Employee Assistance Program: Tools for overcoming trauma[1]
[2]

Gwendolyn D'Elia heard something in a department meeting that saved her life.

In the October 2022 meeting, shortly after returning from maternity leave, she listened as her department's human resources leader mentioned that he used the Colorado State Employee Assistance Program (EAP)[3] to discuss a personal issue. EAP is a confidential resource for State of Colorado and University of Colorado employees, which provides no-cost access to counseling, professional coaching and more.

"He did not get into the nitty-gritty details, and he didn't have to," said D'Elia, a training specialist with Advancement at CU system administration. "All he said was, 'I just want to remind everyone this is a benefit you could use.'"

It was exactly what D'Elia needed to hear, and it guided the new mother to resources that helped her heal from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

When D'Elia gave birth to her daughter on June 20, 2022, nothing went as planned. Her 55 hours of labor ended with an emergency C-section, during which her epidural failed and she felt every incision. She and her daughter were discharged from the hospital, only to be readmitted 24 hours later for three more days, which her daughter spent in the neonatal intensive care unit.

"After the fact, in speaking with billing and some nurses and while reviewing the hospital records, we came to the conclusion that they shouldn't have discharged us when they did. But did so because they'd reached the maximum that they could bill. By discharging us and readmitting us, they were able to restart that clock," D'Elia said.

In the subsequent months, D'Elia was grateful to have a healthy daughter, but still grappling with the way she came into the world. She had nightmares and night terrors every night. She couldn't sleep. She disassociated, trying not to think about her experience but unable to not think about it. And she couldn't talk about it without breaking into tears.

When she did talk about the birth to doctors, relatives or friends, they'd reply with common aphorisms — baby blues are normal, being a new parent is hard, or anxieties are normal. Sharing experiences with friends on social media led to comments like, "Yeah, but your baby's OK," or a private message to stop talking about her experience because she would "scare other people from wanting to have a child one day."

"There were two people who went through this process. One of them was six days old. She was perfectly OK, and that was such a blessing," D'Elia said. "The other person who went through this was 28 years old, and she was not OK."

Hearing about EAP, she completed the counseling application immediately and within two weeks had an appointment with a therapist.

In the appointment, D'Elia told her therapist about why she was reaching out at a high level. At first, he said a lot of new moms have anxiety but encouraged her to talk through what was causing her anxiety. She told him the full story through tears.

"I stopped talking, and the next words out of his mouth were, 'You are experiencing a trauma response,'" she said. "There was a light at the end of the tunnel because I finally felt like someone heard me."

The counselor told her she needed to find a therapist who specialized in eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), which focuses on changing the emotions, thoughts or behaviors that result from a distressing experience. He gave her useful tips for connecting with a long-term therapist — to interview several therapists to find someone she clicked with and felt comfortable talking to, and to look for red flags, such as promises that treatment would be complete in a three- to six-month time frame.

"I wanted to feel like I was being heard, especially because my trauma was so connected to not feeling heard during my delivery," she said.

After the EAP session, D'Elia found a therapist and was formally diagnosed with PTSD related to her labor and delivery. D'Elia began weekly virtual EMDR therapy sessions, which aim to remap how the brain processes traumatic events and allow the patient to process and heal.

"The way it was explained to me is that when you're going through trauma, part of what happens is that the two sides of your brain aren't talking to each other anymore," she said. "During a trauma response, that's why you can feel like you're stuck or like you're reliving certain things over and over."

During EMDR sessions, D'Elia talked about her trauma in small, manageable sequences. On one monitor, she would see and talk to her therapist, who listened, took notes, and then asked her to rate her pain and distress on a 1-10 scale. On the other monitor, there was a small moving ball her therapist controlled. After discussing an element of her experience, D'Elia's therapist would move the ball and she would follow it with her eyes.

They repeated the therapy — discussing the birth, rating her feelings, followed by eye movement sessions — for each aspect of her experience until eventually her ratings lowered. D'Elia was able to dictate the elements they discussed. Once they finished the whole experience, they repeated the process, in case new feelings arose.

In September 2023, she completed EMDR therapy after 10 months.

Recovering from her trauma, D'Elia is now "cautiously nervous and patiently optimistic" about the possibility of having another child. She now has better tools to advocate for herself, communicate her needs and say no with confidence when something isn't right.

