Interrupting Attrition of Entry-Level Live-In Professionals in Residence Life:
With Restorative Justice Circles

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Entry-level student affairs professionals play a significant and influential role in the growth and development of college students. Despite the value of these entry-level professionals, attrition from the student affairs profession is a pressing issue (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), primarily because 55% of student affairs professionals leave the field of student affairs within the first five years (Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006). The purpose of this improvement science qualitative research study, set in a small liberal arts' residential college in the Midwest, was to examine the attitudes that live-in professional staff within Student Affairs and Residence Life have toward leaving their post within five years. This study focused on the role of live-in professional staff; why they leave their post so soon if Restorative Justice circles can contribute to reducing overall attrition.

The main findings of this study suggest that entry-level professionals are no longer satisfied with the altruistic values used to bring new professionals into the field. They are craving opportunities to feel included, connected, and part of a team where they can be seen and have their voices heard. Live-in staff face multiple stress factors associated with their role on campus (Barr, 2014). Higher stress levels have resulted from an ineffective on-call system, the lack of after-hours help from campus offices, a lack of appreciation from campus partners, mental health crises from students, and a missing investment in their well-being. Restorative Justice circles were used to mitigate feelings of despair and attrition from the live-in staff. The findings of Restorative Justice circles suggest they were a success in providing an outlet for staff to express themselves, build

trust among their peers, and feel recognition and appreciation as a Residence Life group. Although restorative justice circles can help small groups feel valued, have a sense of value, and be listened to and heard, they do not address the more important systemic problems that plague student affairs, and additional work is needed to address these bigger concerns. This inquiry provides a recommendation for future research and practice to continue to tackle the systemic issues of entry-level professionals and attrition.

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Preface

Throughout my doctoral journey, I learned that no one could achieve this feat alone. I want to take this space to recognize those who have supported, challenged, and sacrificed along the way to get me to and through the finish line. Thank you to my dad, Dennis Perkins, Sr., for believing in me from the beginning. Being a first-generation, low-income, and the first to go to college was difficult, but he made it look easy by offering unconditional support every step. Even when things were not great, and there were plenty, he always had words of encouragement–thanks, dad!

I owe enormous gratitude to my partner, Dani Perkins, who put up with so much as I went through the process and when the effects of COVID-19 threatened to derail me permanently. I know there were days when I was pleasant, feeling down, several weeks of being unmotivated, and feeling like throwing in the towel. She sat with me through much of this process, cheering me on when I struggled to see the end. She taught me to celebrate minor victories along the way, and I appreciated that so much. Thank you for loving me unconditionally when I know I did not always make it easy.

To my family, thank you to my sister Tasha, brother Dennis IV, and aunts Rena and Doris for asking how things are going and for constantly believing in me, not only throughout this process. I have never felt pressure to succeed, just unwavering support to complete a lifelong dream. That support has meant so much.

To my advisor, Linda DeAngelo. When I first met Linda, I knew she was the real deal. I want to thank Linda for keeping me grounded and providing perpective. When I was in the dumps or stressed from not submitting a chapter on time, Linda was there to pick me up by knowing when to challenge and when to support. Thank you for your excellent guidance and wisdom.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Problem Area

Student affairs professionals play a significant and influential role in the lives of college students, growth and development, and play an instrumental role on campus operationally. Despite the value of these entry-level and experienced professionals, attrition from the student affairs profession is a pressing issue (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), primarily because 55–62% of student affairs professionals leave the field of student affairs within the first five years (Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006). Employee turnover is an important issue, especially for higher education institutions struggling with declining fiscal resources and calls for increased accountability. (Anderson, Guido-Dibrito, & Morrell, 2000; Montgomery & Lewis, 1996; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988). Despite these professionals' goal commitment, loyalty, and dedication, attrition from the field continues to increase (Rosser & Javinar, 2003).

Although attrition of live-in professional staff within residence life is ubiquitous, this study considered this problem in a small liberal arts college, referred to as Small Libatscol within the study, situated in the heart of the Midwest in the United States. Small Libatscol is not better or worse than its peer sixteen institutions, but attrition is a concern. Collecting information from previous and current live-in professionals in student affairs and residence life produced a set of recommendations for the division of student affairs at Libatscol. It contributed to general knowledge about attrition in these positions and their contributions. As referenced previously, Small Libatscol is a residential college with over 85% of the student body, all class standings, living in the residence halls. Because of this, Student Affairs should consider what influences

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contribute to the high attrition that plagues student affairs and the attrition of young live-in professional staff. This study provided direct feedback and helpful information for this purpose.

The intervention for this study was designed based on knowledge gained from empathy interviews with the participants conducted before the study design. Participants were excited to share their thoughts about live-in professionals' work. Overwhelmingly, participants had not had a great experience doing their work. They talked about being down a staff member and how they work, left by those who have exited, was distributed amongst those who stayed without reasonable compensation. At the end of the interviews, participants articulated that it was good to be seen and heard. As leaders, we must identify how Student Affairs professionals recognize and navigate the conditions and situations that lead to attrition through daily responsibilities. Entry-level professional staff feels overwhelmed by the workload. They also do not have an outlet to express frustrations or others to lean on. Restorative justice circles are activities where a group of individuals comes together around a commonality, either team, department, division, or those who might do similar work. The Restorative Justice circles addressed two concerns and made up the intervention for the study of this dissertation.

After the empathy interviews, I learned that at Small Libatscol, there were three broad reasons for high attrition among live-in professional staff in Residence Life at Small Libatscol: (1) live-in professional staff being overworked, (2) lack of understanding of the position and live-in professional staff by campus partners, and (3) dealing with students' mental health concerns. I used Restorative Justice circles to help interrupt these and other issues related to the lack of retention of live-in professional staff.

1.1.1 Current Challenges in Student Affairs

My role as Director of Residence Life within the organization I studied, and my role as an active participant in the pilot that I studied, create essential questions regarding my positionality within the research. In my role at the college, I wear many hats, including working as the leader and supervisor of the live-in professional team. This position places me in an optimal position to conduct this research from a pragmatic perspective. Each of these roles also present potential implications for research at this study site.

As the individual overseeing the broader Residential Life Department, student staff, and programs are borne out of the department at the college, I am interested in the program's success and align it more closely to the college's stated goals. At the time of this research, I have been working in this capacity for one year. I have spent nearly twenty years in student affairs, specifically housing and Residence Life. Throughout my career, I have overseen many master-level professionals. I have watched live-in professional staff go from five to seven years to where we are now at one to three years in the role. My experiences in the field have prepared me for the research I am doing and help define and shape me for the work. I have the privilege of directly accessing institutional data. I must collaborate with institutional review authorities to ensure that I maintain appropriate approvals for data used in this study.

As I mentioned, I have done residence life work for almost two decades, and I can say that it has been both challenging and rewarding work. I have seen many professionals leave the field. Those I went to grad school with or supervised while working on their masters have left the field entirely. During my career, I have entertained the idea of doing something different when I have felt burned out or did not get a specific position or promotion; because, again, this is challenging

work for someone who is an empath and puts so much time and effort into making sure others are cared for.

