leadership team has no idea whatsoever what line staff deals with on a daily, and all they do is to treat us as if we are non-human, as if we are robotic."

"We are treated as pawns, not valuable, very replaceable, not respected. We are the bottom of the food chain."

"We would benefit from an empowering and present supervisor to view us as actual people and not be treated as another body count for staffing."

"I would like to see ACs [Attendant Counselors] treated with more respect, not like we are easily replaceable."

"An IT and MOD management that valued employees and treated them with respect."

Some asked for courteous, kind managers.

"I don't feel lead management has the same views as my immediate supervisor does about acknowledging people's strengths and weaknesses and respecting them. It's their way or no way."

"Get rid of managers and replace them with actual leaders that build staff up instead of always tearing them down."

COMMENTS. Manager fairness

540 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed manager fairness.

Yes
7%

Commented on this topic?

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500
Good Work	25					
Mixed	5					
Needs Work		510				

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 0

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Some employees said they were treated fairly.

"On my unit, I really like my supervisor for treating all employees equally and fairly."

"I feel like my supervisor is fair."

"My immediate supervisor is amazing and tries as best as she can to accommodate us equally."

"Supportive supervisor, open conversations without the fear of retribution."

"For the day to day, my direct supervisor is transparent and fair in her decision making."

Manager favoritism is a common concern.

"Everyone, home and office workers, to be treated with respect and equality."

"There is nothing but fear from CSD HQ leadership being pushed towards lower-level workers, and there is absolutely no engagement unless you are in the 'in-crowd.'"

"Fairness. All staff treated equally and given the same opportunities."

"Have a supervisor that is supportive and treats everyone equal."

"More fair treatment of people who are perceived to be at the bottom of the totem pole."

"Leaders should not exhibit favoritism or play games that benefit certain individuals."

"Too much favoritism within the agency to where people get into trouble for nonwork-related issues."

"Teams being more professional than personal. I feel there is too much buddy buddy situations at work even amongst managers whereby people form friendships and work as such. If you do not fit in accordingly, you are shunned which is very humiliating and causes a lot of friction amongst those unable to do as expected to fit in and be liked to be supported."

A few described unequal workload distribution.

"More equal distribution of work would be appreciated."

"No support from leadership. Double standard in treatment between different people, favoritism, unequal/unfair distribution of workload."

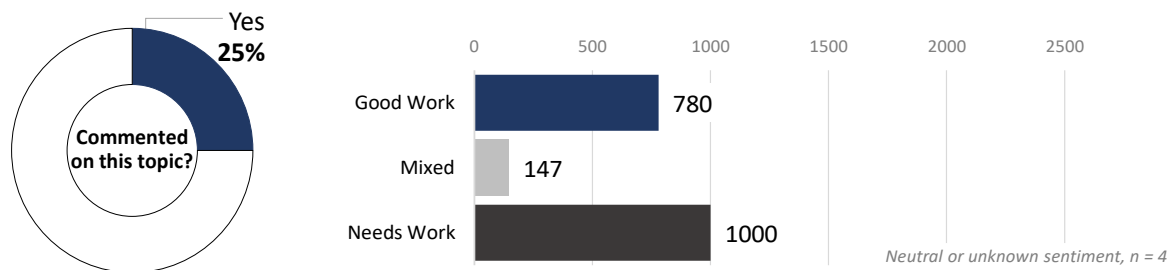**Employees expressed concerns about retaliation.**

"I would like to speak freely without fear of retaliation to senior management."

"Staff are afraid to share or speak the truth for fear of retribution from the highest level of DSHS."

"There are cliques within the current office that include management with employees. Nothing is confidential even with management. Certain employees are often targeted and retaliated against. It has created a toxic work environment and when management is in on it, employees feel trapped and unsafe to voice their concerns."

Many specifically mentioned issues with favoritism in hiring practices.

"Nepotism appears to be rampant in the agency."

"I would like to see Senior management discouraged to create close friendships with their employees because in certain situations it creates favoritism and no matter what their 'friend' says, it is the truth...even when it is a lie."

"Elimination of cronyism and favoritism."

"I would like to see less favoritism and workarounds with nepotism. It's pretty clear around here that there are people favored over others."

"I would like to see the favoritism and cliques gone."

"I would like to see a workplace where promotions are based on merit, not who you are friends with."

"Employees to be treated equally, no special privileges to 'friends' or retaliation in the form of promotion and referrals."

"Less blatant favoritism, picking the best candidates for jobs instead of the most-liked-by-management candidates."

"I do not think people have the same opportunity for advancement. It is hard to see senior management pick someone they like and give them a new role and or just increase their salary when they are doing the same job as the rest of the people on the same team. This favoritism is hurting the agency as a whole, and certainly the productivity and engagement of staff."

COMMENTS. Other comments about managers

1,931 of the 7,687 respondents made other comments about managers.

Yes
25%

Commented on this topic?

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500
Good Work		780				
Mixed	147					
Needs Work			1000			

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 4

► What DSHS employees said …

Employees mentioned positive qualities in their managers.

"Our leader is inspirational, positive, motivational, and seems to be very savvy about organizational change and improvement. My direct supervisor is a problem-solver and balances thoughtful analysis with action. She's also very patient, which has been important in my first year at our department. She treats me like an equal and puts faith in me."

"My direct supervisor! She is everything a supervisor should embody: understanding, supportive, encouraging, calm, respectful, helpful!"

"My supervisor is super kind, knowledgeable, always available to help his team."

"Excellent direct supervisor who is encouraging, engaged, and extremely knowledgeable."

"My supervisor has worked hard – leading by example – to make our unit one that is safe, growing in knowledge, and accomplishing a lot. We now can discuss the good, the bad, and the ugly within our unit. There is a great deal of trust there."

"My supervisor is kind, thoughtful, and willing to go to bat for their entire team."

"I like the management style of my direct supervisor. She allows me to lead my team/program without micromanaging."

Some described their manager's knowledge and skill.

"All the managers and leads know their duties very well."

"My supervisor is a technical expert and makes herself available to answer questions through consults when needed. She is clearly very good at what she does and shares her knowledge when she is able, which is helpful to new staff in this area like myself."

"Current supervisor is very knowledgeable and supportive, making it a pleasure to go to work."

"My supervisor is a great leader with a wealth of knowledge and experience."

"I have a direct supervisor who knows the job, did the job at APS as an investigator and sup, and so she can give me experience-based answers and when she doesn't know she looks it up."

They want leaders held accountable for supervisory and technical skills.

"An immediate supervisor who has leadership and supervisory skills. This person has no interpersonal skills, no supervisory skills, and no compassion nor interest in the job we do."

"Growth and professional development of my supervisor."

"Required ongoing training for all leadership roles beyond the state required training - if leadership does not maintain pace with technology, best practices, and industry standards then it systematically stifles growth and progress for the entire organization."

"Would like senior management to have some accountability."

"Management insists on consistency but do not hold themselves to this."

"Leaders to demand a technical understanding of something they make decisions for and better keeping open minds. Less hubris, more curiosity."

"If you want to foster a culture of accountability, then you have to first model it higher up and then do the hard work of expecting the rest of the organization to fall in line."

Some were dissatisfied with low levels of trust.

"Staff is not trusted to perform simple daily tasks without a supervisor breathing down their neck."

"People don't leave jobs, they leave supervisors. We are already starting to see that."

"More trust and less prove-it-to-me-first attitude."

Others want more connection between managers and staff.

"Olympia Headquarters make more visits to our workplaces."

"A better relationship between upper administration/HQ and the regional field staff."

"HQ is not great to the field."

"I feel like administration seems disconnected from staff."

"I think it would be helpful if senior management gained a better understanding of the workload requirements for front line employees."

"Fireworks with Dad" ● Second Place (tie)
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Employees & Family
By Rena Marie Perez, with permission

"Morning Dew" ● Third Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Technical
By Raquel Gomez Ramirez, with permission

"Monument Valley"
DSHS Photo Contest
By Kim Y Karu, with permission

CHAPTER 3
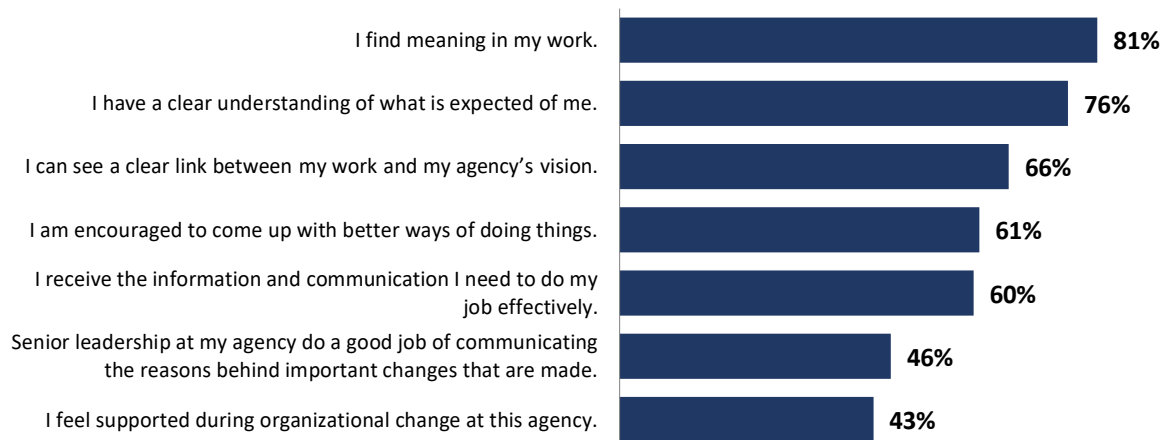
Communication and Vision

OPEN COMMUNICATION AND HELPING OTHERS ARE IMPORTANT for DSHS employees. Many are satisfied with the communication they receive to complete their daily work, but also describe challenges with communication from senior leadership, especially when it comes to changes within the agency. In their comments, employees expressed appreciation for transparency and also noted communication barriers between groups within the organization.

The majority of employees find their work meaningful, and they see how their work contributes to the larger agency vision. Helping others is the most common topic within employee comments, and many say they like contributing to their communities. Comments also expressed appreciation for being able to be creative in coming up with better ways to complete tasks.

Communication and vision

Most employees find meaning in their work and appreciate having clear expectations. However, many also find communication and support from leadership lacking, particularly in times of change.

Percent of employees answering "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

I find meaning in my work.	**81%**
I have a clear understanding of what is expected of me.	**76%**
I can see a clear link between my work and my agency's vision.	**66%**
I am encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things.	**61%**
I receive the information and communication I need to do my job effectively.	**60%**
Senior leadership at my agency do a good job of communicating the reasons behind important changes that are made.	**46%**
I feel supported during organizational change at this agency.	**43%**

More than 8 of 10 (81%) employees agreed that they found meaning in their work, making this the third-most positive question in the survey. This is also the strongest predictor of job satisfaction: employees who find meaning in their work are four times more likely than other employees to be satisfied with their jobs. Respondents also see the connection between their work and the agency's vision, with 2 of 3 (66%) agreeing. In the open comments, many said that they enjoy working directly with clients to meet their needs and make a difference in their lives.

Employees also indicated that they get the necessary direction to do their job. More than 3 of 4 (76%) agree that they have a clear understanding of expectations, and 6 of 10 (60%) agree they receive the information needed to do their job effectively. Respondents also indicated that they have the autonomy to do their job in the way they see best, and 61% agree that they are encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things.

Although employees' responses indicate that they are mostly satisfied with communication for their daily work, employees note challenges when it comes to change management in the agency. Less than half of survey respondents agreed that senior leadership communicate reasons behind changes and provide support during these changes. Most comments about communication from management also pointed out challenges and asked for improvement.

Successes

Helping others and finding meaning in work is a strong motivator for employees. The structured question "I find meaning in my work" has the third-most positive response in the survey with 81% agreeing. In addition, helping others is the most common topic in the comments, with almost 4 of 10 employees (37%) writing about helping clients as the part they like best about their current job. Many also talked in more detail about how their work helped Washingtonians, such as facilitating access to services across the different administrations.

Few respondents (4%) explicitly mentioned the mission, vision, and/or values of DSHS in their comments, but those who did described how their daily work contributes to the agency's mission. This mirrors the 66% who agreed that they see a clear link between their work and the agency's vision. Employees frequently referenced transforming lives and serving their communities as a positive aspect of their work.

> *I like that my organization is committed to solving poverty. Even if we never eradicate poverty, I know our efforts transform lives.*

Employees also appreciate opportunities to be creative in improving processes, with 61% agreeing they are encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things. In the comments, many employees expressed appreciation that they can approach their daily work in a way that works best for them.

Many agree that they have clear expectations within their position (76%) and receive the information and communication necessary to complete their work effectively (60%). Those who praised communication from leadership in their comments appreciate clear and transparent messaging around expectations and upcoming changes.

Challenges

Employees appreciate finding meaning in their work and seeing the connection between their daily work and the mission, but some pointed out in their comments that the stated values of the agency do not always align with the way the job is done. Some of these comments criticized the "Employer of Choice" model, saying that the agency culture does not reflect these goals. Some suggestions to better meet these goals include higher pay to more closely match the private sector and an environment which fosters kindness and mutual respect. Others note that certain processes in their divisions are counterproductive to centering clients and transforming lives.

> *The job feels as if it is more about numbers and meeting certain quotas instead of the most important thing – the people that are behind those "numbers."*

Most employees agree that they receive information to do their job (60%), but they also indicated that communication from senior leadership about the reasons behind changes (46%) needs improvement. This is the second-least positive question in the survey. Employee comments reflect these frustrations, with 89% of comments expressing critiques. Many talked about a lack of transparency, particularly regarding changes that affect the daily work. Some also said they were not given information in a timely way, causing stress with little to no time to prepare for changes in their work.

Feeling supported during organizational change was the lowest-scoring question on the survey with only 43% of respondents agreeing they receive sufficient support. Some employees specifically requested more support from management when there are changes, but most referenced the lack of communication as a contributing factor in feeling unsupported. A few people mentioned challenges with incorrect information being shared, leading to more stress in times of change.

Many employees also made general comments about wanting more communication. Some requested more regular meetings with leadership to learn about plans within the larger agency, but others felt that meetings were not helpful. In addition to the disconnect between management and line employees, some expressed concerns with communication between departments or divisions, with silos making it challenging to complete collaborative projects efficiently.

"I like the progressive vision for our agency and the way we are able to serve our clients and community. I am proud of the forward thinking and trying new ways of serving our clients and love that Washington State is at the forefront of this. I also like working alongside staff, community partners for a grassroots approach … I appreciate upper management's commitment to connecting to the field with road shows and All Staffs."

---

"Summerfest Fun" ● First Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS Values
By Marjoree Udulutch, with permission

From the photographer:
Water Tower at Rainier School Summerfest 2023. An ATS3 gets wet!

COMMENTS. Communication from management

770 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed communication from management.

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 0

Good Work	72
Mixed	13
Needs Work	685
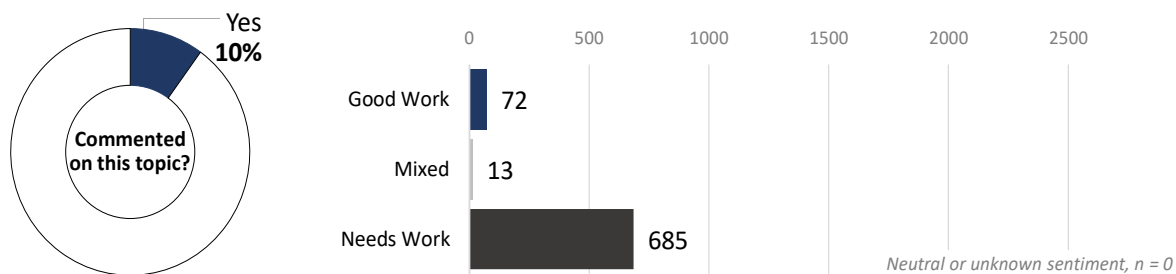
▶ What DSHS employees said …

A few employees described effective communication.

"I have a trustworthy supervisor that is transparent with upcoming changes and a great communicator."

"Information is timely, and I appreciate the support of leadership within my agency."

"[I like] the clarity of purpose and expectations I get from my supervisor."

Employees asked for more transparency.

"Transparency and flow of information from top down. Lots of secrecy is not good for morale."

"More open decision-making would be helpful."

"The whole management team needs to be replaced. They do not care, they lie, no one besides them knows what is going on, and they keep it from the employees."

"More transparency in the workplace. No need to dance around things, be real with employees."

"More communication and transparency from upper (senior) management. There are rumors flying around campus that big changes are coming down the pike that will affect all of us. Yet, no one has addressed this, and the rumors keep growing. It creates tension and anxiety in the workplace."

"Transparency. Decisions are made without any communication to the teams."

"More transparency from local leadership and less rhetoric."

"More transparency with CEO's actions and changes. Seems like a secret and then suddenly enacted."

They want to know the reasons why decisions are made.

"When 'big' decisions are made by leadership, share the 'why' the decision was made (include details)."

"When my supervisor institutes changes that affect how I do my job, I would like a rationale. It's easier and more satisfying to implement changes when you know 'why' rather than being compelled."

"More communication about changes implemented. I have found that not everyone is aware of recent changes or understands the reason those changes were made."

"There's no information on the why behind decisions."

Some said clear and consistent communication is lacking.

"Clearer and more consistent communication and updates from upper management. Currently the communication feels more like an afterthought and is very inconsistent."

"Consistent direction and information. Often find that different people doing the same work are told different things."

"Better communication and clearer vision of system modernizations."

"More communication both for DDA employees and our clients in digestible and understandable language."