Looking back on her journey, D'Elia realized the importance of talking about her experiences. Nothing — no birth class, no influencer, no stories she heard — prepared her for what she experienced. Later, she realized she knew other people who had similar experiences, but never sought help.

"In talking about it, if I can just help one person know that they're not alone, that's worth it," she said. "Don't give up advocating for yourself to try to get the help that you need, because you deserve the help and it's out there. You just need to find the right avenue for you to get it."

Whenever D'Elia sees Josh Brumley, assistant director of Organizational Development at CU system Advancement, she tells him that mentioning EAP in a meeting saved her life.

"It was Josh mentioning EAP in a meeting, because I think if it had just been in an email or in passing, I wouldn't have noticed it," she said. "I'm like, 'Josh, you saved my life,' and he's like, 'Oh, stop.' But it's true. I really do feel that way, like Josh and EAP got me on the path that I needed to feel like myself again."

Learn more about the Colorado State Employee Assistance Program (EAP)[3] or other mental health resources[4] available to CU faculty and staff.

New report details how CU is limiting its environmental footprint[5]

The newest CU system Sustainability Report[6] was recently released, highlighting campus sustainability efforts and progress toward strategic plan metrics and goals.

This is the second edition of the report, which is revised and published every two years. This year's introduction by CU President Todd Saliman emphasizes the need for a steadfast focus on the work being done.

"Demonstrating a commitment to preserving our limited natural resources and reducing our impact on the environment are among our top priorities at the University of Colorado," Saliman writes. "CU should be a leader in advancing

sustainability by making real progress toward our long-term goal of carbon neutrality."

To be formed later this year, a new systemwide working group will help to identify more ways to advance sustainability at CU and to inform future strategic plan goals.

"This will complement the important work our campuses are already doing on this critical priority," Saliman writes.

The new report highlights sustainability progress in areas such as:
CU's continued emphasis systemwide on renovation and repair over new construction Building upgrades paid from utility cost savings CU's development of more sustainable purchasing practices Academic offerings on all CU campuses promoting sustainability
The 27-page report[6], prepared by the Office for the Vice President for Budget and Finance, focuses on sustainability in the built environment.

"The four campuses of the University of Colorado are united in their passion to create opportunities to reduce campus energy use and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions," the report states. "The university recognizes that it has an important part to play in combating climate change."

All four campuses recently completed building performance audits to identify and evaluate possible energy-conservation measures, the report states. As a result, the campuses will be pursuing building upgrades beginning in the next year to be repaid from utility cost savings in the future; the practice is known as Energy Performance Contracting.

The CU system's current sustainability goals are expected to be evaluated and modified during continued strategic planning in 2025 and 2026.

Updates to systemwide administrative policy statements took effect Jan. 1[7]

The Office of Policy and Efficiency (OPE) has announced updates to the following administrative policy statements (APS) from the Budget, Planning and Capital and the Human Resources areas:

APS 3002-Capital Construction Planning and Projects

The revision modifies the APS to include a new appendix and resource guide specific to real property transactions.

APS 5056-University Employment Postings

Minor revisions were made to the APS to fully comply with new legislative requirements made in the passage of Senate Bill 23-105 Ensure Equal Pay for Equal Work.

APS 5062-Leave

Revisions were made to the following sections of APS 5062-Leave:

Military - incorporating changes from House Bill 23-1045 by allowing up to three weeks equivalent to a regular work

schedule per fiscal year.

Administrative - Separating short-term administrative leave into different sections, defining the reason for each usage, and providing clarity on when the administrative leave can be moved to accommodate work schedules.

Parental leave - updated to adhere with the requirement of the State of Colorado Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) and the university's private FAMLI plan and clarify how all the leave components work together for time off and compensation options during parental leave. Notable changes include:
Extension of full paid leave from four weeks to six weeks for university staff, classified staff, and 12-month faculty. Elimination of the requirement to exhaust sick leave before parental leave for nine-month faculty. Elimination of the one year of employment requirement for university staff, classified staff, 12-month faculty and nine-month faculty.

These revisions became effective on Jan. 1, 2024.

For more detailed information, go to https://www.cu.edu/ope/aps/latest-changes[8].