Embarking on this inquiry was personal. I appreciate the student-facing work that Residence Life professionals do. Triaging cases of homesickness, roommate conflicts, and uncertainty inherent in navigating the college experience, my master's preparation program and several years of doing this work have prepared me well. However, like most things, humans develop, and so do situations. Supporting students involves assisting them by responding to physical and mental health concerns, sexual assault, suicidal ideation, and myriad concerns surrounding fairness, equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives to support those from underserved spaces. It can be a lot for any human, not to mention those new to student affairs and residence life. This is not simple work. Although those who agree to be part of this occupational journey view it as altruistic, the work can be highly demanding. The number of mental health cases among students has risen, as well as the number of welfare checks conducted on students. Add to this disposition those who come into the field knowing it can be arduous work. Entry-level professionals still appreciate students doing this work and will continue to do so.

Student Affairs administrators are called upon to assist students in succeeding at their institution (Sandeen & Barr, 2014). It is a simple mandate that most professionals believe in with their whole hearts and derive enormous personal satisfaction from seeing and taking part in students' success. While the obligation remains unchanged, the scenery has. Advances in psychotropic medication have provided access to an entire generation of students in college who would not have been able to manage the stresses a decade ago (Caley, Webber, Kurland & Holmes, 2010; Kitzrow, 2003; Stone & Merlo, 2012). This is simultaneously wonderful and taxing on Student Affairs professionals to help students make it through.

Since 1998, school shootings have become a regular part of the educational narrative at all levels and are frightening (Carter, 2019). Student Affairs professionals in post-secondary education are often called upon to create "shelter in place" protocols for their departments and the entire campus. This happens while having daily interaction with the same students whom the media sensationalizes, listing symptoms that describe several students at most institutions across the United States - focusing on behavioral issues or a sense that a particular student may make others uncomfortable (Kitzrow, 2003; Paine, 2009; Tosone, Shwartz & Seths, 2012). Colleges often face a dilemma. Although making others "uncomfortable" is not an actionable offense, the media will be the first to point out that the college/university should have done more to protect the community once a tragedy occurs. The untenable task of protecting students experiencing severe mental illness and protecting the community consistently falls on Student Affairs professionals, and the pressure is enormous. Across the country, Care Teams and Behavioral Intervention Teams were borne from this pressure.

Residential live-in professionals work to help students acclimate to their new environment, assist them as they learn to share space with another human or humans, navigate the competing academic requirements, deadlines, and schedules, assist them with their medication, and sometimes, bring back the early late 1960s idea of in loco parentis–acting or done instead of a parent, by calling students to wake them up for their classes or checking on them when peers have not seen them for twenty-four hours. They also assess the risk level of students who take part in self-harm and mitigate potential risks to the community while providing for co-curricular learning (Dungy, 2018; Porterfield & Whitt, 2016; Prescott, 2011; White, 2008; Winston, Creamer, & Miller, 2001; Carter, 2019). During the heightened days of COVID-19, acclimating students has

become increasingly difficult. The threshold has remained unchanged but has taken on a new definition of what it means for colleges to "take care of and protect students from harm."

1.2 Statement of the Problem of Practice

Student Affairs is at a volatile moment. Across the nation, colleges and universities are seeing attrition rates soar each academic year (Winston, R. B., Torres, V., Carpenter, D. S., McIntire, D. D., & Petersen, B., 2001). In this section, I will discuss the demographics of my place of practice, the effect of the pandemic on staff, and issues elucidated from empathy interviews with the Residence Life team.

My place of practice is a small, high-achieving, high rigor liberal arts college in the Midwest part of the country. The college serves around 1650 students from all around the world. Live-in professional staff is a direct conduit to the students. They offer resources, are calm, and provide students with a rich outside-the-classroom learning experience. Others outmatch one at the college. In my short time at the college, I have seen at least one and a half staff exit from their live-in position each year of my three years—these live-in staff range from one and a half to three years in the field. At Small Libatscol, six live-in professional staff serve 1500 students in nineteen residence halls and ten learning communities (houses). Having to replace live-in professional staff constantly is daunting, but it also disrupts the goals and aspirations of the department and individuals on the team. It forces the staff to take on additional responsibilities, including more paraprofessional staff supervision, on-call duties, unique programming, and additional stress. Figure 1 summarizes the most pressing issues that Student Affairs will have to grapple with over

the next five to seven years and why it is paramount that we address the attrition of entry-level live-in professional staff.

After a five-month break, from March to August 2020, when 90% of the student body was sent home, Small Libatscol was fully operational during the pandemic and invited all 1500 plus students back to campus. Dining and Student Affairs, departments that had already struggled with staffing concerns, continued to see increased attrition rates. Most of these positions were entry-level, but the staff are not staying. As director of a residence life department, I wanted to know why. Why are seemingly happy and content young, entry-level professional staff leaving the position within two years of starting? Applying the principles of improvement science allowed me to put a stake in the ground (Bryk, Gomez, Gronow & Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). By identifying the root causes, I could observe what was going on around me and diagnosed the situation as I studied the inquiry.

The challenge of holding on to staff was one finding discovered from the empathy interviews. Several departments within my practice are struggling to hold on to employees. Our Student Health and Wellness Department has been down two nurses and two counselors for two years. Campus Safety was already short staffed but saw a mass exodus of their staff during the pandemic.

Empathy interviews conducted with the previous live-in professional staff in Residence Life at Small Libatscol brought many concerns to the forefront as to why [live-in staff] left their positions shortly after assuming their roles at the college. Lack of adequate supervision, campus partners lacking the understanding of the role of live-in staff, untenable workload, unmanageable on-call responsibilities, lack of cohesion among the Residence Life staff, the Division of Student Affairs, and campus partners were a few of the hardships faced by live-in professional staff.

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Participants stated that the professional staff did not care about the live-in work staff, and very few reached out to acknowledge [them] and the vital work they had to do daily.

Initially, inadequate supervision appeared to be a root cause for the high attrition. However, after applying some minor tweaks to the overall structure and supervision, inadequate supervision became a non-issue. Still, the lack of understanding of the live-in position and the dense workload continued to persist as concerns for the live-in staff. Live-in professionals stated that colleagues within the department and division appeared to not appreciate their work. They stated that no one outside the department checked in on them or offered to ease their workload by offering solutions. One staff articulated those follow-ups and documentation of student situations need to be perfect. They felt like they work in a culture that is more focused on calling people out than being open and caring. If a live-in professional makes a mistake, they will hear about it.

Several staff expressed similar feelings when asked to perform tasks, besides their day-to-day responsibilities, regardless of already having full plates. Implementing and engaging in a Plan-Do-Study-Act process (IHCI, W. Edwards Demi Institute (2021) toward addressing the attrition problem helped identify both the problem and possibilities of why the problem continues to be pervasive.