"The communication among leads and supervisors seems to be a bit all over the place. I'd like the communication to improve so that I truly know what to expect for my workday and everyone is on the same page."
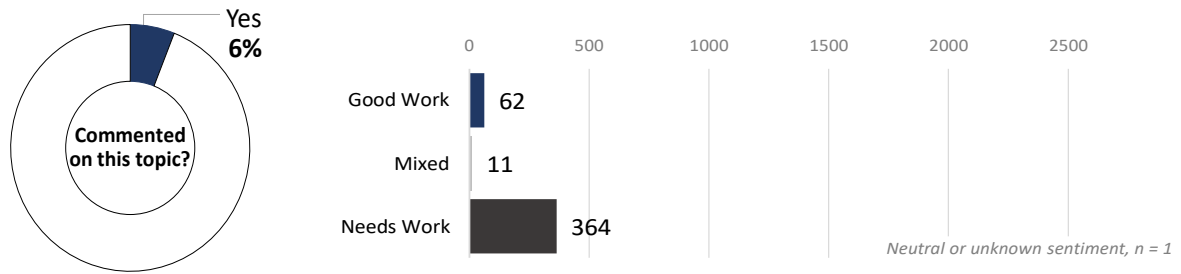
Others noted timeliness was an issue.

"More timely communication. Stop sending changes effective today or immediately."

"I don't feel like leadership always shares information or, if they do, it's very last minute. This usually causes confusion and makes it difficult to do our jobs, as everything seems very reactive rather than proactive."

"More notice when significant changes are implemented to give time to understand the change and adapt."

Communication flow was an additional challenge.

"It seems that line staff and office management get information at the same time. How can management effectively support staff through change if they're processing at the same time?"

"When changes are made at headquarters, these are not communicated well. Emails are sent to all staff without prior notice to supervisors. When changes are made, it is helpful to provide supervisors talking points and/or advance notice, especially when they impact staff."

"Too much communication at DSHS is conducted through 'trickle down communication.' You hope to hear it from a supervisor, who may have heard it from their manager, etc. More directed communication from leadership and others is needed."

COMMENTS. General communication

438 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed general communication.

Yes
6%

Commented on this topic?

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500
Good Work	62					
Mixed	11					
Needs Work	364					

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 1

► What DSHS employees said …

A few employees praised communication efforts.

"Easy communication with my team and others in the agency."

"Strong communication between teams."

"Direct and open communication is the standard."

"I appreciate the check-ins, huddles, and meetings. The communication is there and, so far, it comes from all levels and I appreciate that."

"I like that my team is supportive in responding quickly to questions when communicating to the group in Microsoft Teams or by group email."

Some want general improvements in communication.

"Better communication. I have been saying that for years!"

"More communication!"

"Improve the communication. There is very little."

Many want better communication across teams.

"Team communication is generally good, though across teams or groups it could be improved."

"More communication and collaboration amongst the different programs. This seems to happen at a micro level now, but I would like to see this happen at a more macro level and become more normalized."

"More cohesive communication between shifts and care provided."

"Better communication amongst disciplines in general."

"More intercommunication about shared issues across DSHS."

"I think there needs to be more communication between departments, especially when multiple departments are directly impacted by the decisions made."

"I would like to see better, more cohesive communication between staff and departments."

"Interdepartmental communication has been significantly lacking."

"Less silos of communication."

"Better communication between organizations within DSHS. Lack of communication (e.g., between State Hospitals) creates a lot of problems and reduces efficiency."

Employees had mixed thoughts on virtual and in-person meetings.

"Video communications on Microsoft Teams and more in-person meetings. There's been a lot of misunderstandings, miscommunications that have affected a lot of people due to no visible communication. The real estate in the human brain is dedicated to many things, more so vision and movement. Not being able to see or be seen is taking a toll on your staff that work remotely without video options for Microsoft Teams meetings. Meetings are sometimes like the 'sound of crickets chirping' with intermittent memes, gifs, and a lack of team building."

"More virtual meetings and such, and less in-person."

"More in-person meetings."

"More face-to-face team building and in-person meetings vs. TEAMS."

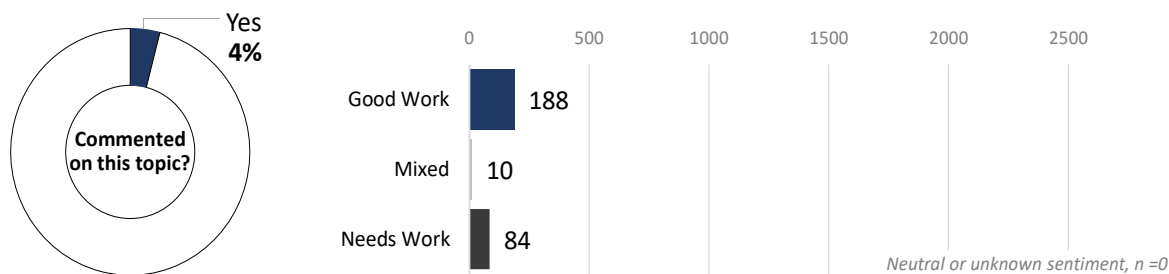**They also had varied responses to the number of meetings they attend.**

"Some regular staff meetings could/would possibly be helpful."

"More all-staff meetings to learn from others."

"More team meetings (online or in-person) when there is a change in programs and technology."

"There are too many meetings that seem a bit redundant, and this affects productivity and workflow. Many employees work remotely, and there are days that meetings are back-to-back all day long."

"Less meetings that could be emails and/or meetings that go into the lunch hour. Both are rude and inconsiderate."

"Less meetings that occur less often."

"Less meetings. :)"

Some want more clarity in communication.

"I think we could use some communications trainings to improve our communication with each other and field offices. For instance, how to get rid of extra words, million dollar words, more plain talk, keeping messages simple."

"Clear communication."

"Better, clear, concise communication."

COMMENTS. Mission and vision

282 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed mission and vision.

Commented on this topic?

Yes **4%**

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500
Good Work	188					
Mixed	10					
Needs Work	84					

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n =0

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Employees offered support for the mission.

"I love what the Department stands for and what each administration stands for."

"I love the agency mission of 'Transforming Lives' and have always tried to epitomize that attitude when performing my job duties."

"I like working for an organization that is pushing for a better future and access to resources for the population of Washington State."

"Our mission is a good one."

Some see a direct tie between the mission and their work.

"I get to utilize my skills to assist in DSHS's Mission."

"I like that I know how my duties relate to the goals of our organization."

"Easy to understand how my work affects our mission and goals."

"What I like best about my current job is how well it aligns with our mission, vision, and values."

"My work truly transforms lives."

Others appreciate when the mission connects with their personal sense of purpose.

"I believe in helping people, transforming lives through the assistance of public benefits. I grew up on DSHS public services and this job as a PBS was an opportunity for me to give back to the department and, more importantly, help our communities. I believe in DSHS and the mission. That's why I am here. Transforming lives through public services."

"The mission aligns with my sense of purpose."

"I find the most rewarding aspect of my job is being part of an agency with a mission to transform lives. Every day I have the privilege of contributing to positive change, helping individuals and communities achieve their goals and witnessing the profound impact our work has on people's lives. It's incredibly fulfilling to know what I do directly aligns with making the world a better place."

"The ability to directly impact a positive change in our society has always been very important to me, and I can see it coming into fruition with DSHS."
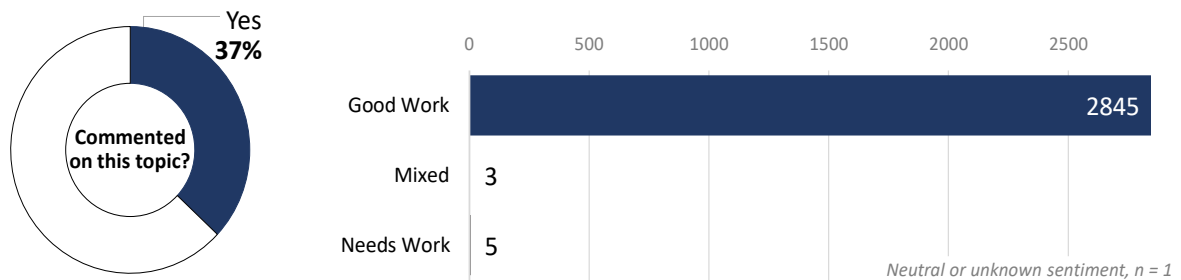
They noted specific administration impact.

"[I like] directly contributing to the ESA vision of reducing poverty."

"I like that I work for an agency that supports the independence and dignity of our aging clients."

"I'm an RSW Social Work Supervisor, and I completely support the agency's goal to serve clients with (very) challenging behaviors in community-based care settings to the maximum extent possible."

"Changing the 'welfare' stigma and culture of how we treat people who are suffering [from] houselessness, mental health issues, and substance abuse. Treating ALL humans with dignity and respect."

"[I like] the mission and how implementing it positively impacts residents at facilities."

Some mentioned barriers to mission-focused work.

"Less focus on process and more focus on purpose. Helping people is why people work here and that takes more than how many interviews you completed today to meet that purpose."

"Just be honest and come to terms with the fact that the vision, mission, values, belonging, EDAI, etc. are only buzzwords and there is no expectation to follow through on them."

"I find it quite difficult to reconcile the messages about our mission to provide client-centered services, ancillary services, etc., with the messages about our need to get rid of cases as soon as possible without spending too much time helping clients with anything besides basic personal care services."

"I don't have a clear understanding of the long-term vision or how I can contribute to it."

"I would like us to get back to being more mission focused. I feel that has been forgotten."

"I feel like the department needs to act like the mission statement says."

"We are currently operating in a system that demands lower quality and less care simply to meet minimum standards which is counterproductive to the mission, vision, and sustainability of the agency."

COMMENTS. Meaningful work

2,854 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed meaningful work.

Yes
37%

Commented on this topic?

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500
Good Work						2845
Mixed	3					
Needs Work	5					

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 1

► What DSHS employees said …

Employees appreciate the opportunity to assist clients.

"I love being able to help people and give them hope and support."

"The best thing about my current job is I am able to work with patients. I feel happy when I can do some good for another human being."

"I help give families in my community the resources they need to support their families."

"[I am] able to serve and help clients thrive or improve their lives."

"I love helping clients."

"I love interacting with patients and giving them hope."

"[I like] empowering clients."

"I am passionate about the population I work with and serve."

"Taking care of people is one of my passions. It's very rewarding."

"Opportunity to meet clients who have many amazing life stories. The ability to help those clients."

"The fact that I am able to bring a difference into people's lives through connecting them to social services and also the fact that I see growth in the lives of individuals is just awesome."

"I like to know I am a small part of helping our residents have the experience of being a part of a community and letting them take the opportunities of having wonderful life experiences."

"I love helping and serving vulnerable populations. I have always had a drive to help others and to ensure that they have a great quality of life."

"[I like] helping DSHS clients to have a safe and full life."

"One of the main motivations for me to work in this field is the opportunity to assist others in improving their quality of life. I find it rewarding and meaningful to see how my skills and knowledge can make a positive difference for the people I serve."

"[I like] the opportunity to support positive change in people's lives."

"Helping people is meaningful."

They like making a difference in client's lives.

"The work is meaningful, intrinsically rewarding, and important to my community."

"What I do makes a difference. I wake up every morning excited about the difference I will make for someone that day."

"What I am doing is helping others. My work is impactful and will continue to positively create opportunities for children and youth in the future."

"I like knowing I am having a positive impact on how care is delivered in my community."

"[I like] that I am part of the change in people lives."

"What we do makes a difference in the world."

"The ability to feel as if I am making a difference in my community and supporting those without a voice."

A few mentioned working with community partners.

"I enjoy working directly with DCYF social workers and supervisors to help our clients. I have learned a lot from the other agency and how things work for them, and it helps me as I try to help bridge the gap between the two agencies for the sake of our clients and helping them live their best lives."

"[I like] working with community partners."

"[I like] working with tribal partners."

"The ability to interact with our customers and community partners, to provide them with the best service possible."

Others enjoy supporting staff.

"The ability to support staff, my colleagues, and ensure that we provide the best services possible to our clients and community members."

"I love being able to assist staff in their jobs so they are able to assist the clients we serve."

"I feel that the work I do greatly impacts our employees' quality of life and well-being."

"I enjoy being supportive and building teams to feel they can make a difference in the lives they support with our clients."

"[I like] having the opportunity to help other employees out."

"Behind the Scenes" • Third Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS In Action
By Felicia Quintana, with permission

"Formula Drift Monroe" • Honorable Mention (tie)
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Technical
By AJ Barker, with permission

From the photographer:
My photography business allowed me to be a part of this national drift event media team, where I was trackside taking photos of drift cars.

"Butterfly Kisses" • First Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Technical
By Dee Hayman, with permission

CHAPTER 4

Equity, Diversity, Access, and Inclusion

The majority of DSHS employees support the agency's equity, diversity, access, and inclusion (EDAI) initiatives, and most employees agree that their workplace is fair.

Ratings of the agency's commitment to Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) were mostly positive, suggesting that DSHS is living up to its EDAI and PEAR commitments in some ways. However, ratings of senior leadership's commitment to a diverse workforce and demonstration of inclusion were less positive.

Most comments about EDAI and PEAR were positive or requests for more action, but some comments suggest resistance to these initiatives. In addition, members of several demographic groups were less positive than others on the EDAI and PEAR questions.

EDAI and PEAR

The survey included two questions about the agency's commitment to PEAR, two questions about senior leadership's commitment to diversity and inclusion, and one question about fair treatment in workgroups.

Percent of employees answering "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

My agency demonstrates a commitment to pro-equity and anti-racism (through policies, practices, and actions).	**72%**
My agency empowers me to take pro-equity anti-racism (PEAR) actions in the workplace.	**66%**
People are treated fairly in my work group.	**64%**
Senior leadership at my agency are genuinely committed to attracting, developing, and keeping a diverse work force.	**57%**
Senior leadership at my agency demonstrate inclusion (through leadership, communications, participating in related activities, etc.)	**57%**

More than 7 of 10 employees (72%) agreed that the agency demonstrates a commitment to pro-equity and anti-racism, which suggests widespread awareness of continuing PEAR initiatives at DSHS. Nearly as many (66%) agree that the agency empowers them to take PEAR actions in the workplace.

Employees were somewhat less likely to agree that people are treated fairly in their own workgroups (64%). Because the other questions in this series are focused on the agency, employee responses to this question may be more closely related to direct experience. Fewer than 6 of 10 employees (57%) agree that senior leadership are committed to workforce diversity and demonstrate inclusion.

Of the 7,687 employees who provided written comments, 497 (6%) commented about EDAI or PEAR. Nearly two-thirds of these comments (64%) indicated support for the agency's focus on EDAI and PEAR or wanted more of it, while fewer than 2 of 10 (17%) said that they did not support EDAI and PEAR.

Across all five questions, respondents who provided positive responses were much more likely to agree that they were satisfied with their job or would recommend their agency as a great place to work. On average, ratings of job satisfaction were 42 percentage points higher for those with positive responses to these questions, and 48 percentage points higher for recommending agency as a great place to work. For example, 8 of 10 respondents (81%) who agreed that the agency was committed to pro-equity and anti-racism also agreed that they were satisfied with their job, while just 4 of 10 (40%) of those who disagreed indicated job satisfaction. This pattern suggests that these two engagement outcomes are closely linked to employee experiences of and opinions about EDAI and PEAR initiatives at DSHS.

"I love that we help create equity in a world of so much inequity."

Strengths

Employees continue to be aware of and supportive of DSHS's PEAR efforts. Most (72%) agree that DSHS is committed to these policies, practices, and actions, and most (66%) feel empowered to take PEAR actions themselves. An addition, almost two-thirds of employees (64%) agree that their workgroup is fair.

In the comments, nearly two-thirds of employees who wrote about EDAI or PEAR were supportive of the agency's efforts. Many employees expressed appreciation for the agency's commitment, satisfaction about being able to participate, and enjoyment in working on diverse teams. As discussed below, most employees who were supportive of EDAI and PEAR work wanted DSHS to do even more.

Challenges

Agreement that senior leadership are genuinely committed to a diverse workforce and demonstrate inclusion was relatively low, at just under 6 of 10 employees in each case (57%). This is lower than the proportion of employees who agree with the questions about the agency's commitment to PEAR. This difference could reflect concerns that the agency is not fully living up to its PEAR commitments. It may also reflect variable understanding of what is meant by "my agency" or "senior leadership" or a general distrust of leadership.

Some employees from historically marginalized groups express lower levels of satisfaction on the EDAI and PEAR questions. Employees who identify as LGBTQ+, women, gender non-binary, veteran, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black, and having a disability are less positive on one or more of these questions. In addition, employees who identify as White are more positive in these areas. This suggests varying perceptions of DSHS' EDAI and PEAR efforts for employees in different social groups. See Appendix E for more details.

In addition to the comments that expressed employee satisfaction with the agency's EDAI and PEAR efforts, some employees expressed a desire for more activities or more effective efforts; these were coded as "needs work." These employees suggested that EDAI/PEAR efforts should place more emphasis on disabilities (including "invisible" disabilities), language access, neurodiversity, and training for supervisors and managers.

The relatively small number of employees who expressed dissatisfaction with EDAI and PEAR presented a variety of perspectives. Several denied that racism or discrimination even exist at DSHS or suggested that EDAI and PEAR are political constructions that do not belong in the workplace. Some felt that they were personally disrespected in discussions of EDAI and PEAR, and others reported feeling excluded because their race, sexual orientation, religion, or other characteristics put them in privileged social groups.