For additional information on systemwide APSs, go to: http://www.cu.edu/ope[9].

Reminder: Boettcher Investigator application deadline approaching[10]

Applications for the 2024 Boettcher Webb-Waring Biomedical Research Awards[11] program will be due to the campus grants offices in February, according to the following campus-specific instructions:
University of Colorado Boulder[12]University of Colorado Colorado Springs[13]University of Colorado Denver | Anschutz Medical Campus[14]
The Boettcher Foundation established the Webb-Waring Biomedical Research Awards program, which will provide up to five grants of $250,000 each covering up to three years of research activity, to provide independent research opportunities to promising and talented early career investigators. Awardees will carry the title of Boettcher Investigator in acknowledgement of the prestigious award.

Video[15]

Since the first awards granted in July 2010, the Boettcher Foundation has awarded CU's 65 current Boettcher Investigators[16] more than $15.1 million.

Eligible faculty researchers from all four CU campuses are encouraged to apply. For purposes of the 2024 award year, an eligible early career investigator (ECI):
Is an investigator who is four years or fewer from their initial career-track academic appointment as of Jan. 1, 2024 (i.e., whose initial career-track appointments began no earlier than Jan. 1, 2020); Has not previously received a major independent research award; Is an investigator who received a terminal degree or completed their initial medical residency within 10 years of Jan. 1, 2024 (i.e., on or after Jan. 1, 2014); and Is an investigator who is either a U.S. Citizen or Permanent Resident, as of date of application in 2024.
For more details, go to: http://www.cu.edu/bfww/eligibility[17]

Do not contact the Boettcher Foundation directly.

Study: Cannabis can make workouts more fun, but it's no performance-enhancer [18]

Colorado Springs Venture Attractor awards $100,000 in Torch Grants [19]

Seed grants applications open [20]

Colorado Center for Personalized Medicine highlighted as a leader in precision medicine in research and clinical care [21]

Van Dalsem to lead Office of Contracts and Grants[22]

Clark receives award from Royal Thai Embassy [23]

Q&A: Martella on active learning vs. lecture [24]

Homeless youth overcome with emotion after seeing photos of themselves on exhibit at MCA Denver [25]

Colorado business leaders more confident heading into 2024 [26]

The 4 New Year's Resolutions Cardiologists Always Make [27]

Links
[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/employee-assistance-program-tools-overcoming-trauma[2] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/lead_photo_preferred_web-gwen-and-isla-53_colorado_eap_profile_crop_01-11-2024.jpg[3] https://cseap.colorado.gov/[4] https://www.cu.edu/employee-services/benefits-wellness/mental-health-resources[5] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/new-report-details-how-cu-limiting-its-environmental-footprint[6]

https://www.cu.edu/doc/sustainability-report-2023pdf[7] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/updates-systemwide-administrative-policy-statements-took-effect-jan-1[8] https://www.cu.edu/ope/aps/latest-changes[9] http://www.cu.edu/ope[10] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/reminder-boettcher-investigator-application-deadline-approaching[11] http://www.cu.edu/bfww[12] https://www.cu.edu/doc/bfww-applicantinstructions-cu-boulder.pdf[13] https://www.cu.edu/doc/bfww-applicantinstructions-cu-colo-springspdf[14] https://www.cu.edu/doc/bfww-applicantinstructions-cu-denver-amc.pdf[15] https://vimeo.com/189663981[16] https://www.cu.edu/bfww/cu-investigators[17] http://www.cu.edu/bfww/eligibility[18] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/study-cannabis-can-make-workouts-more-fun-it-s-no-performance-enhancer[19] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/colorado-springs-venture-attractor-awards-100000-torch-grants[20] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/seed-grants-applications-open[21] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/colorado-center-personalized-medicine-highlighted-leader-precision-medicine-research-and[22] https://connections.cu.edu/people/van-dalsem-lead-office-contracts-and-grants[23] https://connections.cu.edu/people/clark-receives-award-royal-thai-embassy[24] https://connections.cu.edu/people/qa-martella-active-learning-vs-lecture[25] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/homeless-youth-overcome-emotion-after-seeing-photos-themselves-exhibit-mca-denver[26] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/colorado-business-leaders-more-confident-heading-2024[27] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/4-new-year-s-resolutions-cardiologists-always-make