Figure 1 Reasons to Address Live-in Staff Attrition

This model, represented in Figure 1, is based on empathy interviews, conversations with peers, colleagues, and campus partners, and my own experiences of residence life work over the last eighteen years at various colleges and universities. Some reasons for the high attrition are lack of supervisory support, little to no upward mobility, high stress, and compassion fatigue (Carter 2019) from students with mental health crises and performing the day-to-day work of others within the department or division. Actual change within higher education can be gradual, while new generations of students move more swiftly.

Entry-level professionals in higher education, student affairs, and residence life want more than their peers who have come before them, but they are not receiving more. Even entry-level staff members want respect (Ellis, Lindsay, 2021). Although human resources would say they are in line with peer institutions (Libatscol Salary Report, 2018). Entry-level staff wants nights and weekends off and the ability to say no to "other duties as assigned." My place of practice is not ready to agree to these asks–a prime example of higher education moving more slowly than new talent asks and demands.

1.3 Place of Practice

As I mentioned above, my place of practice is a small, high-achieving, high rigor liberal arts college in the Midwest part of the country. According to the institution's Analytics and Institutional Research department, 1650 students attend the college from over seventy countries. There is a high number of faculty and staff from historically marginalized backgrounds. Faculty is about 10% of staff of color, whereas the students make up about 33% of the students from historically marginalized backgrounds. Among the student body, 20% identify as international or permanently living outside the United States. The gender breakdown is about 53% female-identified, 45% male-identified, and about 2.5% transgender.

Small Libatscol is a four-year liberal art residential campus that graduates 96% of its matriculated students for four years. It is a college that accepts 16% of its applicants as part of high rigor and socially just-minded student, faculty, and staff body. Small Libatscol is a residential college where a vast majority, about 87% of the students, live in the residence halls at any point. There are nineteen residential halls for 1487 residents. Almost half or 47% of the student body has

dealt with a mental health concern during their time at the college. The 47% of the student body experiencing a mental health crisis is about 18% more than Small Libatscol's benchmarked and peer institutions. The number of residence halls, students to live-in staff ratio, and the high number of mental health concerns are the constants presented during empathy interviews and routine one-on-one meetings. One staff member stated to me, "I did not sign up to deal with student mental health issues."

Students who choose to come to Small Libatscol come from all over. Along with the over 20% of students from abroad, only 5% live in the state where Small Libatscol is situated. The college represents almost forty of the forty-eight contiguous states within the United States. Continuing to lose staff at such a high clip is untenable and needs to be addressed. Although this problem is of national concern and more significant than my place of practice, I wanted to work with staff, my supervisors, and other campus partners to develop a potential intervention to address the attrition issue.

1.3.1 Research Questions

The following inquiry interview questions guided the intervention in this study to analyze the effectiveness of the circle. These questions provide the framework for the questions of the research protocol and inform the data analysis scheme.

- What is affecting live-in professional staff in this role such that they are leaving in such a short amount of time?
- How will participating in Restorative Justice circles contribute to the better well-being of the live-in staff?

- What systemically can be done to improve the live-in professional staff role?

1.3.2 Student Affairs Culture

Edgar Schein (2016) posits that climate culture is the feeling conveyed in a group by the physical layout and how members interact with customers or other outsiders. Like other new members of an organization, those in Student Affairs come into organizations with a climate culture. This is a typical state of being. However, if the institution's cultural parts and espoused values do not line up with the new staff member, the staff member may move on quicker than expected (Carter, 2019).

Student Affairs at my place of practice espouses similar values. Typically, these spaces are inclusive, open-minded, diverse, and progressive. Because of the robust nature of the hiring process for live-in professionals, those taking part in the recruitment and selection process have many opportunities to learn about the espoused values of the institutions and, precisely, the department to determine whether they want to join the organization.

Academic Advising, the Dean of Students, Student Involvement, International Affairs, Diversity, Student Health and Wellness, Campus Police, and the Department of Residence Life. These stakeholder groups play an instrumental role in this inquiry, as they all have a direct or indirect relationship with the students at Small Libatscol.

1.3.2.1 The Role of COVID-19

One of the historical events of 2020 that the world will remember is the Coronavirus disease. The beginning of the pandemic was the start of March 2020, and many colleges sent students home for the semester because of the spread of the Coronavirus. While most institutions across the nation

were charged with creating a game plan for the mass exodus of the student body, the Residence Life staff was asked to execute the plans (Chronicle of Higher Ed, 2020) for serving those who could not leave campus. Student Affairs departments and divisions knew that going "home" would not be an option for some, so they created a petition process for international students, who could not travel abroad, as well as domestic students who could not return home because of unstable living conditions, multiple siblings at home, lack of Wi-Fi access and struggling with family. The Coronavirus has provided a perspective for the entire world. Whether everyone believes the deadly disease exists, it is hard to dispute the over 300,000 humans who have lost their lives because of contracting it.

At my place of practice and during the pandemic, the college kept about 150 students living in the residence halls based on those approved via the health and wellness petition. However, only ten percent of the entire on-campus population lived in the halls. While I worked from home officially, I went into the office three or four times a week to support the Residence Life staff, who were considered "essential" staff. Essential staff on our campus meant that the expectation was that staff would come to campus to carry out tasks for students during the pandemic. The live-in professional staff had their hands full. No one, anywhere, on any campus, knew what it would mean to be on campus during the outbreak, but students, faculty, staff, and parents alike took the plunge and changed it. Like those who lived in places where the borders had closed, some had no choice, like China and India. Others simply did not want to go home, citing harsh home living conditions. The road to sending students home and opening the doors to a "low density" number of students was no straightforward task. Students were essentially told to pack up their room, take what they could, and leave the rest for the local storage company to pick up the items.

As with businesses and other colleges and universities, the information shared was ever-changing. Members from the college in key positions met weekly to discuss the next steps for dealing with the students. We were charged with thinking about whether to bring students back; if we tested them, how would that work? We discussed testing faculty and staff and how often. The meetings were both exhausting and exhilarating. There were so many questions and very few answers, but many colleges across the nation figured out how to survive.

Residence Life struggled mightily. As we opened the doors for a low-density, a small number of students who would live in the residence halls, the live-in professional staff had to contend with their thoughts and uncertainties about the virus. Remember, no one knew precisely how the virus was transmitted. It was not until a few weeks after the CDC stated masks were useless that they came out to support mask-wearing. By this time, many were skeptical. Residence Life staff was asked to connect with students who struggled to stay put in a 10X10 foot room. Everyone, especially students, was expected to "social distance" and later changed to physical distance. This lexicon change is not surprising when the group is a bunch of student affairs professionals working in higher education.

The college ordered a PPE (personal protective equipment) kit for each student and asked the live-in professional staff to deliver them. The campus marketing department created signs and placed them across campus, mainly in residential spaces, by live-in staff, warning students of the consequences if they choose not to follow the new standard protocol of mask-wearing and physical distancing. Residence Life has also been responsible for enforcing the mask and face shield in and outside their buildings - mainly because they live on campus and are likely to see students who violate policy. The journey has been challenging for many, but it has been incredibly daunting for

live-in professionals, who are often saddled with the goings-on of the campus and the on-campus population by choosing to take an on-campus position as a live-in professional.