"I would like to see more honest commitment to diversity and inclusion. I would like to see more gender diversity, more acceptance of non-binary people, more acceptance of individuality, [and] less bullying, favoritism, and micromanaging."
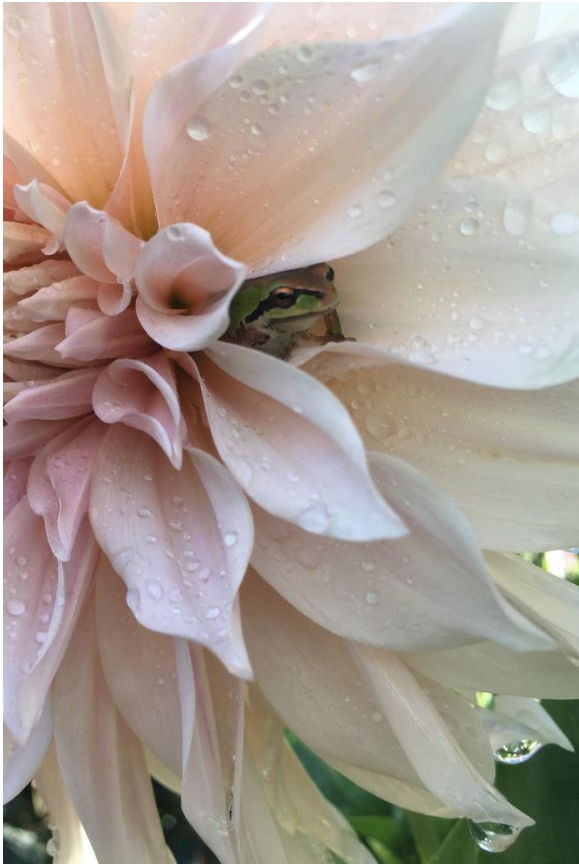
"How Do You Dew?" • Honorable Mention (tie)
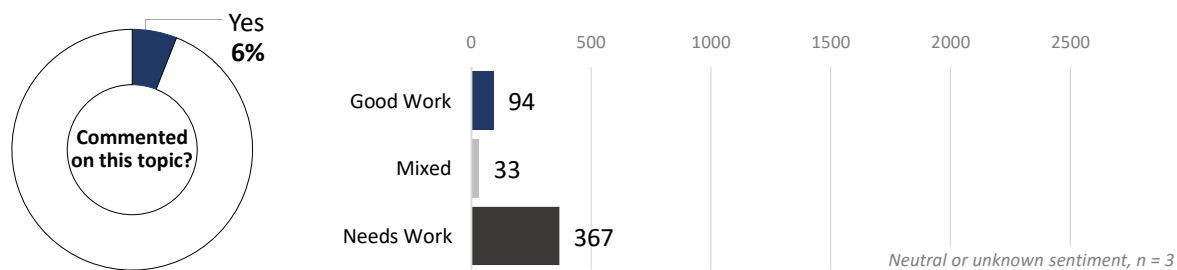DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Technical
By Holly Glasgow, with permission

From the photographer:
I used to constantly find tree frogs while gardening and mowing my lawn, which was always exciting. Dahlias are my favorite flower, and I hoped that I'd eventually find a frog resting between the petals because I had seen photos of such online. One day I was walking through the Bellevue Botanical Garden and paying special attention to the dahlias. Something caught my eye, and even before I looked closer, I wondered if this was finally the moment I'd been waiting for. Then...sure enough! I bent over and noticed that the dark speck I'd seen was actually a sweet, little frog. I literally squealed with delight and took this photograph. This magical moment didn't occur in my own yard as I'd hoped, but the experience still brings me so much joy.

COMMENTS. Equity, diversity, access, and inclusion

497 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed equity, diversity, access, and inclusion.

Yes
6%

Commented on this topic?

0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500

Good Work — 94

Mixed — 33

Needs Work — 367

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 3

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Some employees appreciate EDAI initiatives.

"The department seems very committed to establishing a culture of inclusion and equity."

"I like how I am empowered to make everyone feel that they matter and that they belong. I have the opportunity and the empowerment to implement Executive Order 22-04 (PEAR and Belonging Plan & Playbook). I am motivated daily to be part of the change."

"The REDI culture is alive and well where I work."

"[I like] the cultural focus on going beyond inclusion and focusing on belonging, anti-racism, and greater accessibility."

"I love the culture being promoted on my specific team (equity, encouragement, positive and honest communication)."

"I love the diversity in our facility. Having the ability and opportunity to learn, grow, and work alongside others despite each other's backgrounds is amazing."

"I appreciate the steps we are taking to be an anti-racist organization and would like to see this continue and for us to diversify our executive leadership teams within our regions and HQ offices."

Many requested more substantive EDAI implementation, including better communication and training.

"I would like to see more understanding of employees' physical/mental disabilities."

"Clearer direction from DSHS HQ on PEAR and what is going on with learning for EDAI for the field."

"More cultural responsiveness - open communication about racism, oppression, privilege as well as adjust practices and services to be as culturally relevant as possible."

"Since EDAI/PEAR matrix, little is being done from my perspective. Everything at the local level has been stopped, so it feels like nothing is moving forward or advancing."

"Our agency seems to pay lip service to REDI and PEAR initiatives but does not offer meaningful skills and tool kit development-based trainings for supervisors, staff, and frontline staff."

"I support DSHS' efforts toward becoming an anti-racist, equitable, transformative organization. However, the majority of the information and training that we receive are focused on just anti-racism? What about diversity, equity, or inclusion? EDAI is not only about anti-racism."

"Actual implementation of anti-racist workplace practices and better enforcement of toxic, harassing staff."

"Regular ongoing anti-racist and anti-discrimination trainings for ALL Supervisors regardless of perceived level of mastery or experience."

"More mandated EDAIB group activities that give those silenced a voice and a safe space to express themselves. EDAIB needs to start being considered as a necessary approach and not some type of extracurricular activity."

"Supervisors should be required to have an understanding of neurodiversity, equity, and inclusion."

Others described skepticism or challenges with current EDAI practices.

"I have been in meetings where managers, some of which are in HR, have used or endorsed terms to include 'old white men' and 'mansplaining.' DSHS is either a PEAR agency or DSHS is racist and sexist when it is politically acceptable; pick one and educate our leaders."

"EDAI is suffocating. A moral evaluation should not be part of a performance evaluation."

"Many of the questions in this survey were about racism and equality. Why? When was the last time there was a racial or equity issue big enough that this is a priority? I think racism exists, but not in DSHS."

"I work in a place where I must 'identify' as my skin color. I am Asian/Caucasian. I am accepted by neither group. I have been told I have to prove my ethnicity because I look like neither group. Can I actually discuss being biracial and not being accepted in either culture without being attacked?"

"There is a lot of discussion around equity and diversity, but some staff still do not feel safe to explore these topics."

"Less PRESSURE to accept gender confusing policies (like men in the women's bathroom)."

"Towards Sunset"
DSHS Photo Contest
By Salenna Green, with permission

From the photographer:
Taken at almost sunset in California.

"Looking for Dinner" • Honorable Mention (tie)
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Technical
By Steve McDannel, with permission

From the photographer:
Taken on a hike to Freemont Lookout at Mt. Rainier, Sunrise area.

CHAPTER 5

Discrimination and Harassment

DSHS IS COMMITTED TO FOSTERING A SAFE, INCLUSIVE, AND EQUITABLE WORKPLACE. In partnership with the Office of Justice and Civil Rights (OJCR), the 2023 Employee Engagement Survey included a special set of questions related to discrimination, harassment, and equal opportunity.
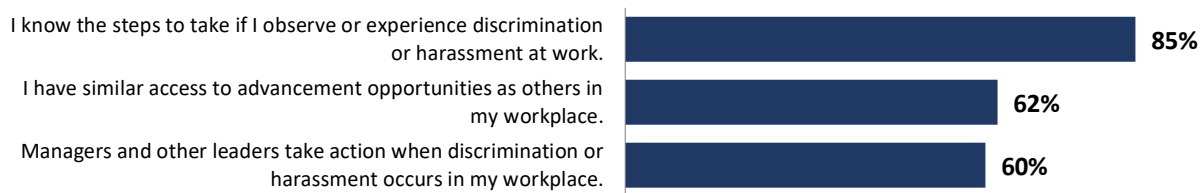
Most DSHS employees are confident that they know what to do if they encounter discrimination or harassment at work; this was the second highest scoring item on the survey. In addition, the majority of employees agree that they have equal advancement opportunity and that leaders act when discrimination occurs.

Employee comments related to discrimination and harassment emphasized a desire for more accountability for inappropriate behavior, including bullying. Some also expressed a fear of retaliation from co-workers and supervisors if they were to report inappropriate behavior.

Discrimination and harassment

Most employees say they know how to respond to discrimination and harassment, feel they have equal access to advancement, and agree that leaders act when discrimination occurs.

Percent of employees answering "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

I know the steps to take if I observe or experience discrimination or harassment at work. **85%**

I have similar access to advancement opportunities as others in my workplace. **62%**

Managers and other leaders take action when discrimination or harassment occurs in my workplace. **60%**

DSHS employees are confident that they know what to do if they encounter discrimination or harassment. More than 8 of 10 respondents (85%) agree that they know the steps to take if they observe or experience discrimination or harassment at work. This is the second highest scoring item on the survey, right behind the 85% of employees who agree that their supervisor treats them with respect.

About 6 of 10 respondents (62%) agree that they have similar access to advancement opportunities as others in their workplace. Though the majority of respondents perceive equity in this area, a sizeable minority do not. Almost 1 in 5 respondents (19%) disagree with this item, representing over 2,000 DSHS employees. In addition, another 19% of respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

Many employees would like managers and leaders to do more to address discrimination, harassment, and inequity. Four of 10 (40%) do not agree that managers and other leaders take action when discrimination or harassment occurs. Employee comments also suggest that this is a potential area of improvement for the agency. For example, many comments asked for increased accountability for employees who behave inappropriately and for managers who look the other way.

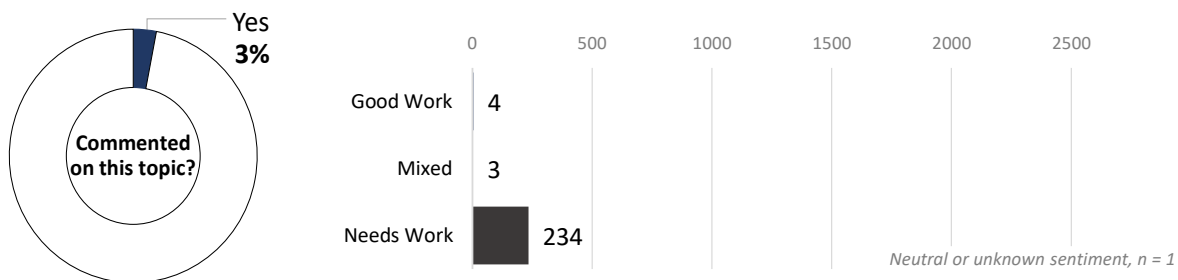**Observations and Experiences of Discrimination and Harassment**

Employees were also asked whether they have recently observed or experienced discrimination or sexual harassment at work. The majority of respondents have not observed (81%) or experienced (85%) discrimination or sexual harassment at work in the past three years. Almost 1 of 5 respondents (19%) have observed discrimination or sexual harassment and about 1 of 7 respondents (15%) report personal experiences. In both cases, reports of discrimination are more common than sexual harassment.

Employees who have experienced or observed discrimination, harassment, or unequal advancement opportunities are significantly less positive on all dimensions of the employee experience. For example, only 27% of employees who said that they have experienced discrimination would recommend their agency as a great place to work, compared to 64% of others.

Although employees were referred to DSHS policy definitions of discrimination and harassment to help them answer these questions, it is likely that some responses refer to incidents that do not meet legal thresholds of discrimination or reflect a more general sense of unfairness. That said, if employees are perceiving behavior as discriminatory or harassing, this tells us something important about employee experiences of the workplace, even if the behaviors are not civil rights violations as legally defined.

COMMENTS. Discrimination, harassment, and bullying

242 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed discrimination, harassment, or bullying.

Yes
3%

Commented on this topic?

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500
Good Work	4					
Mixed	3					
Needs Work	234					

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 1

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Staff would like a safe and equitable work environment.

"A lot less bullying. More fairness. A kinder work environment."

"Every staff to be treated with respect without discrimination."

"Better community in that hostile and bullying practices are not tolerated."

"Stop workplace bullying. Stop favoritism. Treat employees with respect and promote equality."

"More employee protection from third party discrimination, harassment, and hostile treatment."

"Accountability, real change, and change the narrative. Discrimination and harassment are real. I experience it at my place of work. Stop victimizing the victims with systems that don't even help."

"DSHS needs to stop promoting supervisors and managers that have histories of harassment and discrimination."

Employees seek improved reporting and investigation processes.

"The reassignment and investigations process seems extremely broken on multiple levels."

"I want investigatory reassignments to resolve faster than 90 days. If I report being harassed, I want to be believed."

"When an employee brings forth a concern, check back in with the employee over the next few months to see if things have been resolved or gotten better."

"I would like to see my workplace do something about the weaponization of DSHS Policy 18.66. Staff take advantage of the policy to get their supervisors on lengthy reassignments for simply doing their jobs."

"On the wards, I hear statements like, 'If you don't like that person, all you need to do is send an email and say this person made you feel bullied or harassed and you can get them reassigned.' There are no consequences for staff wasting resources to investigate false claims or dishonest statements and there needs to be. I cannot recommend that any of my friends come to work here with this current culture."

Some staff are concerned about retaliation.

"Staff get singled out and harassed if they point out anything wrong. Retaliation is common hospital-wide. Management says they are trying to make it better but are only making it worse."

"Some employees can engage in sexual harassment with no repercussions, no change in behavior. I have spoken to management and the actions are taken against me. Well, I will never speak up alone again."

"I would like to see those who harass and bully be held accountable for their actions, instead of punishing those who are the victims of their cruelty."

"Discrimination and harassment are coming from management, but people are scared of retaliation."

Employees would like more accountability for inappropriate behavior.

"Actually addressing and disciplining staff's unprofessional behavior, especially when it creates a hostile work environment and multiple complaints have been filed by multiple staff members."

"Bullying needs to stop and the people who do this need more than a slap on the wrist. The managers that are ignoring it over and over again need to be held accountable."

"More accountability for people who sexually harass others. They get moved and then just continue to harass people at their new location."

"Hold supervisors responsible and accountable when they engage in nepotism, favoritism, racism, and the like."

"Hold people accountable for their actions, do things to correct behavior. Try to work to establish better working environments for marginalized groups."

"Timely and better support from upper management when dealing with potential harassment and/or discrimination."

"There is so much discrimination that happens and gets swept under the rug because the perpetrator of the discrimination is friends with someone in leadership. That is completely unfair and unacceptable."

"Glisten in the Sun"
DSHS Photo Contest
By Amy Herring, with permission

From the photographer:
I bought property for rest and relaxation. When setting up our camp for an upcoming vacation I spied this guy in the sun.

"Glenfinnan Viaduct"
DSHS Photo Contest
By Ellen Rice-Lewis, with permission

From the photographer:
During a recent cruise to Alaska, I hopped aboard a White Pass scenic railway excursion in Skagway and captured this abandoned historic steel bridge surrounded by forest and mountains.

"White Pass Steel Bridge" • First Place
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic
By Alan Sapalaran, with permission
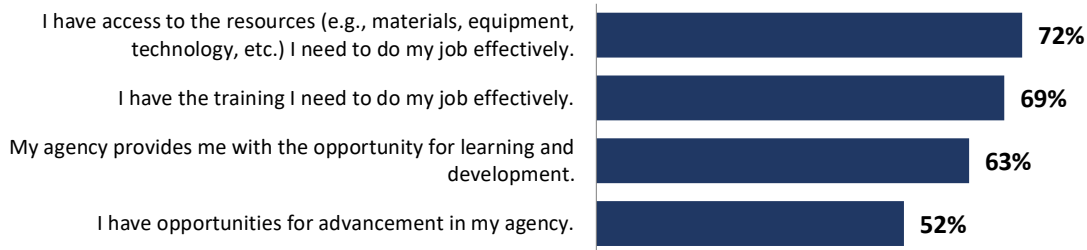
CHAPTER 6

Access and Resources

ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES DIRECTLY SUPPORTS EMPLOYEES in completing their jobs effectively. Most respondents agreed that they have appropriate access to the resources they need to do their job, including training and development opportunities. Fewer agree that they have opportunities to advance within the agency.

In their comments, employees shared their perspectives on a variety of topics related to access and resources. Respondents care about how resources are used to serve their clients and the ways in which their units are run to allow them autonomy and opportunities to develop their skills. Many refer to policies and processes within their division, with some specifically talking about personnel policies and practices. Others shared their experiences with technological resources and training, as well as physical facilities and the work environment.

Access and resources

Employees largely agree that they have access to resources and training opportunities in their jobs, but there is room for improvement when it comes to opportunities for advancement.
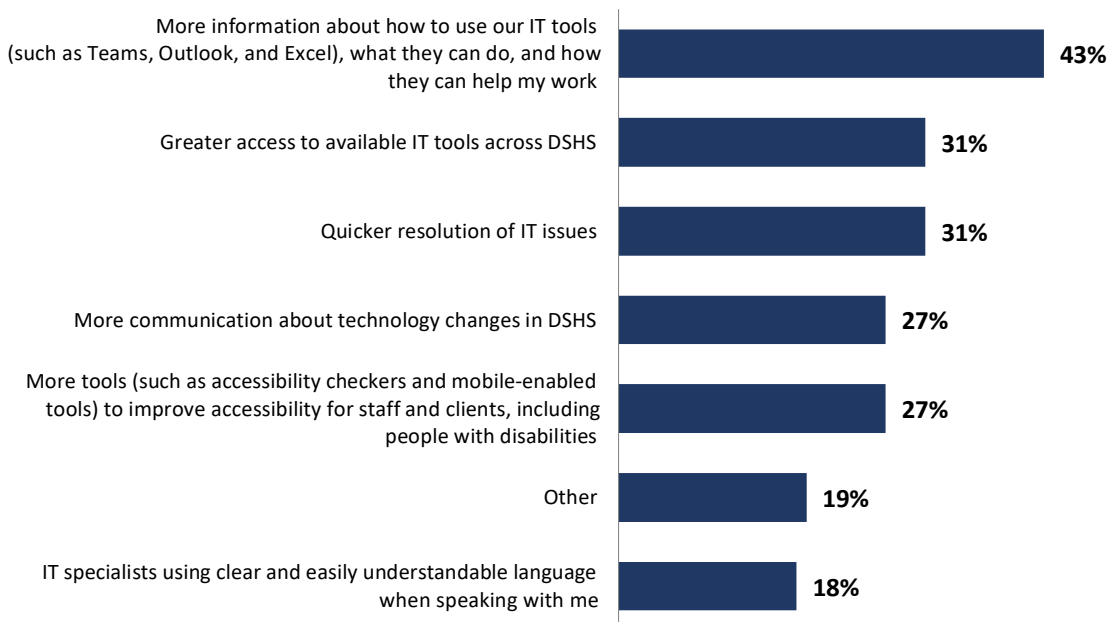
Percent of employees answering "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

I have access to the resources (e.g., materials, equipment, technology, etc.) I need to do my job effectively.	**72%**
I have the training I need to do my job effectively.	**69%**
My agency provides me with the opportunity for learning and development.	**63%**
I have opportunities for advancement in my agency.	**52%**

Most employees (72%) agree that they have access to the resources necessary to do their job effectively. However, comments about resources were more likely to point out challenges, including complaints about facilities, technology, and general resources. In addition to the 69% of respondents who agreed they have the training to do the job, most (63%) are satisfied with their opportunities for learning and development. Many employees mentioned their DSHS training in their comments, often saying they want more opportunities to train within and across units. Perspectives on opportunities for advancement in the agency are more mixed, with only 52% of respondents agreeing that they have opportunities to advance within the agency. Most employees who commented on personnel processes were critical of policies and processes currently in place (88%).