1.4   Significance of Study

In the national context, if student affairs continue to be affected by attrition, we will likely see more entry-level staff turnover in all student affairs departments. This could mean a revolving door of entry-level professionals in an area that relies heavily on institutional history and memory regarding best practices for students.

In the local context, at my place of practice, the division of student affairs has a tall task. They ensured that everyone within the eight departments' professional work and personal life needs was met with care. The Division of Student Affairs' mission is to advance the College mission and strategic plan by intentionally fostering and proactively promoting student learning and development within our residential liberal arts college community, where self-governance and personal responsibility are hallmarks. We achieve our mission by embracing our core values. Restorative Justice circle activities help bridge the gap between these espoused and actual values.

As an intervention, I plan to introduce social justice circles into our staff team's cultural construct (The Circle Way, 2018). Social justice circles are physical circles that are valuable because they tap into a group's communal nature and desire to be in positive relationships. In circles, no one is dispensable, and everyone is valued for their knowledge and unique gifts. In this way, teams remain whole and reciprocal. Circles build accountability between individuals and the more prominent teams and create a more substantial relationship within teams (Rethink Together,

2022). As the group grew closer, the goal was to identify structural issues that make the job less tenable and undesirable.

As stated previously, the live-in professional provides developmental experiences for students living in on-campus housing. These include programs and activities to help students connect socially with other students. Some other programs include working with students who may be homesick, especially at the beginning of the year, with mental health concerns and, in extreme cases, suicidal ideation. The live-in professional handled the management and daily operations of the residence halls and the overall well-being and care of students living in the hall. The live-in professional interacts with students around the clock throughout the semester. This intervention provided the care that the staff sought. One of the intended goals is that the circle activities will provide a safer space for professional staff to work with and discuss workplace concerns with fellow campus partners outside their department. This will happen immediately after each circle activity, which happens monthly (see schedule Figure 10) from the beginning of Residence Life professional training from July 2021 until April 2022. The circle keeper creates notes as part of a debrief to understand whether the circle achieves desired goals. Within a few days of the circle, I conduct individual interviews with the Residence Life team that last from forty-five to sixty minutes about the circle. These interviews are digitally recorded, and notes are taken during these interviews.

At my institution, I lead the department of residence life. I have faced severe challenges regarding my direct reports throughout my short time at the college. I have seven direct reports, including six live-in professional staff, an Associate Director of Residence Life, and an Assistant Director for Housing Operations. It has been a major supervisory challenge. I have seen the

departure of staff I hired during my short two-plus years at that college. Student Affairs cannot afford to lose entry-level positions at the rate of losing them.

While the work of live-in professionals at Small Libatscol has become untenable and arduous because of additional responsibilities and low levels of appreciation, it should be stated that the changing generation may also play a role in the attrition problem. In the division of Student Affairs, most employees are millennial (51%), Generation X makes up 44%, and baby boomers represent 3%. Generation Z, or what scholars call the digital generation, currently does not make up a significant percentage, less than 2%. However, this will change over the next five years.

Because of the entry-level nature, Generation Z professional staff will be employed in many entry-level positions at the college within one to two years. Supervisors in student affairs and residence life must be prepared to reassess their incentives and motivation tools (Wright, 2020). Young professionals go into the student affairs helping field not because it is lucrative but because they can help students and make a difference in the world. However, a Seemiller and Grace (2018) survey shows that 75% of Generation Z believed that making money is more important than 45% of millennials, 40% of Generation X, and 33% of baby boomers (Seemiller & Grace, 2018; Wright, 2020). Future workforce generations will mandate supervisors to consider additional incentives. For example, despite little proven work experience, Generation Z is more educated and wealthier than previous generations, making them feel comfortable setting demands and willing to leave if those expectations are unmet (Seemiller & Grace, 2018; Wright, 2020). In my practice, this could pose a particular challenge to student affairs and residence life, which rely heavily on entry-level talent, as Generation Z will likely be the new workforce.

2.0 Review of Supporting Literature

Most literature on attrition in student affairs focused on burnout studies. In 2018, two pieces of literature studied burnout in Student Affairs professionals. The first article looked at job stress, burnout, job satisfaction, and turnover intention among Student Affairs professionals. The results found that Student Affairs professionals with high stress and burnout had higher levels of dissatisfaction with their work and had higher turnover intentions (Maslach, 2003). It was also true. Lower stress and burnout positively correlated with the professional's desire to stay in their role. The importance of supervision was a significant thread (Mullen, Malone, Denney & Dietz, 2018). Maslach's burnout surveys and Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI) have contributed significantly to the burnout phenomenon. However, new research suggests there may be more to consider. As explored by (Gooblar, 2018; Paine, Figley, 2009; Tosone, Schwartz & Seths, 2012), compassion fatigue posits that there are other factors to consider for entry-level professionals leaving their posts within the first five years or sooner.

Besides burnout and compassion fatigue, the upcoming new generation of young professionals may subvert the entire operation. Lauren Wright's (2020) dissertation about supervising a generationally diverse workforce in higher education confirms the postulation of Fodor and Jaeckel (2018) that workplaces have had to adapt to increases in generational diversity in their daily operations and in the development of the organizational culture that they will advertise to potential new hires. Throughout this chapter, I review the supporting scholarship as it provides a foundation for my chosen intervention, offers thematic background on the activities related to literature, discusses how circles affect a variety of areas within the live-in professional

landscape, provides relevant limitations, and conclude with the theoretical framework that provides the foundation for the study to follow.

Nicole Millar Allbee (2016) surveyed alumni who graduated within the previous five years from student affairs master's degree programs across the nation to examine attrition-related issues. The study surveyed 697 alumni; 588 (84.36%) were still in student affairs, and 109 (15.64%) had departed. Participants were surveyed regarding their levels of occupational commitment to student affairs and their satisfaction and burnout in their first postgraduate professional role to understand how these factors influenced their retention within the profession.

2.1 Circle Intervention Impact and Attrition

As evidenced in the attrition literature devoted to educators, why live-in professionals leave their positions is an essential topic of conversation. Student Affairs research specific to attrition, although not abundant, exists. This is due in part to the high attrition rate in the field, as people are leaving the profession at an alarming rate, and it is concerning (Carter, 2019; Dungy, 2018; Gansemer & Englin, 2015; Gentry, Katz & McFeeters, 2009; Mullen, Malone, Denney & Dietz, 2018; Porterfield & Whitt, 2016; Reynolds, 2013). The attrition rate within the first five years in the student affairs field is as high as 61% (Boehman, 2007; Gansemer-Topf, Zhang, Beatty & Paja, 2014; Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, & Lowery, 2016). Several variables were analyzed to analyze the isolated effects of each study variable and the cumulative effect.

Contrary to my initial hypotheses, the perception of style in supervisors and divisional leaders was insignificant. As hypothesized, the predictive value of work was low. Control at work was a significant predictor, as well as increases in the perceived level of control, leading to

increases in the odds of new professionals intending to leave Student Affairs. One of the potential outcomes of an effective Restorative Justice circle is allowing circle participants to have more control over their voices and actions, which works well with the findings of this study.

Apart from the senior leadership in Student Affairs, the attrition rates may be high because of compensation, specifically pay, as it is known for being low. Administrators often work for intrinsic values, as their job role brings fulfillment to their lives and has also been referred to as a "calling" (Boehman, 2007; Carter, 2019; Lorden, 1998). The long hours, job description ambiguity, high-stress levels, diminishing resources, low visibility of role performance, a lack of promotion options within the exact geographic location, and a lack of respect from colleagues and other departments contribute to job dissatisfaction. There are many entry-level student affairs positions, fewer mid-level opportunities, and dramatically limited senior-level opportunities (Hirt & Creamer, 1998; Johnsrud, Heck & Rosser, 2000; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Waple, 2006; Winston, Creamer & Miller, 2001).

In the United States, we live to work, not work to live. It has become a broad cultural shift. Most full-time employees work eight to five or nine to five for forty to fifty years. It is not surprising that a person's outlook changes over time from identifying with one's organization and feeling more alive in the workplace than at home and relying on coworkers as one's primary source of friends (Ellis, 2021).

Recognizing that the day-to-day work Student Affairs professionals perform is essential to the psyche, health, well-being, and satisfaction a student has with their institution of higher education, the attrition rate, which currently hovers between 50-60% within the first five years, is disconcertingly high (Lorden, 1998; Marshall, Gardner, Hughes & Lowery, 2016; Tull, 2006).

The Student Affairs literature on attrition gives theoretical attention to professionals' early exit from the field. Reasons include a lack of understanding of the reality of the Student Affairs field, or perhaps the employee never intended to stay in the field long term. The research shows that attrition is primarily because of the misalignment between the employee and the job responsibilities. Job altruistic behaviors, relationships with peers, student affairs as devalued work, and compassion fatigue, among others, are expansively explored within this study.

2.1.1 Humanitarian and Helping Fields

Helping behaviors exist within the workplace. These behaviors are typically voluntary and help improve the efficiency of an organization and are typically not included in job expectations and descriptions. In 2005, Van Emmerick and colleagues researched the correlation between burnout dimensions, altruism, and engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors. The researchers hypothesized a positive association between organizational social responsibility and altruism (Van Emmerick et al., 2005). Helping behaviors in the workplace are referred to as "organizational citizenship behaviors" and are defined as "the individual contributions in the workplace that go beyond role requirements and contractually rewarded job achievements" (Van Emmerik, Jawahar, & Stone, 2005, p. 94). Examples of such behaviors are meeting workplace expectations, adhering to policies irrespective of personal annoyance, fulfilling extra-job activities, and helping colleagues. Engaging in such behaviors depicts altruism. However, the overextension of help can be detrimental, leading to employee burnout (Van Emmerik et al., 2005).

Staff attrition often manifests where there is frequent contact with people. We need service personnel to meet the needs of internal and external customers (i.e., students). It is also an expectation to be proactive when working with employees and engage in altruistic behaviors to

assist others, which promotes good business. This is especially true for service personnel in restaurants, hotels, and front desk staff on college campuses. These individuals usually get the lion's share of the complaints before customers move them to management or administrators.

2.1.2 Circles and Feeling Devalued at Work

Since the beginning of the profession, there has always been a lack of understanding of the live-in position at the college/university. Parents, family, and friends struggle to understand precisely what the live-in professional does (ACPA, 2015). Some have characterized the position as a glorified Resident Assistant (RA) or other student staff member. Others have called them undergrads who live with students or overvalued babysitters. These master-level professionals, most times, are highly skilled at working and understanding student development theory and can work with students in different and creative ways. Knowing that the colleagues you work with daily lack the understanding of what live-in professionals do has perpetuated high-stress levels and job dissatisfaction.

Nearly a third of live-in professionals who planned to leave or considered leaving the field pointed to vision statements or strategic plans as evidence that student affairs lacked value (Carter, 2019). This devaluation led them to describe feelings of being "burned out" or "exhausted" from the effort they spent advocating for the importance of their work and their chosen field (Maslach, 1997).

2.1.3 Compassion Fatigue Phenomena

Compassion fatigue is characterized by depressed mood, feelings of fatigue, disillusionment, and worthlessness, related to providing care to people who have experienced trauma, including secondary trauma or severe stress (Figley and Stamm, 2009). Compassion fatigue affects those who work with traumatized persons, including physicians, emergency room nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, ambulance crews, emergency rescue teams, firefighters, genetic counselors, pastoral care workers, hotline workers, and educators (Dutton, Figley, Kleber and Rubinstein, 2009). While student affairs leaders have seen compassion fatigue in its current form, it is being named as adding to the high-stress levels, preventing professionals from being their best in student affairs, specifically residence life, as reasons for young professionals to leave the field (Stoner and Yokie, 2015).

Humans are complex, and the emotions they exhibit within the workplace are multilayered - particularly for those in a caring profession where "giving" is in the subtext of a job description. Therefore, it is vital to understand how attrition can manifest from those individuals feeling overwhelmed & burned out (Bride, Figley, and Radey, 2007).

On top of live-in staff struggling with compassion fatigue, human giver syndrome is another phenomenon that makes itself known in the helping fields. Human Giver Syndrome (HGS) is a concept coined by sisters Emily and Amelia Nagoski, in which individuals, typically women, are conditioned to put others before themselves and their needs. In their book *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* (2019), the sisters share the common concept that stress, and stressors are two different things. Their research suggests that handling one does not automatically eradicate the other. Still, the secret to beating burnout is first attacking stress by "completing the stress cycle" before facing the stressors. The authors suggest practical ways to increase wellness and lower

stress, including social connection, rest, and self-care. The authors do an excellent job of reminding already overwhelmed readers that time can be found even in the busiest schedules to take care of the caregiver by rearranging schedules and accepting help (Smith, 2019).

2.1.4 Emotional Burden of Working with High-Need Students

Based on the empathy interviews conducted with live-in professionals, an emotional burden theme emerged. Students bring an array of mental health challenges to college. Because over 80% of first-year students at four-year institutions live on campus (ACPA, 2015), Student Affairs professionals are the first to interact with them. It is not uncommon for live-in professionals to deal with multiple crises each week during their on-call period. At Small Libatscol, on-call is divided between all live-in professionals every week. Each live-in professional is on for seven days. However, because of the extreme nature of on-call, the staff split the week into weekdays, on-call, and weekends. They have a dedicated mobile phone that must be turned on their person for seven consecutive days. When the phone rings, they respond, regardless of the time of the day or night.