In addition to the statewide questions about access and resources, this year's survey also included a question about employees' IT priorities. These responses will help the Technology Innovation Administration (TIA) support the agency in adapting to changing technology and technological needs. Responses indicate that employees want assistance with learning what technology is available to them and how to use it, as well as greater access to IT tools and faster resolution of issues.

When thinking about IT, what changes would most improve your ability to do your job? Select your top three.

More information about how to use our IT tools (such as Teams, Outlook, and Excel), what they can do, and how they can help my work	**43%**
Greater access to available IT tools across DSHS	**31%**
Quicker resolution of IT issues	**31%**
More communication about technology changes in DSHS	**27%**
More tools (such as accessibility checkers and mobile-enabled tools) to improve accessibility for staff and clients, including people with disabilities	**27%**
Other	**19%**
IT specialists using clear and easily understandable language when speaking with me	**18%**

Successes

Most employees (72%) agree that they have access to the material resources needed to do their job effectively. Though few talked about such resources in the comments, those who did expressed appreciation for upgraded equipment or made general references to resources like standard office supplies being available for their use. Some employees said they liked having access to community resources to help clients, in addition to the services provided through DSHS.

Nearly 7 of 10 employees (69%) agree that they have the training needed to do their job effectively. Many (63%) also agree that they had opportunities for additional training and learning with DSHS. Those who specifically praised the training they received at DSHS liked having opportunities for advanced training and supervisors who encourage it. A few also praised the training itself for being effective and thorough, appreciating that they gained appropriate skills to apply to their daily work.

The majority of comments about job autonomy and growth opportunities were positive (82%). Employees appreciate opportunities to learn new things and improve their skills, whether through formal programs or informal information sharing. Many like taking advantage of professional development opportunities and being able to apply what they have learned to their work. Others said they value the freedom to be creative in their jobs and use their skills to improve processes within their units.

> *I love that this is a place where I can continue to grow. There is never a dull moment and always something new to learn.*

Some employees also mentioned policies and processes that made their work easier. Many like the structure and consistency built into their unit's processes so they know what to expect. Others talked about the ways that existing processes allow them to help clients, such as collaboration between offices to coordinate services. When talking about personnel policies, employees say they like that there are opportunities for promotion within their unit or division, with some sharing examples of how they were able to advance.

Challenges

While most survey respondents indicated in the standard questions that they were satisfied with access to resources, the majority of comments talking about resources noted challenges. Among those who talked about facilities, many employees expressed frustration with not enough parking or parking conditions that did not meet expectations. Some respondents said they want modernized offices, and a few noted challenges with temperature control or broken appliances. Others requested office supplies and furniture, often saying they wanted these resources in their home offices. Outside of the office, some employees said that there were not enough state vehicles available or that the vehicles they had access to were not in good condition. Employees also requested additional resources, including funding, to better serve DSHS client communities through their programs.

Comments about technology resources were mostly (88%) negative. Some of these comments may have been prompted by the question asking what IT changes TIA could implement to improve employees' ability to do their jobs. These comments included frustrations with common software such as Teams and SharePoint. This corresponds with the responses to the IT question, where the most requested change (selected by 43% of employees) was wanting more information on how to use common tools. Greater access to IT tools and quicker resolution of IT issues were tied for the second-most requested IT change at 31% each. Both were frequently mentioned in the open comments. Many respondents also requested an electronic health record system to modernize access to patient files.

Though nearly 7 of 10 employees (69%) say they have the training to do their job effectively, fewer employees (63%) agree that the agency provides them with opportunities for learning and development. This difference may be explained by the broad nature of the first question, which could include training employees received prior to their current position in addition to DSHS training. In their comments, many employees requested more opportunities for training, including cross-training to better support office operations. Some were concerned that they did not have enough time to take advantage of trainings they wanted to participate in or they were unable to get the necessary approval. Others said they wanted more training to help them advance in their career, with a few referencing continuing education and tuition reimbursement programs.

In addition to wanting more training, employees made suggestions for improving the training they have received through DSHS. Some said that they wanted training to be more targeted to their job or to have practical objectives rather than focusing only on high-level goals, especially when it comes to complex tasks. Others said they would prefer the opportunity to take trainings in person in order to participate in hands-on activities.

> [I want] more training that is relevant to my job and not just the stuff that the State creates. I want industry best practices training and conferences where I/we can learn the newest and best practices.

Although about half of respondents (52%) agreed that they have opportunities for advancement within the agency, comments detailed employees' frustrations with the promotion process. Many were critical of promotion practices within their divisions and often noted that they perceive these practices to be unfair. Some employees felt that promotions are based on favoritism, rather than qualifications. Others said they believe that they were passed over due to their age, gender identity or expression, or other protected status. Some employees said it would be helpful to get feedback on why they were not selected for promotions they applied for.

Employees brought up many concerns with processes and policies in their daily work life, often making suggestions that would improve their and clients' experiences with the agency. Many respondents said they want work processes to be clearly spelled out and easy to reference, with some suggesting desk manuals or publishing policies on internal SharePoint sites for easy access. Employees also frequently made specific process improvement suggestions for their lower-level units, emphasizing how important it is for leadership to listen to their ideas when developing policies. Some said that expanding office hours outside of a 9 to 5 schedule would make their services more accessible to clients, as well as allow more flexibility for employees who prefer nonstandard schedules and telework. Others want more clarity and consistency in telework policies, citing confusion over differences across teams. There is a small group of employees who raised concerns about waste in the agency, noting that current processes are unnecessary and may contribute to wasting taxpayer dollars.

"We make it so hard for clients to access our services and I understand there are a lot of federal rulings and state rulings that we have to follow, but our systems shouldn't be overloaded and full with clients by 8:30 am every morning and dropping clients' calls constantly. These folks are already facing so much injustice and trauma just by trying to get by and having to take a full day just to complete a review isn't trauma-informed care or helping in the long run. People shouldn't have this much stress and anxiety with just trying to get benefits to try and feed their families or themselves. Our basic needs shouldn't be this hard to get met."

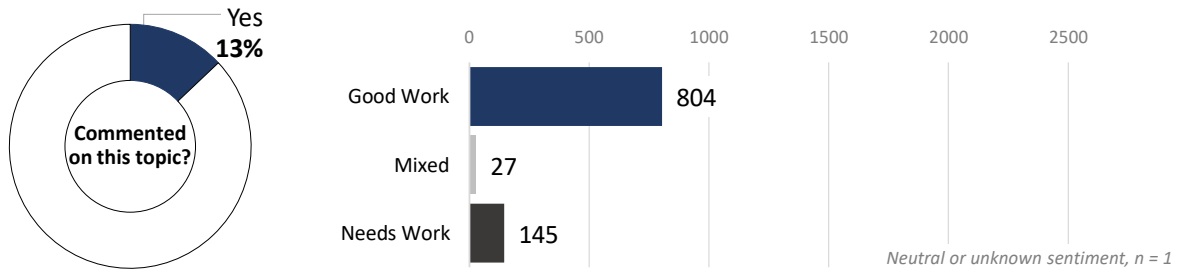**"A Walk in the Park With Maya"**
DSHS Photo Contest
By Mark Allen, with permission

From the photographer:
Maya had knee surgery last February and this was her first real walk after her recovery. Her joy is quite apparent!

COMMENTS. Autonomy and growth

977 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed autonomy and growth.

Commented on this topic?
Yes **13%**

Good Work	804
Mixed	27
Needs Work	145

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 1

► What DSHS employees said …

Many employees appreciate flexibility and autonomy.

"[I have] the option to independently manage my caseload and choose the approach that works best for me."

"Autonomy and ability to vary approach depending on case particulars."

"I like the ability to figure out my own style and work in a way that is best for me."

"I appreciate the autonomy I am allowed in my position. I am encouraged to make decisions independently."

"Freedom to do my work without micromanagement."

"I am able to work at my own pace and in a way that works best for me."

"I appreciate the freedom I have to use my own judgment to prioritize tasks."

"I'm provided with autonomy and support to be able to do my job. In return, I accept responsibility and accountability for the job I do."

"The ability to be self-governed but still have boundaries. Not being micromanaged."

"I feel trusted to manage my own time and work."

"Flexibility to be autonomous in my job to get the work done."

"The opportunity to make my job mine in every way possible."

"I am responsible for myself and the work I am assigned. I have opportunities to help elsewhere but am not forced."

"[I like] not being micromanaged."

They like learning and growth opportunities.

"[I like] the opportunities provided by DSHS to continue to grow."

"I can keep learning and gain more experience in my career."

"The opportunity to grow and learn."

"I am fortunate to be given opportunities for growth and learning."

"I love the constant chances for growth, learning, and continuous improvement!"

"I'm always learning new things daily."

"I enjoy the opportunity to learn and to explore how to make my job better."

"I learn something new every week, and the job pushes me to a new level. Very rewarding."

"I like that I am consistently challenged to flex and strengthen my skills."

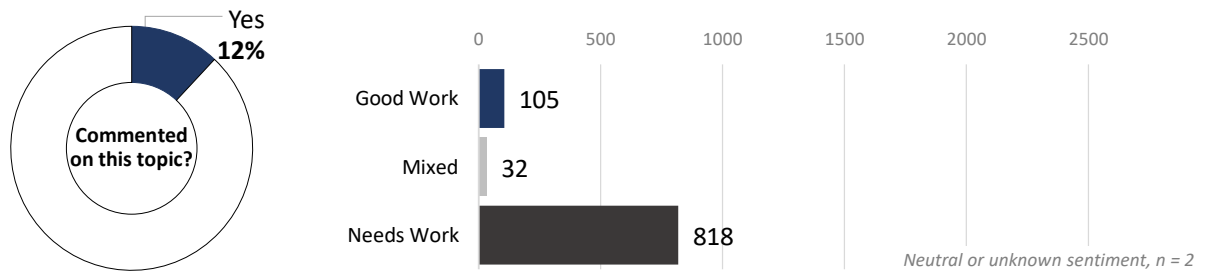**Some noted their ability to be creative and to innovate.**

"[I like] the ability to be innovative."

"I love that I am encouraged to innovate and find better ways to support our clients."

"I love that the work culture at my agency encourages creative thinking and ideas."

"The freedom to be creative on improving processes."

"I have the opportunity to be innovative and creative in the delivery of my work. I am supported to try new things."

"Being encouraged to find innovative solutions to problems; freedom to explore solutions and develop process improvements."

"The flexibility to be innovative and creatively come up with solutions."

"I have the freedom to envision creative solutions for challenging situations."

"The ability to be creative in the work that I do."

"The platform to think outside of the box and create things!"

"My supervisor gives me the time and space to be innovative and find the best way to complete new tasks."

A few wanted more autonomy and the ability to grow.

"More empowerment and less micromanagement."

"I would like to have more opportunities to learn more specific skills related to my position and other skills to expand my skill set during work hours and throughout the week."

"More opportunity to grow."

"More autonomy to make decisions."

"Encourage greater innovation."

"I would like to see less micromanaging."

COMMENTS. Training

957 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed training.

Yes
12%

Commented
on this topic?

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500

Good Work — 105

Mixed — 32

Needs Work — 818

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 2

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Some employees expressed gratitude for training.

"I enjoy the training opportunities I've been given."

"I like that we are cross-trained so we get to do different things at work."

"The training I received allows me to do my job efficiently."

"I am encouraged to take trainings or attend workshops to advance my career."

Many want training for daily job tasks.

"More training on how to perform assigned tasks."

"I am often frustrated when presented with tasks where I have not had the training and expected to complete in a timely matter on top of all the other work I have on my plate. It takes much more time to complete without this training/knowledge."

"I would like to see training adjusted or changed to align more accurately with what eligibility workers will actually be doing on a day-to-day basis in the real world. I felt unprepared to start helping clients."

"Different trainings when you take over a new caseload."

"More training on the actual jobs we are doing and changes to programs/work that come up."

"I would like to see more meaningful trainings (hands on?) to help us be successful in our positions."

"I worry that I have not had enough training to properly do my job duties correctly."

"More in-department training or training that is more consistent from trainer to trainer and more in line with what the actual workers do every day, not what is just in 'training world.'"

Others requested in-depth training on specific topics.

"Deep training about behavioral diagnosis."

"More specific trainings to put additional tools in my toolbox to help clients and families."

"There are lots of trainings, yes, but some of the issues we encounter are not covered in the trainings or need more support than just reading through a policy."

"More continued training on things that are not very clear. No one in our Region can process Food Benefits correctly."

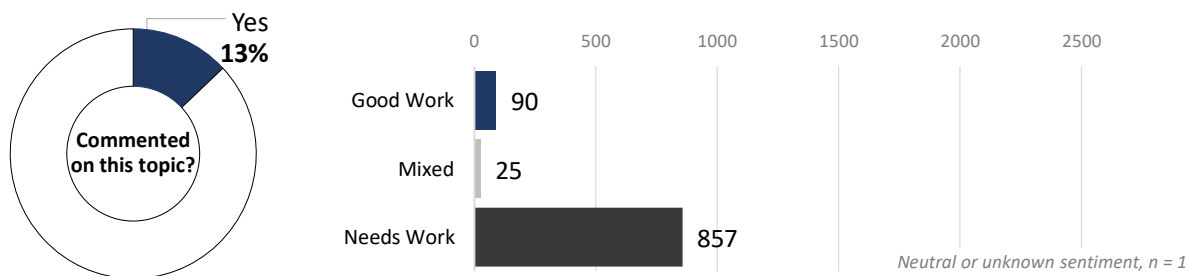**Employees value cross training, mentoring, and options for continuing education.**

"Mentor program to build leaders from within."

"I would appreciate some cross-training opportunities to better understand how I can serve in that fill-in role."

"A mentorship program for movement within DDA. For example, if an employee wants to move up within DDA, we need a mentorship program to help the staff understand what is needed to be able to move up. We also need a shadow program to see if that is the job that the person would like."

"More shadowing and learning opportunities for advancement within the agency."

"More on the job training or mentorship for non-clinical roles. With all of the changes in staffing/leadership, there is a major lack of understanding in certain departments or options for training."

"I would like paid tuition for a master's degree."

Some want to see improvements in training newly hired employees.

"It would behoove us to provide mentors to new hires to assist them in learning and to make them comfortable. I believe it would help with retention."

"New staff need more training on the floor."

"Better training opportunities for new employees. Better help with transitioning into public service. My intake experience was not very pleasant."

"More focused training for new CM."

"Training: more hands-on roles for training the first week of starting. Best way to learn the job successfully in my opinion."

"The training plan does not sufficiently teach new employees how to do necessary tasks before providing them with a caseload."

"I would like to see a better training curriculum for new folks. I know we are working on it and am excited to see the results, but training new people has been a challenge lately because our training teams appear inconsistent and ill-prepared at times."

COMMENTS. Personnel processes

973 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed personnel issues.

Commented on this topic?
Yes **13%**

Good Work		90
Mixed		25
Needs Work		857

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 1

▶ What DSHS employees said …

A few employees were satisfied with personnel processes.

"Clear pathway toward advancement. Experience and time in the field recognized when hired."

"DSHS has offered the smoothest on-boarding process and transition that I have experienced."

"I was just promoted to a new position. I like the fact that I was given the opportunity to apply and was taken into consideration for it."

"[I like the] opportunity for advancement."

Several want improved hiring and promotion processes.

"I would like to see all positions posted so that whoever wants to apply can."

"More opportunities for internal promotions."

"I would like to see interviews include some level of skill and knowledge-based application."

"I would appreciate seeing more opportunities or options for advancement/promotion."

"The hiring process seemed to take a while and I feel like the delay for some could cause us to miss out on great employees."

"[I want a] better hiring process. Turnaround time from application to offer, proactive hiring to reduce gaps/being short staffed."

"More access to career advancement."

"Interviews based on actual performance and not on whether you can tell a complete story."

Others mentioned unfair hiring practices.

"Stop allowing unqualified applicants being hired based on who they know within the agency."

"More equitable advancement/promotional opportunities. I truly believe I have been passed over due to my age."

"A hiring process that is transparent and based on skills and not on management's personal likes or their cliques."

"[I want an] opportunity for growth within the agency based on skills and employment history versus preferential treatment of those with strong friend or peer relationships within the agency."

"Less hiring of friends, family, and others not really qualified for the job."

Many want changes to education requirements.

"I would like to see more opportunities for promotion in the area we are experienced in. Unfortunately, the agency doesn't have an effective promotional system to value their own experienced/expert employees. In order to move up to a promotional position, the employee must apply to completely different jobs. The agency then loses its own experts and has to train the same employee as a new one, in a different position, just so the employee can achieve better pay."

"Just because someone has a bachelor's degree doesn't mean they are the most qualified for the job."

"More entry level positions so that new college graduates can get in. Most (if not all) entry level positions require experience. We are not capturing recently graduated resources with new and fresh ideas for innovation."

"I would like more consideration to be given to people's experience when it comes to hiring for most positions. We should be able to hire people with associate's degree + years of experience in positions that require a bachelor's degree. We are limiting our pool and missing out on folks who would be excellent for our teams."

"Better advancement opportunities; more chances to be promoted from within an agency for experience rather than needing a degree."

"More consideration for past experience and years of experience vs. formal education."

Some asked for a reclassification of their position.

"I would like to see PBS reclassified."

"Our job duties need to be reevaluated."

"For the positions to be classified appropriately for the work that is being done. Then maybe we could keep people. There is a huge overturn of staff. No one wants to stay long-term."

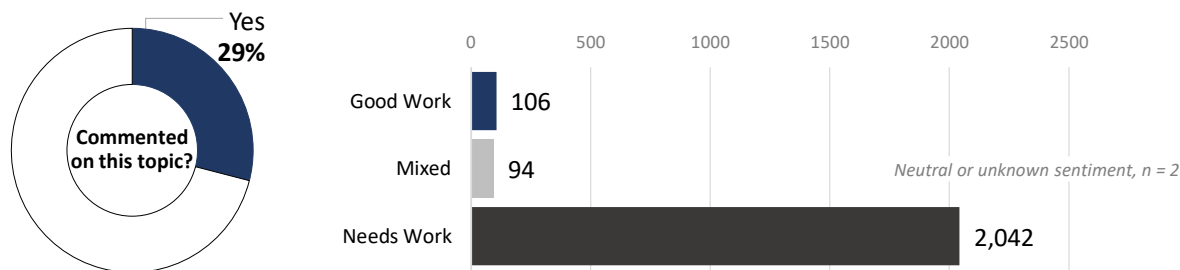**A few requested quicker HR responses.**

"I would like to see quicker HR response times."

"Better employee support from HR. Currently HR is primarily a tool for management."

"An HR department that responds to workplace issues. No email reply or follow-up."

COMMENTS. Work process and policies

2,244 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed work process and policies.

Yes
29%

Commented on this topic?

0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500	

Good Work — 106

Mixed — 94   *Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 2*

Needs Work — 2,042

▶ What DSHS employees said …

A few praised current work processes.

"The collaboration between the specific unit under our office umbrella is growing and is offering us greater opportunity to work together and create under one vision. Less silos of work these days."

"We are 'The National Standard' and I would like to see that continue."

"It's always evolving and we're always looking for ways to improve our processes."

Some want better change management.

"A better managed rate-of-change that is clearly defined and prioritized so that those who do not have systemic decision-making roles feel more included and valued."

"I would like to see DSHS executive initiatives use change management. At DSHS, stuff is rapidly pushed out causing chaos and distrust."

"There has been NO change management around the decisions made the past two years. Employees are skeptical, fearful, and have very little trust."

"Less internal policy changes and pseudo planning. Allow a few months to go by before changing things so that we get more reliable data."

"Employees have been faced with sudden changes with little to no warning and are expected to carry on as if the change does not affect them. The idea of 'Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing' is ignored as are any of the processes discussed in the change management trainings."

Others described stressful work expectations.

"They keep adding more and more things for us to do. The datelines should change, too. We are still working with the same datelines as when I first started, but the number of assigned investigations we get has more than tripled. Something has to change."

"I would like to see steps that make the job less stressful/easier without taking away from the mission."

"No WFO for social services. It makes ZERO sense. The nature of our job cannot be put in a box or confined to some specific time structure as we are working with clients in crisis."

Siloed work is challenging for some employees.

"Elimination of silos between administrations, or at least greater transparency as to why the silos are actually necessary."

"Less siloed work and more collaboration as One DSHS."

"I think our division has too many silos and staff are very territorial about what they do. Then when something goes wrong, they want your help to correct it, but don't want to share the information."

"I feel as if we are working silos. The subject of the work that I do stretches across in several units and if there was more of an open dialog, the work that I do could help the other units, but there appears to be a wall between us."

Several pointed to a lack of person-centered processes.

"We are creating manuals on top of manuals that tell staff how to do every single action, but not allowing staff to stop and determine, what truly does this person need? What are applicants telling folks they need? How do we as an agency train staff to focus on the whole person, their family, and moving out of poverty, versus step-by-step actions?"

"We need true person-centeredness and to move away from systems-centeredness that loses our humanity and most vulnerable and marginalized clients along the way."

"The department overall seems to have lost sight of the human aspect of providing support. I often wonder if those who write the policies have actually seen any of our clients or consider what may be important to them. For example, not everyone finds happiness in having their own apartment, some would benefit from group living and many would enjoy having friends."
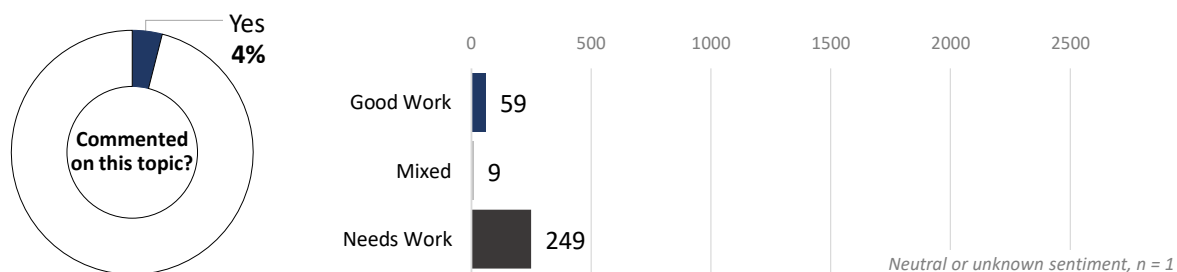
Updated telework policies were a priority.

"We have embraced a new modern workforce model with hybrid work (telework & office) and more flexible work schedules, which is great! Yet there are existing old policies that have not been changed to synchronize better with the modern hybrid work model."

"More teleworking options, and different policies around this."

"Same expectations on all, each job class, equal telework."

COMMENTS. Facilities and environment

318 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed their work facilities and environment.

Yes
4%

Commented on this topic?

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500
Good Work	59					
Mixed	9					
Needs Work	249					

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 1

► What DSHS employees said …

A few employees praised their facilities and commute.

"The campus is amazing. Very beautiful."

"[I like the] short commute."

"We have a newer building that has been so nice to work in."

"It's a close commute."

"The workplace is quiet and organized."

Parking is a challenge for many.

"More disabled parking."

"More readily available parking spaces to include more handicap parking spaces. There is just not enough parking spaces for employees. I have to come to work 30 minutes before my shift to get a decent parking spot."

"Better parking. Most of us have to park in a parking lot with potholes. We trip in the rain."

"Parking has always been an issue, and I would like to see that issue addressed."

"I think that coming to work everyday would be easier if most of us were not forced to park a half of a mile away from our offices. This is Washington and the weather is not nice on a regular basis. There needs to be more parking options."

"Safer parking."

"Needs more parking for staff. Lots are too small, and it is often difficult to find a spot at all."

Some want changes to in-office lighting.

"More natural light would be nice."

"The only changes that I see would be that the office lighting is rather bothersome to the eyes. I wished they would put in a dimmer or something to help with that."

"Less horrific migraine-inducing fluorescent lighting. More lamps and soft lighting. Lighting is the pathway to the soul."

"A change in the lighting at the office. The overhead fluorescent lights are very bright and are only adjusted for entire large areas. This puts anyone uncomfortable with the lighting in an awkward position in regards to making any adjustments, since it impacts a whole group of people."

Cubicles and office configuration can be problematic.

"I don't like cubicles. I can hear all conversations and vice versa."

"Better barrier between cubicles to drown out sound."

"More private office space."

"Allowing people to have a cubicle in the office even if they only come 2 days a week."

"Being in cubicles doesn't offer much in the way of sound dampening, and it can be very difficult to focus on trainings or tasks with a lot of background noise."

"Better facilities. Everyone can hear each other's conversations. Except for the PA, other staff are in cubicles close together and there is a lack of privacy as far as communication, HIPPA issues."

"The physical environment is terrible. Way too many people in a small space and we feel like an afterthought."

"The layout/cubicles in the office. It is restrictive to communication and blocks out the windows, so it feels like you're working in a dungeon."

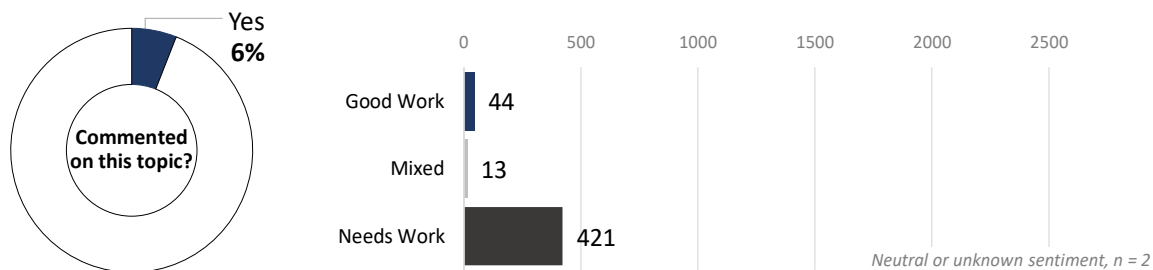**Others want improvements or renovations to the building.**

"Renovations, repairs, and updates to aging facilities."

"The office itself is very gloomy and outdated. Lots of clutter around and old ugly cubicles."

"A remodel is not a bad idea. Our CSO is a bit more outdated than others I have seen."

"[I want] an upgrade or modernization of the nurse's station on my ward."

"Modernized office space."

"Updated desk and cleaner floor fixtures. Carpet is very old and dirty."

"More investment into the interior of the facility. Many things (i.e. equipment, infrastructure, furniture) are left in deteriorating conditions even after workorders and personal requests to have these issues addressed."

A few mentioned heating and cooling issues.

"Improvements to the HVAC system (too cold; too hot). Thanks!"

"Make the building a little warmer in the winter."

"More consistency in the temperature."

COMMENTS. IT resources

480 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed IT resources.

Yes
6%

Commented
on this topic?

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500
Good Work	44
Mixed	13
Needs Work	421

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 2

► What DSHS employees said …

Some employees are satisfied with technology resources.

"[I like] the flexibility with videoconferencing and telehealth abilities."

"The continued and growing use of Team Chats. This has been a very helpful/useful tool."

"[I like] going paperless and having a little more access to modern technology (e-signature options for at least some of the forms we need to get signed)."

Many requested quicker adoption of new technology.

"We need the technology and resources to compete and be effective in a modern healthcare industry."

"Updated computer systems that will allow us to work more efficiently."

"Faster access to technological solutions to analog problems. Learning to use it isn't a problem. Getting it in place sooner and for ALL employees is the challenge."

"Implementation of new technologies at a faster pace."

"More technology innovation for current manual processes."

"Our systems are archaic and completely not on par with modern technology."

"Faster, more common-sense technology that makes it easier for clients to communicate with us and get documents processed faster."

Some mentioned resources they need for job duties.

"New laptops."

"Funds applied to the enhancement of our computer and phone systems so we can actually do our job."

"Computer equipment upgrades to better achieve goal of paperless work."

"I know my staff and myself would like to have tablets that we can use in the field."

"Access to Wi-Fi."

"Access to laptops and cellphones."

"Support or compensation for printing documents remotely from home."

"[I want] telework technology and equipment options."

"Computer equipment better suited for field work."
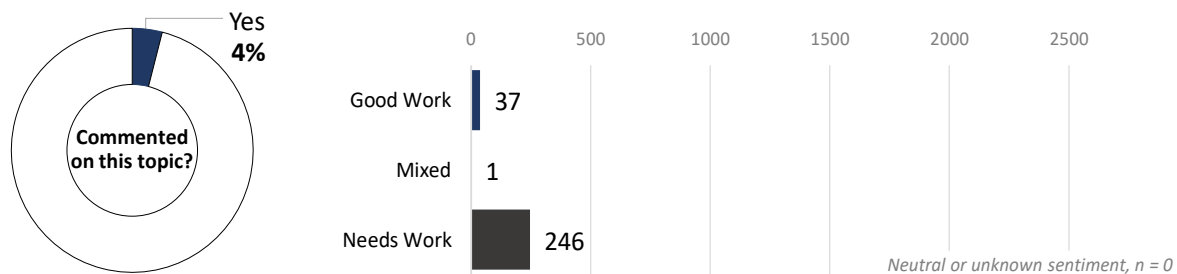
Others described challenges with specific programs.

"I would like to see increased access to data and tools such as Power BI to be able to automate the information that is manually pulled today."

"The Barcode Hub Imaging Unit (HIU)/Imaging/Indexing manual needs to be updated."

"A Careweb without constant bugs."

"WAVES needs to be more user friendly."

"Our Electronic Health Record (EHR) system is, in general, terrible."

"SEMS upgrade; SEMS upgrade; SEMS upgrade. Just in case I failed to mention it, SEMS could really use an upgrade."

"A revamped ACES that can incorporate the online application already completed by the client."

"Modernization of Food Service Ordering System (POSSUM)."

"Make OneNote more user-friendly."

"I would like to see a better organized SharePoint. The current SharePoint is clunky."

Employees want more responsiveness around IT issues.

"Faster IT resolutions when we have IT issues."

"IT staff more easily accessible and more often present in the office."

"Quicker fixes to IT issues."

"IT and telecommunication staff on site to address issues."

"More urgency on the part of IT to ensure IT requests are responded to in a timely manner."

"More IT help desk staff to better facilitate helping end users."

"I feel that with the growth of the organization, those who are working at new facilities across the state but are still supported out of OB2 (such as HRD and FFA) are not getting the same level of IT support due to the distance, particularly when it comes to issues that cannot be done remotely. It would be useful to have some onsite IT support for those users at new facilities and to plan ahead for onsite support when the next new facility comes around."

COMMENTS. Resources for clients and other resources

284 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed resources for clients and other resources.

Yes **4%**

Commented on this topic?

Good Work	37	
Mixed	1	
Needs Work	246	

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 0

► What DSHS employees said …

Some employees have adequate resources for their work.

"I love the way the agency equips us with all the tools and supplies to enable us to do our job seamlessly."

"We have access to community resources that can help families."

"I appreciate that after many, many years, it seems we have more resources available for people and can actually provide services they need/want."

"[I like the] use of state cars."

"[I have] sufficient resources to perform well."

"I have access to all the resources to do my job remotely."

Others want more resources for clients.

"More activities for the residents."

"I would like to be able to provide our clients with more resources than what is currently available."

"A working TV/DVD player for the children in the lobby."

"I would like access to order arts and crafts supplies for my patients."

"I would love to see in-house ASL interpreters."

"I would like to see more opportunities for my clients. [For example] jobs, activities."

"Have more tools and support services to offer our clients."

"More animals for resident support."

Employees want ergonomic assessments and equipment.

"I want a chair to fit a raised desk! It's like an act of congress to get one!!!!!"

"I don't get any support when I requested an ergonomic option for my desk."

"Ergonomically correct workspaces are important. A person who is right-handed and 6 feet tall should not have to share a cubicle with a left-handed 5-foot-tall individual."

"More assistance for ergonomic workspace items (chairs, desks, etc.)."

"I would like to have an option to get a desk that can raise so I am not sitting all day."

"Ergonomic worktable stations would be nice to have."

Many requested access to resources while teleworking.

"I would like to see more financial support for those working remotely, such as a stipend for things like a desk and office chair."

"More home environment equipment."

"I enjoy working remote. Wish I could have a scanner or something like a small printer to do small print jobs."

"Easier options to do administrative duties at home, like copying, faxing, scanning and mailing."

"A small compensation for working from home, i.e. utilities, internet."

"To have accessibility to printing from home."

"Equipment options for teleworkers, such as desks, chairs, file cabinets, supplies, etc."

"We should be able to get new chairs and have a nice desk like we do at the office, at home, as this is our work area."

Several said the number of state cars is inadequate.

"We would benefit from each residence having access to a vehicle at all times."

"We need more state cars!"

"State vehicles to be available at each office, even remote DSHS offices. State workers should not have to utilize personal vehicles."

"Access to working vehicles."

"A better vehicle to employee ratio to allow for flexibility in field visits."

"Access to resources necessary to do my job; there is extensive travel in my unit, and we do not have enough vehicles to meet our unit's needs."

A few asked for in-office coffee and food options.

"More coffee in the breakroom."

"More options in vending machines."

"Could y'all stock coffee and coffee creamer/sugar in the CSOs. Nothing excessive but small efforts like supplying coffee/tea, plain creamer, plain sugar – those little things really impact staff morale."

"Coffee at night for night staff."

"[I want] to have coffee."