One trait of a live-in staff member is to struggle with balancing their personal and private lives. Live-in staff are traditionally close in age to their students and staff and often blur the line between professional work and taking time for themselves. There is no exception at Small Libatscol; the lack of balance took more of a toll on live-in professional staff. Participants described the lack of work and life balance as an emotional burden.

2.2 Lack of Human Resources

This study aims to understand what individual factors or organizational characteristics at Small Libatscol are represented in support structures for live-in professional staff, ultimately recommending refinements to existing initiatives or creating new programs. The literature review exposed a deficit in current studies on the idea that compassion fatigue plays more in the attrition of live-in professional staff working in the residence halls. This gap is essential, as it is essential to address this study. It is essential to recognize that compassion fatigue can create a more significant barrier to the work of live-in staff, especially the next generations of young professionals, or Generation Z, who move into live-in roles (Carter, 2019).

One of the intrinsically satisfying aspects of the profession is the knowledge that Student Affairs professionals make a difference in another person's life, and, to a lesser extent, the satisfaction derived from being needed by other people. There is only so much one can give before depleting their resources. This empty bucket contributes to leaving the Student Affairs field (Philipson, 2002). The following section will introduce the prominent theme of attrition and why Student Affairs professionals leave the field.

2.2.1 Attrition

The satisfaction and retention of new professionals in student affairs remain critical in a profession plagued by high attrition rates (Society for Human Resource Management, 2006; Tull, 2006; Ward, 1995). Quality supervision and positive socialization have not only been identified as a need by new professionals but have also been shown to reduce attrition, decrease job dissatisfaction, and reduce burnout (Cilente, Henning, Skinner Jackson, Kennedy, & Sloane, 2006;

Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006). Understanding supervisors' views of their relationships with new professionals is helpful to student affairs organizations seeking to retain new professionals.

Attrition rates in the field range from 50 to 60% within the first five years, as most recently reported by Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, and Lowery (2016). Therefore, it becomes vital to know more about who is leaving and why? It is essential to understand who leaves and what factors influence that decision. Research reflects those young professionals, women, and introverts are most vulnerable to the exhaustive pace (Craig & Sprang, 2010).

They estimated the student affairs workforce to be 15%–20% of new professionals (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008) who have between zero and five years of full-time professional experience (Clinte et al., 2006). New professionals leave the field for several reasons, including role ambiguity, role conflict, role orientation, role stress, job burnout, work overload, lack of respect from campus partners, extreme conflict management, compassion fatigue and perceived opportunities for goal attainment, professional development, career advancement and supervision issues (Berwick, 1992; Conley, 2001; Carter, 2019).

Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) suggested that limited knowledge of institutional culture and lack of "fit" may detract from professional experience and increase attrition. Hancock (1988) speculated that some leave the field after graduate school because they never intended to pursue a long-term career in student affairs. Lorden (1998) found that getting a Student Affairs master's degree allowed individuals to gain a broad-based transferrable skill set for other professions. Others argue that, given the changing concept of long-term employment, and Americans changing jobs an average of seven times throughout their careers (Jo, 2008), the rate of departure may be "endemic" within the field. Still, it should be accepted as inevitable (Frank, 2013). Others,

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however, argue that the departure of professionals represents a loss of talent and training and is detrimental to organizational growth and effectiveness (Evans, 1988; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Tull, 2006).

Satisfaction and retention of new professionals in student affairs remain critical in a profession plagued by high attrition rates (Society for Human Resource Management, 2006; Tull, 2006; Ward, 1995). Quality supervision and positive socialization have been identified as a need by new professionals but have also been shown to reduce attrition, decrease job dissatisfaction, and reduce burnout (Cilente, Henning, Skinner Jackson, Kennedy, & Sloane, 2006; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006). Understanding supervisors' views of their relationships with new professionals is helpful to student affairs organizations seeking to keep new professionals. Carter (2019) found that compassion fatigue plays a more significant role in student affairs and live-in professional staff attrition than five years ago. Higher education is seeing higher mental health cases from students than ever before (Carter, 2019). Instead of taking medical leaves, students are "sticking it out" (Small Libatscol Academic Advising Student Tracking Assessment, 2020).

2.2.2 Significance of Attrition

High levels of attrition can cost the organization significant time and money and often impact institutional and departmental productivity because of challenges, such as the time training new professionals who fill the holes in personnel because attrition takes, or the additional tasks that other employees must take on after losing a co-worker (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010). Besides losing qualified newcomers, losing experienced student affairs personnel affects the

department, its mission to provide high-quality help to students, and the divisional, campus, and professional morale (Boehman, 2007; Lorden, 1998).

Over the last five years, the professional journey for young professionals has been challenging for many. Still, it has been incredibly daunting for live-in professionals, who, by choosing to take an on-campus position as a live-in professional staff member, are burdened with the goings-on of the campus and the on-campus population.

In the local context, I have explained the role of live-in professional staff in my place of practice at Small Libatscol. It is worth reiterating that the live-in role is unique. The position is front facing to students, but many variables are consistently at play for live-in staff. They must juggle the constant pressures of always being "on." Live-in staff is expected to build better working and interpersonal relationships among the eight departments within the Student Affairs division because of the position's front-facing nature. Because of the multifaceted role, everyone's responsibility is to assist new live-in professionals with their growth and socialization within the division. Too often, this responsibility falls on those in the live-in role and the direct supervisor.

2.2.3 Restorative Circle and Love

As stated, more students present with mental health concerns than ever before (JCSD, 2016). College students' mental health disorders increased alarmingly even before the pandemic. Recent estimates show that 31% of students experienced general anxiety disorder (GAD), and 41% experienced significant depressive disorder (MDD) during the pandemic (HMN, 2020). College students are a vulnerable group regarding their risk for mental health disorders, many of which present themselves during traditional college-age years, in late adolescence and early adulthood

(Liu et al., 2020). This includes, in part, those young professional staff addressing the student of concern.

The current model (illustrated in Figure 3) shows the cycle that the live-in professional staff experiences. Being on call, the person responsible for handling student concerns, documenting those concerns, following up with the student, and documenting the follow-up. In the model below, the live-in staff is not introduced to an intervention that helps them build relationships with others inside or outside the department. It is common not to ask for help when feeling overwhelmed.

3.0 Improvement Project

This chapter describes the circle intervention conducted with the study participants in Residence Life and Student Affairs. The proposed improvement project is based on improvement science; a disciplined inquiry process carried out jointly by those closest to the problem (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow & Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). Improvement science melds pragmatism and science and builds knowledge that can sustain and spread. In this study, I employed Restorative Justice circles as the intervention and studied the outcomes of those circles.

3.1 Intervention Circles

In my local context, it is hard to give the time when there is little to no separation of space to have "personal" time as with live-in professional staff. Students and staff are constantly asking for the support of live-in staff, whether to help with a personal problem, dealing with homesickness, looking over a resume, seeking advice on a broken relationship or, in some extreme cases - suicidal ideation. Being a live-in professional is no simple occupation. Live-in professionals are constantly being tapped to do welfare checks on students since they are physically close in proximity. Chances are they know the student better than their colleagues or campus partners, asking them to do the welfare check.