"Classic Ruby Beach Sunset"
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic
By Steve McDannel, with permission

"Outside Looking In"
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic
By Marta Zingmark, with permission

From the photographer:
The oldest house in Inverness Scotland made me wonder about the lives that were inside. We can only wonder at what was left behind to guess what their stories could be. Every family has different stories to tell, and if walls and windows could talk.
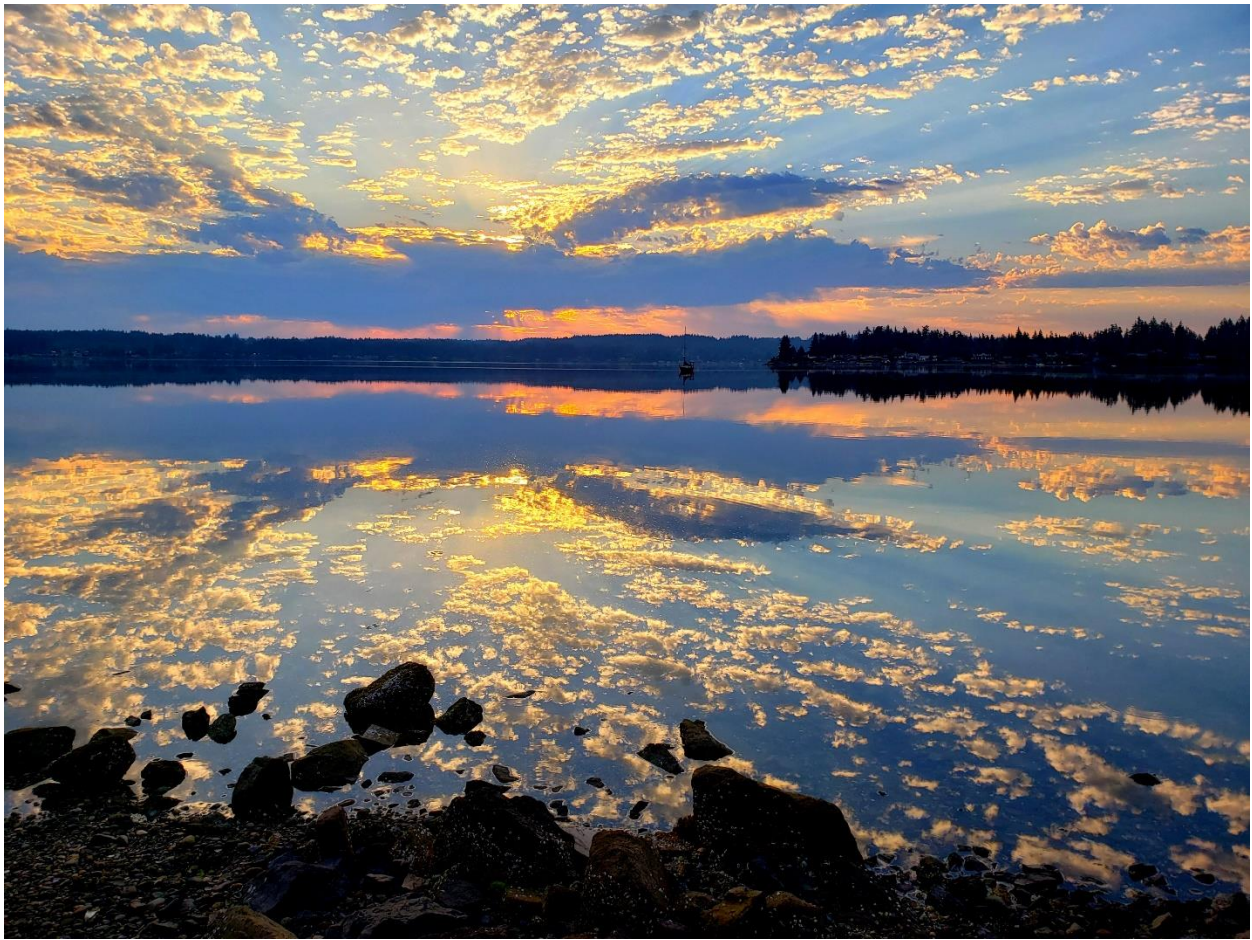
"Sailboat Sunrise" • Photographer's Choice
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic
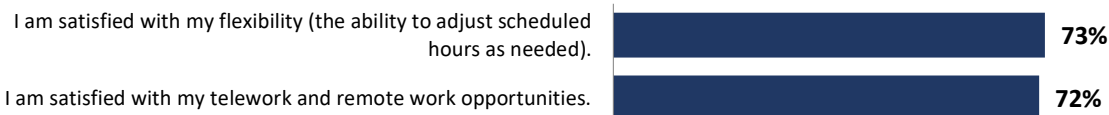By Judi Stewart, with permission

CHAPTER 7

Work-Life Balance

EMPLOYEES VALUE THEIR ABILITY TO TELEWORK AND FLEX THEIR SCHEDULES. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, remote work and schedule flexibility have become an integral part of the way people work. Within DSHS, most employees are happy with their ability to telework, flex their schedules as needed, and take advantage of the different schedule options contributing to a healthy work-life balance. However, not all positions are compatible with telework or flexible work schedules. The requirements of direct service jobs often make it difficult for the agency to balance service needs with offering these flexibilities to staff.

Employees are also concerned with the impact of heavy workloads on work-life balance. Strict processes, short deadlines, and struggles with staffing often add to individuals' workloads. Employees say that unreasonable workloads increase their job stress. Some explained how the workload leads to mental health challenges when trying to take care of all their responsibilities.

Work-life balance

With the widespread introduction of telework at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, satisfaction with remote options and flexible schedules continue to be popular topics in the survey.

Percent of employees answering "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

I am satisfied with my flexibility (the ability to adjust scheduled hours as needed).	73%
I am satisfied with my telework and remote work opportunities.	72%

Many respondents are satisfied with their ability to flex schedules and work remotely to accommodate their responsibilities at work and home. Both telework and flexible schedules were popular topics in the open comments, with 21% mentioning telework and 15% talking about their work schedule. In their comments, employees often said that these job characteristics contribute to their work-life balance and overall satisfaction.

However, due to the nature of their jobs or to office policies, not all employees are able to take advantage of schedule flexibility and telework. Four percent (4%) of all respondents who commented said they wanted more access to telework. 6% expressed dissatisfaction with their ability to have a flexible work schedule. Although there was no standard question specifically asking about work-life balance, more than half (57%) of those who talked about it in their comments expressed dissatisfaction. Almost all (95%) of the comments regarding workload were also negative, often saying that their assigned workloads are unsustainable.

Successes

In addition to the high percentage of respondents who agreed they are satisfied with their telework options, comments about telework were largely positive at 72%. Most people simply noted that they liked being able to telework. In addition, half of those who had positive things to say about their work-life balance also had good things to say about telework, with many making a direct connection between the two. Some of those who made this connection simply stated that telework contributed to their work-life balance, but others gave reasons such as no longer having a commute and saving money on gas or lunch expenses. Some also noted there were fewer distractions at home, allowing them to be more productive and focus better on completing their work tasks.

> [I like the] flexibility of working remotely from home as it balances my lifestyle and family needs. I am able to focus a lot more [on] work without the stress of my far commute to the home office.

Schedule flexibility is also important to employees' satisfaction in the agency. In their comments, many appreciated being able to adjust their work hours to take care of personal responsibilities like doctor appointments or providing care to family members without having to take leave. Many talked about liking compressed schedules, such as 9/80 or 4/10 schedules, so that they could have longer weekends. A small group of employees in divisions that allow overtime said they liked the opportunity to supplement their income by working extra hours.

There was no standard question regarding employee wellness, but 7% of all comments addressed wellness topics such as work-life balance and mental health effects of the job. In addition to the comments attributing telework and flexible schedules to supporting work-life balance, many employees said they appreciated being able to prioritize time with their families rather than devoting all their energy to the job. Others note that lower stress levels positively impact their mental health.

Challenges

Although telework and flexible work schedules can help employees maintain a healthy work-life balance, many still struggle with large workloads. Seven percent (7%) of all employees who commented talked about overwhelming workloads. Some note that due to challenges with staffing, they end up carrying the caseload of multiple people, which quickly becomes unsustainable. Among those who talked about challenges with work-life balance, 29% also mentioned problems with workload that affected their wellbeing. Many talked about burnout for themselves or among their colleagues. Some said they felt they could not take leave, even for illness, due to the amount of work they needed to complete.

To assist in workload management and personal wellbeing, some people proposed more flexibility with telework and work schedules. Many said that they wanted flexible time to accommodate their lives outside of work. Others want to take advantage of compressed work schedules, with many saying they would like to work four 10-hour days each week. Some talked about moving to a 4-day, 32-hour workweek, with a few referencing San Juan County's implementation of this on October 1.

Most employees who requested changes related to telework (4%) said they wanted more access to telework. Some of these employees are not able to take advantage of telework due to the nature of their jobs, including direct-service positions. A few people in those sorts of positions proposed a one day a week telework option to take care of paperwork or other administrative responsibilities remotely. Some who already work remotely want greater flexibility with where they could work, such as in a different region within Washington or out-of-state. A small group of employees said that while they liked telework and recognized many of its benefits, they missed the in-person interactions with co-workers and clients.

> **"I love the remote work and the adjusted schedule opportunity. My mental health is a lot better with the adjusted schedule to allow me time to have outside appointments without constantly stripping myself of leave in order to attend doctor's appointments, therapy, my child's appointments, or other things that can interfere with an 8 to 5 work schedule."**

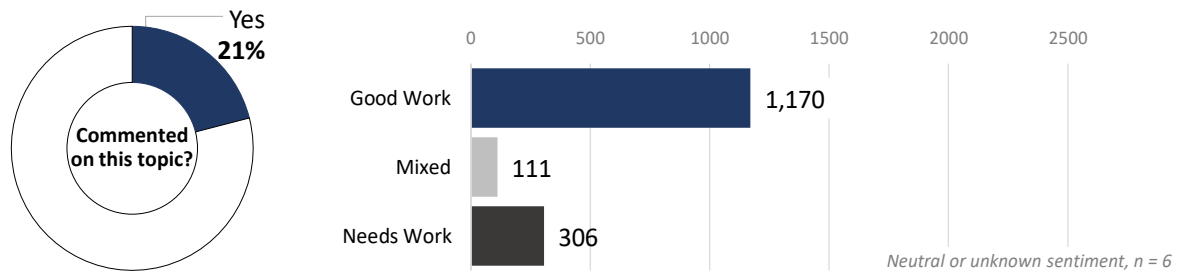**"Smash" • Honorable Mention**
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic
By Todd D. Reed, with permission

From the photographer:
The partnership of raising a child. Both his mother and myself outside playing in the snow with him and having a snowball fight. See the expressions on their faces individually and see where they are in life. He, a child is having fun pure and simply. His expression shows the joy of family. Her, the expected experience of being targeted by a snowball form her child, but having fun that he is having fun. Me...behind the camera as most dads are :P

COMMENTS. Telework

1,593 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed teleworking.

Yes
21%

Commented on this topic?

Good Work	1,170		
Mixed	111		
Needs Work	306		

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 6

► What DSHS employees said …

Most employees had positive thoughts about telework.

"I love the fact that I am given the opportunity to telework."

"[I like the] ability to work from home, but still feel part of a team."

"I enjoy working from home."

"I appreciate the flexibility with teleworking."

"I appreciate the ability to work from home."

"Telework is a dream come true. It just makes sense."

Many said teleworking increases their productivity.

"I love teleworking. I am much more productive working from home. I have less distractions from other staff."

"I like that we have the ability to be able to work from home. I feel it is more efficient, and I get more computer work done while at home as opposed to the office."

"I am able to perform better and get more done when working from home. When I'm in the office, there are too many distractions and multiple people interrupting me as I try to work."

"In these modern times, working from home seems to be far more beneficial and more productive."

"Teleworking provides a much quieter and comfortable work environment, and I can concentrate more."

"[I like] being able to telework as I am more productive and happier."

"I feel much more productive working at home. Less interruptions and am able to focus much more."

Others praised the hybrid model, mixing telework with in-office days.

"I really appreciate the hybrid work schedule - I enjoy working in the office and value that in-person time with my co-workers, and working from home for part of the week supports a better work-life balance."

"I am able to utilize hybrid work settings, so that I am able to better balance field work, remote work, and in-office work in a very seamless manner."

"I like that it is modeled to a modern workplace that encompasses a hybrid model of work and encourages a work-life balance."

They noted the positive personal impact of telework.

"The accessibility to work from home. I have medical conditions which make working from home the best option for me."

"I like that my position is a remote position. This allowed me to take this job opportunity as a single mother that I might not have been able to otherwise. Thank you!"

"Telework with reduction of commuting improved my health."

"I love my job! The best part is working from home. I never could apply to be part of this specific department before because traveling to Seattle was not possible on a daily basis, but working remotely is a perfect fit!"

"I love telework! It allows me to be a great employee and a great mom!"

"Working from home allows me to immediately start work where I am most comfortable instead of having an extra 1-2 hours commute to and from office."
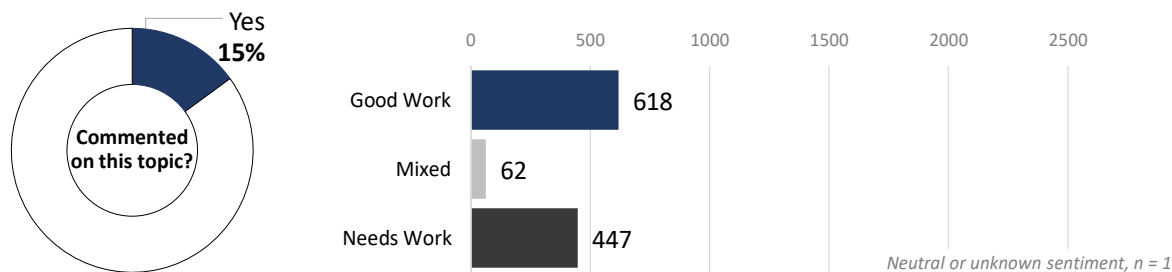
Some asked for expanded telework policies.

"Telework opportunities, but wish it was full-time and not mandatory to report to the office. Some positions do not require staff to be in-person ever, but we come in because it's a mandatory one day in office per week. Why be in the office just to be in the office? Only change is a different view of your desk."

"More remote work opportunities."

"All workers should get telework options."

"I would LOVE to see telework location options expanded. Right now, as I understand it, telework is confined to working from anywhere within the employee's region. I would love to see telework expanded to allow a state employee to work from anywhere in the state, regardless of the region of the employee's worksite."

"I would like the opportunity to work from home, too."

A few wanted more in-office days.

"More in-person team meetings."

"Staff need to come back to the physical workplace."

"Back to in-office as a team."

"More people back in the office."

COMMENTS. Flexible schedules

1,128 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed flexible scheduling.

Yes
15%

Commented on this topic?

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500

Good Work ▬▬▬▬ 618

Mixed ▪ 62

Needs Work ▬▬▬ 447

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 1

► What DSHS employees said …

Employees appreciate work schedules that fit their lives.

"[I like] the balance of my work schedule for myself and my family."

"[I like the] ability to adjust [my] schedule around personal and family needs."

"[I like the] flexible work schedule to accommodate for personal appointments."

"[I like] the schedule. It is friendly for working single moms. I am able to provide for my children and be there for them. So, thank you for that."

"I like the flexibility around things like family and health."

"I like that my schedule is very flexible. This helps me balance work-life and my (special needs) kids and personal life."

"I like the opportunity to change my schedule and make time up when needed to accommodate personal life situations that arise."

"I like the flexibility I have with my hours so that I can take care of myself and my family when I need to."

Many like the ability to choose alternate work schedules.

"I like the 10-hour days and three days off."

"[I like the] 9-80 schedule."

"[I like] my current schedule of 12-hour shifts and 8 hours every other weekend because it gives me flexibility to take care of my family."

"I love being able to have the option to work the schedule I do (four 9-hour days, one 4-hour day)."

"[I like] the flexibility with my schedule to be able to get off work at 3:30 p.m."

"I appreciate the flexibility in the 9-80 schedule made available for everyone."

"[I like] ability to work four 10-hour shifts and choose those days."

"[I like] flexibility regarding start time."

Some mentioned the option to work overtime.

"I like that I get overtime hours regularly."

"[I like the] overtime opportunities."

"I like the overtime availability, doing unlimited overtime."

They value the ability to use their leave time as needed.

"The ability to take care of myself by flexing time, taking time off when needed."

"I am able to take a vacation on the dates I need."

"[I like the] flexibility to call out when needed, without the threat of losing my job."

Some were unsatisfied with their current schedules.

"There is no reason to have as inflexible schedules as we do. There is no reason to have to go through the hoops to change a lunch time, or length. It's an extreme waste of supervisor's time to do this."

"More flexibility in work schedule, if needed. If I need to leave an hour early for an appointment, I should be allowed to come in an hour early. That way, I can still work a full 8-hour shift and not be forced to use leave."

Others want part-time positions.

"I would like to see the opportunity for part-time work. There are so many staff shortages and so many skilled and trained staff that would be happy to stay on if part-time work was available."

"Opportunity for part-time employment."

"I would like to be allowed to work part-time."

"Would like part-time opportunities to be available."

Employees that have fixed schedules want more options.

"I would like 4-10s to be made available."

"The ability to have a flexible schedule. I do my best work in the early morning hours and would love the opportunity to work chosen hours. An 8-5 schedule is not inclusive to all and is an outdated work model."

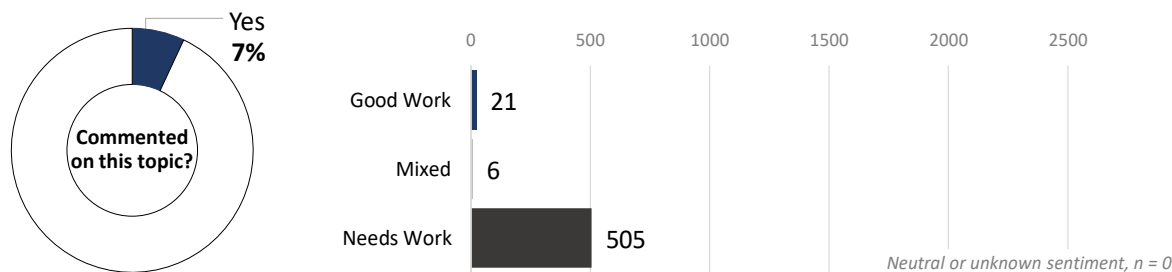"More flexibility in work hours beyond 630 a.m.-6 p.m."

"Have more flexibility within the day schedule. Not always Monday-Friday 8-5."

"12-hour shift for direct patient care."

"Less structure surrounding 8-5., some clients are more accessible 5-7 p.m., taking off a few hours in the middle of the day in order to flex would be nice; to be able to use common sense/judgment in getting your work done/hours in, both in a way that makes sense to specific caseload, rather than ticks standardized boxes."

COMMENTS. Workload

532 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed their workload.

Commented on this topic?

Yes **7%**

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500
Good Work	21					
Mixed	6					
Needs Work	505					

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 0

▶ What DSHS employees said …

A few employees noted satisfaction with workload.

"[I have] the time to do quality work that matters."

"The workload is manageable."

"Decent sized caseloads."

Most employees want reduced workloads.

"To have a manageable workload so I can address fully and well the needs of my clients."

"I wish we had lower caseloads in order to better meet performance expectations. This would also allow us to have more of a focus on meeting client's needs."

"Reduced caseload so we can provide quality services."

"Reduced caseload for more interaction with families."

"Smaller caseloads. Things are hard to manage, and it's a disservice to the people of Washington."

"We seem to get told 'it just takes a minute' to add a task to our day, but these things have added up to thousands of minutes that no one accounts for, yet my job is inundated with these things and it's taking up my time from actually working with my clients."

"Not having such high caseloads or having less tasks with high caseloads."

Some are experiencing stress and are overwhelmed.