The proposed intervention for this study focused on ongoing Restorative Justice circle activities for the Residence Life team to enhance the professional live-in professional experience. There are many goals to developing a professional staff. One of the fundamental goals of any circle

activity is to get participants to listen to each other, understand each other better, and have a better working relationship. In the case of the residence life staff, the circle activities were designed to bring the group closer together (Pranis, Stuart, & Wedge, 2003), and, in doing so, they could appreciate each other's work and values.

The following paragraphs discuss the basic idea of the social justice circle activity, the theory of improvement, and the goals of the social justice circle activities.

3.2 Theory of Improvement

After researching and developing the theory of improvement that guides this intervention, I concluded that entry-level professionals benefit significantly from the concept of social-emotional learning (SEL), which refers to a constellation of skills and mindsets that allow learners to navigate interpersonal relationships, self-regulate their emotions, persist in the face of adversity, and understand their learning. This study aimed to create and bring the participants together during overlapping and interconnected health, wellness, and social justice crises. Creating opportunities to process various feelings and emotions and make meaningful connections is essential. After the circle activities, the newly formed team felt a sense of belonging as part of the Residence Life team and Small Libatscol, which, if my hypothesis holds, has led to fewer live-in staff wanting to vacate their position. One of the fundamental principles of Restorative Justice circles states that when humans foster connections in ways that allow all community members to thrive and feel valued (Rethink Together, 2022).

After designing this intervention intended to reduce stress, show appreciation, and provide individual staff with a sense of worth, I have gained insight on how to create a staff team that trust

one another and who will engage in ways that provide the best outcomes for the individual, team, and division. In my research and experiences as a practitioner, I have concluded that (1) live-in staff do some of the most challenging work on college campuses and are underappreciated for that work, and (2) live-in staff want to feel connected to the team in which they are apart. I have outlined in previous chapters attrition in entry-level professional staff within higher education is not going away. Student Affairs professionals must strategize new, creative ways to bring new entry-level professional staff along; no longer can we rely only on recruiting loyal and altruistic personalities to work in student affairs and residence life. Entry-level professionals want to know how the position will benefit them and how much money they will make in the position. Within the improvement science framework, identified drivers affect an organization's ability to accomplish its goals. These drivers often create the challenges that an intervention applied via a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle seeks to correct.

We know that supervisors and mentors play the most critical role in employees' satisfaction with their organization (Clifton & Harter, 2019; Tull, 2009; Wright, 2021;). Managers with the most vital positive feedback from their staff have less turnover. Retention has been found to correlate more strongly with the manager than with the staff members' seniority, performance, tenure, or promotions (Pollak, 2019). However, despite a strong presence, employees need to feel connected, that their work matters and feel belonging. Figure 2 illustrates my summarized theory of improvement.
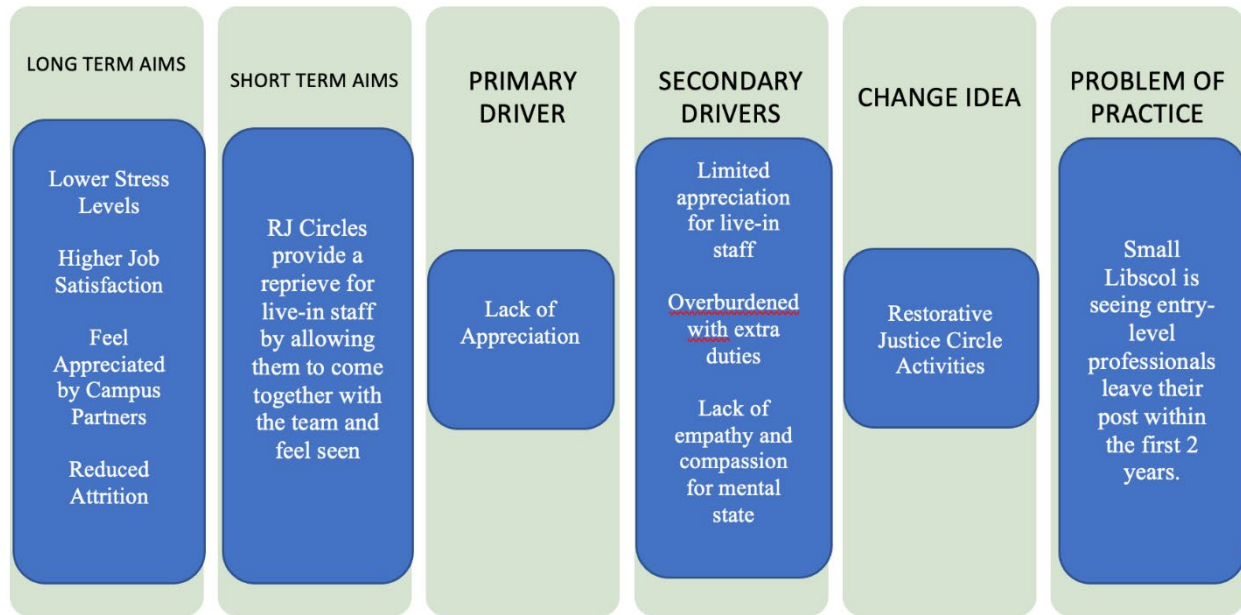
Figure 2 Theory of Improvement

As shown in Figure 2, the long-term aims are lower stress, higher job satisfaction, a sense of appreciation by campus partners, and reduced attrition of live-in entry-level professional staff. The change idea, Restorative Justice Circles, mitigated the drivers' effect and produced a sense of trust, openness, and appreciation for the live-in professional staff.

3.2.1 Social Justice Circles

Born from indigenous (pre-colonized) societies worldwide, Restorative Justice Circles tap into our communal nature and our desire to have positive relationships with one another. In circles, everyone is valued for their knowledge and unique gifts (Rethink Together, 2022). In this way, communities remain whole and reciprocal. Circles build accountability between individuals and the larger community.

In higher education, restorative circles can be used in several ways, from building and strengthening relationships and departments, healing harms and increasing accountability, to fostering connectivity in ways that allow all campus members to thrive and feel valued, to reintegrating students who have felt shunned or removed (for example, students returning from suspension) and addressing concerns or clarifying meaning (i.e., lesson plans and activities, policies and procedures, processes, systems, and structures); approaching challenging conversations, celebrating achievements and milestones, planning, organizing, and redistributing power, and dismantling systems of power and hierarchy (The Circle Way, 2016).

3.2.2 Goals of a Restorative Circle

While Restorative Justice circles can occur without a specified topic, the primary goal of the circle intervention for the Department of Residence Life was to come together as a team and show the live-in professional staff that they are valued. To name a few, Circle Forward outlines several goals of restorative circles; here are a few topics:

- •Resolving conflict among staff within a team or department

- •Staff team building

- •Exploring gender identity and norms, and toxic masculinity

- •Resolving conflicts with a peer or colleague

- •Reflecting on an incident in which it affected multiple parties

- •Discussing the effects of colorism within your division

Circles are not always smooth, but they are always meaningful. A neutral third party can help guide lulls in the conversation. It is not uncommon to have some participants with little to

share; they still benefit from being part of the circle and campus community (Circle Forward, 2020).