"I feel overwhelmed with the amount of work I am required to do on a daily basis. I often skip lunch and work late just to keep up with my caseload. My work is rushed, and I feel I'm more prone to making mistakes. I have no time throughout the day to take advantage of additional training, learn new skills, or be involved in presentations that are offered."

"I would like to see and experience less overwhelm in my workplace, due to incessantly insurmountable workloads. For example, my position contains a workload that is heavy enough for 2 or 3 employees. I would like to see myself spending less of my time off recovering from chronic overextension in the workplace."

"Our caseloads are too big. We cannot support the amount of people that we do. I have cried many times trying to juggle everything, and I know I am not alone when I express that."

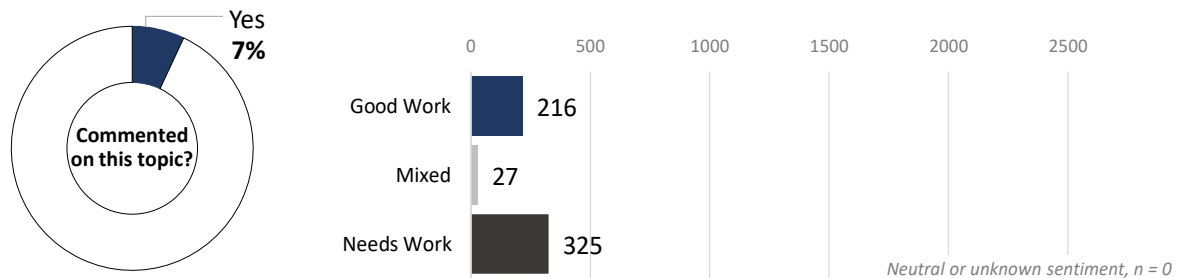**Many believe more staff would decrease workload issues.**

"I'm stretched very thin and am doing the work of at least two full-time positions. This impacts the quality of my work and makes it difficult to keep up."

"I would like to see an increase in staffing so that there is not so much work that one person cannot do in a reasonable amount of time."

"I would like to see the financial workers have more FTEs to decrease excessively high caseloads and avoid employee burnout."

"More staff to share workload. I cannot adequately complete all of the work required of me without working longer hours."

"More workers. [I am] tired of no lunches."

"Staffing so I don't get told every day that I need to stay and work more after working a day where I already have to do the work of two people."

"More staff to alleviate our heavy workload."

"The current workload is too much, and it is killing employee retention."

"There has been a trend since I started of more work being added, but no additional staff being added to do that work. Our vacancy rate is consistently low, however we do not have enough staff to manage the workload."

Others pointed out the increasing workload.

"Each year, more and more work is assigned to us and it is not sustainable to keep adding this amount of work."

"I would like more consideration given to the workload that staff and supervisors are already under before deciding to add more responsibility to them. Staff and supervisors are already hitting their limits and are being told they need to do more. When we have expressed this concern, we have just been told that we were expected to get the work done."

"There is a growing workload in one area of my job, and it should be a full-time position. Unable to adequately meet the needs of the hospital due to competing priorities."

"I am doing this work to help people, but the higher that our caseloads get, the less I feel able to do my job to the best of my ability."

COMMENTS. Wellness and mental health

568 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed wellness and mental health.

Yes
7%

Commented
on this topic?

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500

Good Work — 216

Mixed — 27

Needs Work — 325

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 0

► What DSHS employees said …

Employees value work-life balance.

"This position allows me to navigate the work and life balance that I need to provide my own children and family the best opportunities while still making a difference professionally."

"[I like] the emphasis placed on work-life balance."

"I really enjoy supporting the community in a job that promotes a healthy work-life balance and encourages its employees to utilize the resources available."

"[I like] the flexibility it allows for home-work balance."

"Since I started working a hybrid schedule (remote and in-office), I've created a work-life balance that has improved my well-being all around, which in turn makes me a better employee and makes me a better parent and spouse."

"I really enjoy working from home, helps with my anxiety."

"Being able to telework and have a fantastic work-home life balance has been so important to me and I love that our agency is providing that to us."

"I like that we get to telework. It makes for a better work-life balance than I've ever had in this field."

"Flexibility to make my own workflow schedule to balance with life obligations."

"My leadership works hard to encourage good work-life balance by allowing for flexible work schedules and encouraging staff to take uninterrupted vacation time."

They benefit from psychological safety in the workplace.

"I feel a strong sense of psychological safety in my team."

"There is psychological safety, room to make mistakes, admit them, and learn from them, and we learn a ton from each other and our supervisor."

"I truly see the supervisors working toward a safe and rewarding environment for their employees."

"I appreciate the time and thought that is put into mental health in the workplace as this job can be stressful and/or you may witness situations or cases that make you feel sad or anxious."

"My immediate supervisor has worked to develop psychological safety within our team."

Some noted the challenge of burnout.

"Offer supports, such as counseling, as a front-line treatment for burnout. Constant stress can develop into burnout quickly."

"More focus on wellness for employees to avoid burnout."

"I would like to see burnout and empathy fatigue addressed from a high level, not through teachings and lunch and learns about the subject, which educate but don't help fix the issue, but through actual substantial changes. Senior leadership seems blind to the exhaustion and frustration of those on the front lines or, worse, seems openly disparaging of workers. When the system is set up to create burnout and empathy fatigue, individual employees practicing self-care can't actually stem that tide."

Others believe schedule flexibility would promote wellness.

"Having four tens would allow me to be able to take care of my mental health an extra day. As caseworkers, we often are hearing about our client experience or stories. But who is taking care of us? We go home with these feelings, emotions, thoughts. Would be nice to have an extra day to just go take care of my mental health."

"More availability for 4-10s. Burnout is real."

"It would be helpful to offer non-traditional schedule options and expanded hours to accommodate work-life balance (night/swing shift, part-time hours, etc)."

"Flex schedules are not offered to certain staff due to staffing levels, and therefore work-life balance is not being met."

A few mentioned issues with their work environment.

"I would like to see a work environment that doesn't use shame as a motivator. Using staff as examples of what to do in a training with their peers is not okay. Good staff have left because they felt embarrassed. I would like to work in an environment where it is safe to say when you are struggling in an area and not have it used against you later in a punitive way."

"The job pays great but if it is at the cost of your professional self-esteem and mental health and well-being then it is absolutely not worth it."
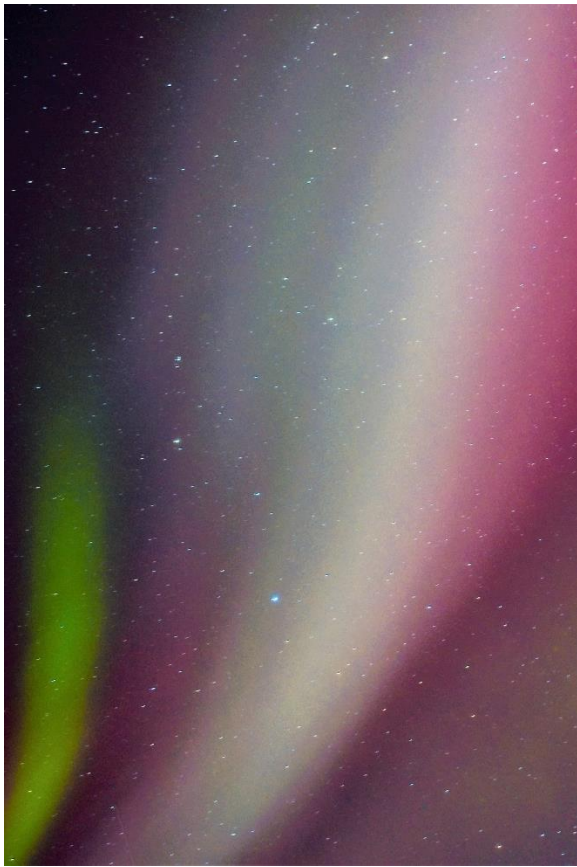
"Aurora Borealis over Washington State"
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic
By Deirdre Hayman, with permission

From the photographer:
Aurora borealis is something beautiful that had been on my bucket list for my entire life. I captured this from the driveway last spring. It was magical... breathtaking and filled me with hope.

"Camp Muir Trail"
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic
By Gary Fryer, with permission

From the photographer:
Took this photo hiking up Mt Rainier on the Camp Muir Trail with two of my buddies. This photo is a magnificent representation of the beauty and splendor of our wonderful state!

"Medical Lake Strong" • **Second Place (tie)**
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: DSHS In Action
By Gerald (Jerry) Goertz, with permission

CHAPTER 8
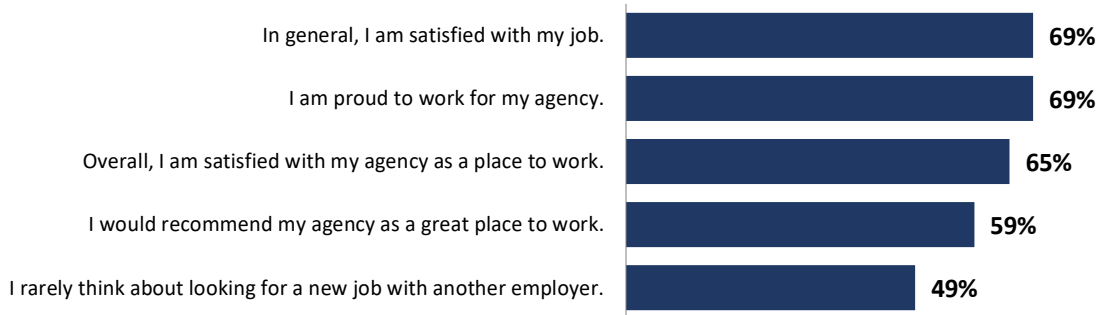
Satisfaction with Job and Agency

EMPLOYEES ARE GENERALLY SATISFIED WITH THEIR JOBS AND WITH DSHS. Many survey respondents agreed that they are proud to work for DSHS and consider the agency a great place to work. Employees greatly appreciate the positive work environment and various aspects of the workplace, such as job stability, that make their jobs enjoyable.

Although the standard survey questions reflect employees' satisfaction, the open comments gave them space to talk about other concerns, including salary and benefits, staffing challenges, and staff safety. Many talked about the rising cost of living in the state, requesting more salary increases to keep up. Respondents also recognize that recruiting and retaining talent is a difficult process in DSHS and noted that low staffing levels make it more difficult to be satisfied in their roles.

Satisfaction with job and agency

Most employees are satisfied with their jobs and with DSHS, but that does not necessarily mean they want to stay in their current positions.

Percent of employees answering "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

In general, I am satisfied with my job.	69%
I am proud to work for my agency.	69%
Overall, I am satisfied with my agency as a place to work.	65%
I would recommend my agency as a great place to work.	59%
I rarely think about looking for a new job with another employer.	49%

Employees are generally satisfied with their jobs, with 69% of respondents agreeing with the standard question. When asked how they feel about working for DSHS, most employees agree that they are proud to work for the agency (69%), are satisfied with DSHS as a place to work (65%) and would recommend the agency as a great place to work (59%). Comments about general satisfaction were also mostly positive (57%), and many talked about specific aspects of their work that they liked. Although only 49% of employees agreed that they rarely look for a new job, the way the question is worded makes it difficult to interpret in relation to employee satisfaction.

Although respondents indicate that they are generally happy in their jobs, they also brought up challenges related to training, staffing, and pay/benefits, which often have a direct impact on job satisfaction. Physical safety is also a concern for some employees who commented on dangerous situations they have encountered in their jobs. Some also noted frustrations with other aspects of the job that were specific to the divisions where they work.

Successes

Most respondents agree that they are satisfied with their job (69%) and with the agency as a place to work (65%). They also agree they are proud to work for DSHS (69%). In their comments, the majority of employees who mentioned general satisfaction said they are happy with where they are in the agency (57%). Many simply stated that they like their job or talked about the positive work environment they experience. Employees also mentioned specific aspects of the job they enjoyed (24% of all comments), with many saying that they appreciate the variety and flexibility they experience in their work, most often in reference to their daily tasks. Others noted that they found the work intellectually challenging, and they enjoy solving process problems that occur in their unit or division.

> *My current job offers me a constant learning environment which I tend to thrive in. There is not a day that goes by where I am not looking forward to going in to work and contribute to the success of our agency as a whole.*

Employees also addressed pay and benefits as important aspects of the job that influence their general satisfaction, with 31% of these comments noting positive experiences. Many expressed appreciation for the benefits received as part of compensation, including paid time off, health insurance, and retirement or pension plans. Some also said they like the job security and stability that comes with working for a government agency. Others mentioned they felt that pay or overall compensation is fair.

Challenges

Although respondents indicated they are happy working at DSHS, only 49% agree that they rarely think about looking for a new job with another employer. This question is difficult to interpret, in part due to the negative sentiment of the question ("rarely") which may have been confusing for respondents. The term "employer" is also unclear, as this could be interpreted to mean looking for a new job in another DSHS administration, another government agency, or even employment outside of state government. In the comments, some employees mentioned looking for new employment due to dissatisfaction with their current work environment, but it was often unclear if their goal was to move within state government or into the private sector. Even with these interpretation challenges, the response to this question may point to a degree of dissatisfaction among employees within their current positions.

Staffing is a significant concern among respondents, with 10% of those commenting noting the need for improvement. Filling open positions is important to employees to ensure their units are fully staffed, but many brought up retention challenges and high turnover as well. Some attribute these challenges to high workloads. Adding more positions and increasing salaries were common suggestions that employees gave for attracting applicants and easing employee stress. Many noted that line staff or those providing direct services are the ones most affected by staffing challenges, and they often struggle to provide adequate care to clients without the proper support.

> *The short staffing problem is the greatest hindrance to effective care that I have experienced. Without proper staffing levels, most all components of care, and the operational systems of care, are deeply compromised.*

Requests for increased pay and benefits were also frequent in employees' comments, with 9% of all comments noting a need for improvement. Many of these comments referenced the cost-of-living increases in Washington State, often citing high inflation rates over the past few years. Some indicated they felt that their current salary wasn't keeping up, and they need another source of income to keep afloat. Others expressed frustration with the increases in health insurance premiums, with a few referencing the recent large increase for Kaiser Permanente. In addition to cost-of-living challenges, some employees said they feel that they are not being compensated fairly based on their experience, claiming that newer employees are being paid more than those who have longer tenure.

A small group of employees (3% of all comments) also talked about safety concerns in their jobs. Though a few spoke positively about staff safety, the majority of these (86%) expressed concerns. Those working in residential facilities referenced patients assaulting staff and the need for full staffing to keep employees safe. Others expressed concerns about angry clients in offices and suggested increasing security presence.

"I know that it's an issue everywhere, but I would like to see the FTEs filled and less of a revolving door when it comes to employee turnover. I'm not sure what can be done to entice people to join us or stay with us because I think DSHS is a good place to work. My only complaints are topping out salary wise and lack of cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) raises."

"Fort Jefferson - Florida"
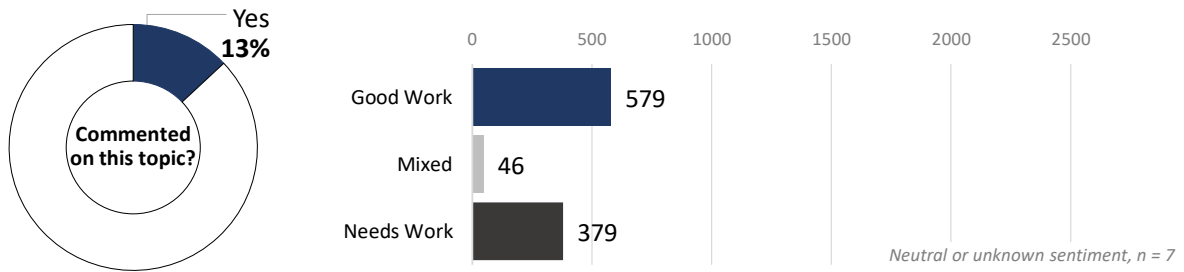DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic
By Diane Rubie, with permission

From the photographer:
Took a trip with my husband and friends to Florida in April 2023. We visited Fort Jefferson - Dry Tortugas National Park. Lots of history and beauty!

COMMENTS. General satisfaction

1,011 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed their general satisfaction.

Yes **13%**

Commented on this topic?

Good Work	579
Mixed	46
Needs Work	379

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 7

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Employees described qualities of an enjoyable workplace.

"What I like about my current job is the vibe. It has a home feeling to it."

"Friendly environment and inclusive group."

"I like the friendly and low stress culture of ALTSA."

"The culture is very positive and supportive."

"The energy and the culture are what I like the most in my current position."

"[I like] the feeling that I belong here."

"I love the relaxed atmosphere."

"The work culture among my team and region is the healthiest environment I have worked with in a very long time."

"Never a dull moment and always an intellectually stimulating environment."

"The work environment is positive and healthy."

"Wonderfully supportive and positive work environment in my division."

"I feel blessed to be in an environment where most everyone is so empathetic."

"[I like] being in a work environment that has a mindset of being an employer of choice."

"I enjoy the family atmosphere that we have in our CSO."

"It is a creative and positive environment."

"[I like] the respectful, welcoming, and healthy environment."

"Positive atmosphere is encouraged by example and actions."

"[I like the] easy going environment."

Some expressed satisfaction with their job.

"I am passionate about the work I do."

"I'm doing work that interests me, so this is not just a job, it is more meaningful."

"I love love love my position."

"I personally feel like I have best job in the world!"

"I am passionate about my particular job, and I do it well."

"I find meaning in my position and look forward to reporting to my workplace."

Many employees praised their work environment.

"Best office to work in."

"DSHS has provided a fantastic environment through which to serve our customers."

"Nice environment to work in."

"My workplace is great!!!"

"Excellent work environment."

"Everything looks great at work, and I am very happy."

"I love the atmosphere of the campus."

"Outstanding place to work."

"Though the pay and benefits are great, I would say the thing I like best so far about my current job would be the work environment."

"The environment is pleasant and enjoyable."

"It's an amazing workplace to be a part of. I'm more than grateful to have this opportunity to work with this establishment."

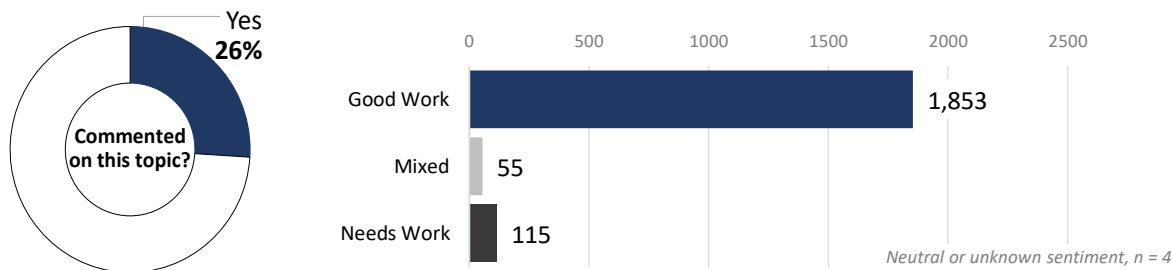**Some asked for better work culture.**

"More positivity, less negativity and stress."

"I would like to see an increase in positivity and increase in morale. We are all in this together and can press forward as a united team if we have a positive, hopeful mindset no matter the situation we face on a daily basis."

"I would like the environment to feel more relaxed."

"I would like our workplace to be less toxic. Happier people."

"Promote a more positive and encouraging environment."

"Several people on my team cry on a regular basis due to the toxicity. It is not good."

"I like the actual work I do. If I could move my work to a healthy environment, it would be a great job."

Others mentioned job dissatisfaction.

"I don't like my current job. I spend my lunches searching for a new job."

"This is the worst state job I have ever had."

"I have always enjoyed my job until the last two years. It is difficult to remain positive with wins so few and far between."

COMMENTS. Other important aspects of the job

2,027 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed other important aspects of the job.

Yes **26%**

Commented on this topic?

Good Work	1,853
Mixed	55
Needs Work	115

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 4

► What DSHS employees said …

Employees appreciate flexibility.

"I am in a position that allows flexibility when I need it."

"[I like] the flexibility to do what I need but also the ability to see the impact I'm having."

"I enjoy the flexibility."

"[I like] the flexibility to do my job."

"Love the flexibility."

"[I like] the flexibilities with my job."

They enjoy contributing their skills and experience.

"Opportunity to use skills I really enjoy to further DSHS' mission."

"[I like] utilizing my previous skills to currently help CRMs."

"I get to work in my areas of strength."

"I get to do what I like and put my skill sets to use."

"[I like] the ability to be able to use my knowledge and work experience in my current job."

"Being able to use my skills and training to do a service that helps people in the state in which I live. This is rewarding and I am grateful to do this with my career."

"My current position allows me to use my strengths."

Some like the variety and challenge their work offers.

"It is never the same. Each day is an adventure with puzzles to complete. I like the challenge."

"[I like] the variety of work."

"I have a good mix of tasks so my job is not stagnant or boring."

"I enjoy the work and the challenges that come with it."

"My position has me doing a wide range of duties that never gets old or routine."

"There is something different to do every day in my work."

"I like every aspect of my job. It changes frequently; however, also has enough routine work."

Many noted specific job duties they value.

"I love all the moving pieces, detail, legal aspects."

"I enjoy working with supported living agencies in monitoring their contracts. Brainstorming and problem solving with agencies and the CRM's."
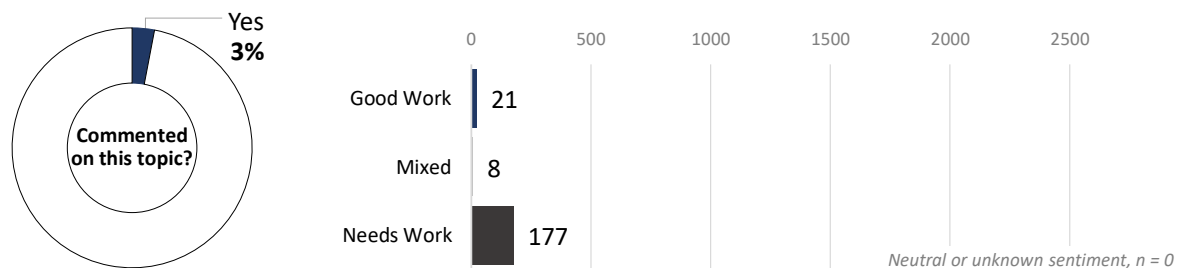
"[I like] cooking things."

"I find the greatest satisfaction in case management and having the opportunity to work with families from start to finish."

"I enjoy casework."

"Providing solutions to complex IT issues and making complicated issues simple for customers."

"I like being able to help clients with the frustration of our system that is overwhelming to them."

"I like the challenges that come from assisting employees with their questions. I like that each day can be different."

"I like doing the actual support work, i.e., closing docs, creating paper cases, uploading records."

"I like the administrative work that I do."

"I love making the hospital sparkle for the patients and other staff working in the hospital. Disinfecting the hospital is a very important job, and I'm proud to be the person who shows up every day, with a positive outlook."

"The ability to develop or design quality programs that are utilized to improve patient outcomes."

"I feel my role is critical to patient outcomes when they re-enter the community. I value being a part of a patient's transition from hospital back into community."

"I love counseling psychology, vicarious resiliency (the flipside of vicarious trauma, encountered when hearing how patients and peers sometimes have made it through challenges, trauma, and hard times effectively), and increasing an ongoing improvement mindset."

"[I like] providing human kindness. Lifting others up."

A few said they were not satisfied with their job.

"I feel like my skills have atrophied over the years as I am responsible for less and less."

"The lack of flexibility is incredible. We are adults and should be treated like it."

"This job is mentally draining."

"That my expertise and agency knowledge be more appropriately leveraged."

COMMENTS. Safety issues

206 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed safety issues.

Yes
3%

Commented on this topic?

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500
Good Work	21					
Mixed	8					
Needs Work	177					

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 0

► What DSHS employees said …

A few employees are satisfied with the level of safety.

"I like the fact that the staff follow safety protocols and do everything that they can to ensure staff safety."

"Safety comes first no matter what."

"[I] am happy because the environment is safe to work."

Some want more focus on staff safety.

"For senior leadership to focus on safety at all times. Not just when there is an emergency, incident, or inspection from Labor & Industries."

"I think safety of staff is something that should be addressed for each facility, as the concerns are different for each facility. I believe that you have to take care of your staff first, before your customers, because without the staff, you have no customers. And these days, safety is a huge issue we are having. But it needs to start with the staff. Make them feel safe and feel cared for, then they will stick around, and it will then be transferred into their work."

They requested additional staff for safety purposes.

"For the higher risk cottages, I would like to see a higher staffing number. Staff should go home safely daily."

"More emphasis on staff & patient safety through updating base staffing numbers, as staff feel overworked and unsafe."

"Staff safety has been an issue for a long time, and staff do not feel safe with combative patients. More staff need to be present with this type of population that they have to work with. They are too much put in vulnerable positions and at higher risk."

"STAFFING is a grave issue. PLEASE provide enough staff to work for safety purposes!"

Others asked for more security personnel.

"Dedicated security for ALL CSO location (no excuses)."

"More security staff so they can deploy to wards as needed."

"Security needs to be available for staff/patient emergencies. Nursing and medical staff should not be front line in volatile situations when we have trained security staff."

Some described specific scenarios where they felt unsafe.

"Investigators are still questioned about why they are going with other investigators in the field. We work in a field of unknowns, and this should never be questioned. Safety should always be the priority and going out together is safer than alone a majority of the time due to the unknown."

"I would like for there to be more safety measures put into place for employees in person at CSOs. Clients are becoming more escalated and sometimes it is hard to come to work feeling safe."

"Address the significant fentanyl-addicted population and the correlation to our safety as front-line workers."

"Increased safety for staff. Don't allow clients back in staff areas. Some clients are emotionally charged when coming into the office or have other issues. I have had to call the police several times due to poor behavior by clients. I am not saying this is all of our clients, but we don't know how clients will react during an interview. I feel we are putting staff at risk by having clients interviewed in their cubicle."

"Client threats to employees should be taken seriously."

"For DCS to close the front counter for Support Enforcement Officer (SEO) visits. For a client to come in to speak (in person) with someone that is taking collection actions, when we have so many other communication means, seems to be a very outdated policy and an ongoing safety issue."

A few asked for safety-focused training.

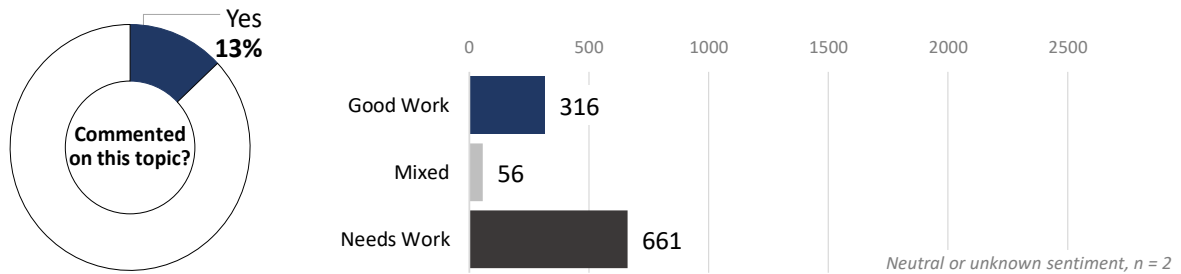"Safety/defensive tactics training in hostile environments."

"Better training for handling fentanyl situations in the CSO. If a customer has OD'd and we are rushing in to help them, we do not know if they have smoked it. We don't have the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) and can be easily put in harm's way."

"Better training to decrease assaults."

"I would like to see DSHS offer self-defense for employees that work in the field. This was done in the past and not sure why it's not done now to help employees know how to protect themselves better from physical confrontations."

COMMENTS. Pay and benefits

1,035 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed pay and benefits.

Yes
13%

Commented
on this topic?

Good Work		316
Mixed		56
Needs Work		661

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 2

▶ What DSHS employees said …

Some employees praised the pay and benefits.

"I like the pay and benefits that I am getting and how that has set me up for my future."

"Rewarding work with good pay."

"I love the number of vacation/personal days we have."

"I like my pay and benefits."

"I have job stability."

"The pay is better than I could find anywhere else."

"I feel the state takes care of me with benefits, opportunities for advancement, and job security."

"I feel secure in my job."

"[I like the] job security and leave."

"Pay scale and benefits packages are better than most workplaces."

"Medical benefit package, wages improvements in the last few years."

"[I like] my paycheck, retirement, and vacation package."

"In addition to being emotionally fulfilling, the pay is competitive and it comes with great benefits."

"I am grateful for being paid a living wage and great benefits."

"That I have a job. It pays decent, and I have health care."

"Stable income and benefits."

"The benefits and the pay are good!"

"The benefits, retirement, and medical are amazing."

Others made comparisons to salaries outside DSHS.

"Current salaries are not competitive with the market. They need to be revisited."

"Pay scale to match or exceed outside employment and other state agencies."

"Many job titles and pay rates are not in line with industry norms. This is a major cause of low morale and turnover."

"More competitive salary that keeps up with current cost of living. Every time there is a raise, there remains a disparity between our salaries and inflation of living costs. We are already paid less than our contemporaries in other sectors of the workforce across the nation and the state."

Some said they work multiple jobs due to low pay.

"We need higher pay now! I just topped out at my pay scale. Now, with inflation I need to find a second job. It is not uncommon for line staff to have to find second jobs. That is ridiculous, infuriating and makes my job difficult when I am in the same boat as clients but can't really share that information with them as that would be harmful and disrespectful, but it is the truth."

"Better pay so I don't have to work two jobs."

"Fair wages that enable us to afford to keep coming to work, [have] a roof over our heads, with enough money left to eat."

"The pay scale is very low. I feel like I have to take opportunities for overtime to make this job sustainable."

"Employees need to make a livable wage. There is no reason a DSHS employee should have to be on food assistance and rental assistance to survive while working for the state."

They want pay rates to reflect experience and education.
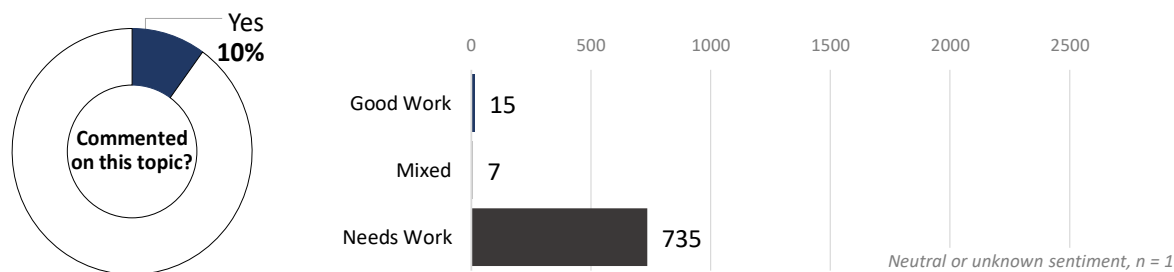
"[I want to] be paid for my expertise in the field, to match my degree and certifications."

"Compensation commensurate with my qualifications, experience, and work duties. Employees in my position are woefully undercompensated, and that's a large part of the extremely high turnover and difficulty in recruiting new employees to replace those who leave. That's also the main reason I'm looking for a new job."

"Pay increases. My position requires either a PhD or a MA and 5 years' experience, but still pays 37% less than the nongovernmental average for my position and 27% less than other state government positions."

"I would like to see a pay differential for advanced degrees or certificates."

A few requested an increase in vacation accrual.

"Giving employees another personal leave day or increasing the monthly vacation accrual would be great."

"Accruing more vacation and sick days would make a huge impact."

"Starting vacation accrual for newly hired employees is not competitive."

COMMENTS. Staffing

758 of the 7,687 respondents who commented addressed staffing.

Yes
10%

Commented on this topic?

	0	500	1000	1500	2000	2500
Good Work	15					
Mixed	7					
Needs Work		735				

Neutral or unknown sentiment, n = 1

► What DSHS employees said …

A few employees described adequate staffing.

"[I like] having full staffing to provide the quality care."

"[I like the] leadership investment in growing my team to an effective size."

"I think our team is solid and we have very little turnover even due to all the work that we have in our area. This is due to our leadership."

Many asked for staffing increases.

"We need more workers/employees, not supervisors or administration. We need more front-line workers like support staff and case managers for all areas not just basic case management."

"I would like to see more staffing to accomplish the work that we need to do."

"More staff hired for WorkFirst."

"Not being perpetually understaffed causing high caseloads."

"Increase FTEs proportionately to increased workloads, projects, initiatives, etc."

"I would like to see our team fully staffed."

"Filling areas of employee shortage to help prohibit burnout for existing employees."

"More staffing. We have a long-term staffing issue, more than 8 years."

"More staff to meet the ever-increasing workload and requirements."

Some mentioned staffing assessment tools and models.

"Follow a staffing model. Use HART (Hospital Acuity Resource Tool) as staffing guidelines and tell the truth when staffing falls below HART staffing numbers. We need a paradigm shift from 'What is the minimum staff that you can get by with?' to 'How many staff can we give you?'"

"Our area is short-handed. I would appreciate a hard look at the current org chart and workload."

"It is widely acknowledged that the algorithm used to determine how many FTEs are needed is outdated, but when asked for Time Study we are told it's not cost effective."

Employees want more focus on staff retention.

"Whatever needs to be changed to maintain the retention of workers, let's address that. The speed at which we go through workers is gross."

"I would like to see management REALLY look at how to retain employees. Better support, supervisors being present, etc. so investigators want to stay with APS and not look elsewhere for employment. Investigators should have a limit of cases they have on their caseload and not feel so overwhelmed due to retention issues."

"Leadership and significant cultural changes would need to be made in order for our agency to retain staff long term again."

"Less turnover of administrative staff."

"Efforts from higher ups to retain workers, especially high-performing ones whom the office depends heavily on."

"I would like to see a focus on job retention. Primarily being the Employer of Choice, retaining and hiring our valuable staff. Many are overwhelmed and burnt out."

"I would like to see administration put forth effort into retention of employees. The emphasis is always on recruitment, but nothing is done towards retaining the employees we have. If we could stop the hemorrhaging of employees leaving it would also help with recruitment."

"Now would be the time to really make improvements and do what we can to retain so many of us that continue to choose to work here. We put our whole heart and soul into the work we do day in and day out."

"Ability to retain staff so we are not constantly hiring and training staff."

A few pointed to current pay scales as a retention issue.

"Staff have to take drastic measures to get a raise which includes leaving the position or obtaining a job offer in the hopes of using it to leverage a wage increase."

"Staff should have increased pay. This could help with the staffing issues."

"I would like to see that our pay scales increase to help with retention. I think that our pay scales are outdated and lower than many other similar positions, and people move on due to needing more money."

From the photographer:

With the changing of the seasons, we transform and must adapt to the weather and what our climates bring. In Washington State, the Evergreen State, the fall color palette can be muted in brown and green, often overcast and gray, on the West side of the Cascade Range. Up in the mountains however, you can catch glimpses of brilliant color hues of red, orange, and yellow. Just like us, the larch, a deciduous pine tree goes through change, shedding the beautiful and delicate golden needles when the freezing temperatures arrive. Hiking to see these trees can be a challenge as they exist only in pockets throughout the forest. This was the first time I was able to see them up close and touch the soft conifer. They are a unique site to see and when shared with close friends, makes for a special experience. For all of us at DSHS and the people we serve, we enter into the season of change to prepare for winter and take to rest and recharge so that we may again fully serve our communities.

"Lustrous Larches of Washington" • Second Place (tie)
DSHS Photo Contest • Category: Artistic
By Benjamin Lee, with permission

Employee Engagement
Survey 2023

Washington State
**Department of Social
& Health Services**
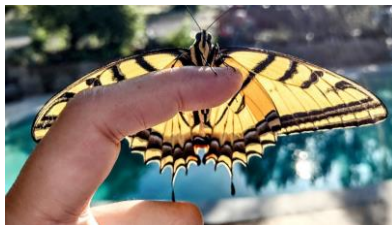
Transforming lives

Research and Data Analysis Division