3.2.3 Restorative Justice Circle Design

The circle activities occurred on average once every three weeks for the entire academic year, which resulted in fourteen circle activities (see Figure 8 circle schedule), starting with the first day of professional staff training. Beginning with the first training session was an excellent way to help navigate past thoughts and feelings and set each participant at ease for the rest of the training sessions (The Circle Way, 2018).

Since we could meet in person, amid COVID-19 restrictions, the team could come together in the professional staff conference room within the Student Affairs suite. Each circle activity was scheduled for two hours during the recurring Residence Life team meetings slot. The first few circles took place around a conference table and allowed adequate space for each participant to spread out and get comfortable with the process. After a few circles, the staff gathered in chairs without barriers. The circle keeper guided each round in a standard circle, as there were no leaders. The circle keeper chose a "talking piece," which is typically significant to the circle keeper. Each person within the circle shares their name, and if they are comfortable, their pronouns, in the value round, benefit all. There are standard guidelines for each circle. The circle keeper asks that each participant speak and listen authentically. They ask everyone to be mindful of their speaking time so that everyone who wishes to speak does so. If something someone says resonates with you, make a note of it, and contact the person later to connect and build community. They ask that each participant honors privacy and confidentiality, understanding that what we share in a circle is respected as confidential. Share the lessons, not the stories. There are no recording devices, and

the expectation is that the group conversations will not be shared outside of this space, as people may share intensely personal and private experiences. Finally, each participant is asked to focus on the present by turning off mobile devices, including phones and computers, to minimize distractions.

As part of restorative practices to deal with the past traumas and cultural identities that the team intentionally or involuntarily took on, Edgar Schein (2016) posits that climate culture is the feeling conveyed in a group by the physical layout and how members of the organization interact with each other, with customers, or with other outsiders.

As the intervention was underway, the researcher asked the study participants to sit down and provide updates in empathy and regular interviews about their experiences and the changes made. Empathy interviews were used because this method allows those on the receiving end of empathy to feel heard (Lucas, 2018), and to feel heard is to feel valued. It was apparent early on that the staff had not felt heard, so this was an opportunity to course correct. Empathy interviews allow users to speak about what is important to them. They focus on the emotional and subconscious aspects of the user because it is an interview about active listening and active hearing. Empathy interviews also allow those who may not always speak up to either find their voice or use it. The goal was to use empathy interviews to create rapport and dig deeper beyond the surface-level questions. The researcher could observe body language and reactions.

These interviews took place within a few days of the circle activity. The researcher conducted the interviews with the team to determine how the activity went and if any potential changes needed to be made as part of the iterative process for improvement science.
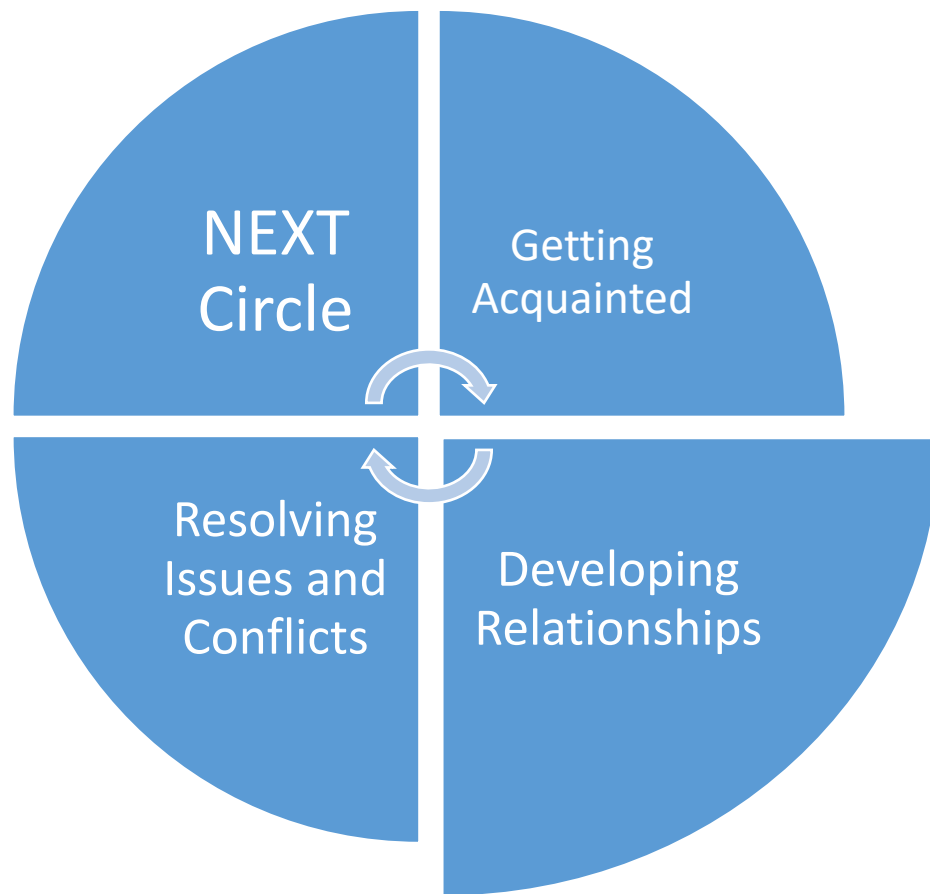
Figure 3 Circle Goal Model

3.2.4 Circle Process

The circle process has four parts: getting acquainted, developing relationships, resolving issues and conflicts, and preparing for the next circle. Although all pieces are essential to successful circle activity, Residence Life's focus was the developing relationships piece. In a standard circle, the circle keeper welcomes each member and thanks them for their participation. The circle keeper states up front that the activity is voluntary. No one is forced to take part in a circle activity. The circle keeper reads a passage, either a short story or a poem, to open the session.

The circle keeper then acknowledges that we are standing on stolen land from Indigenous Peoples as sources of learning and wisdom that have shaped the work of restorative practices. They further explain that we borrow and adapt these practices with respect, recognizing and understanding that they are not our own. The next step is to state the circle's purpose (see Figure 2–circle elements).

The entire circle activity can range from one hour to four hours; the Residence Life circle activities were scheduled for two hours. The circle guide and circle keeper each suggested a two-hour time. Questions were chosen based on how familiar the participants were with one another, from one circle to the next. Questions became more in-depth as the intervention continued, and the team became better acquainted.

At the close of a circle meeting, it was essential to allow a few minutes to comment on what they learned or what stays in their heart and mind as they leave. We closed the circle by doing a final round of checking out, which provided a formal end to the meeting. The check-out process allows the group to reflect on what transpired and pick up any objects placed in the center before exiting the circle.
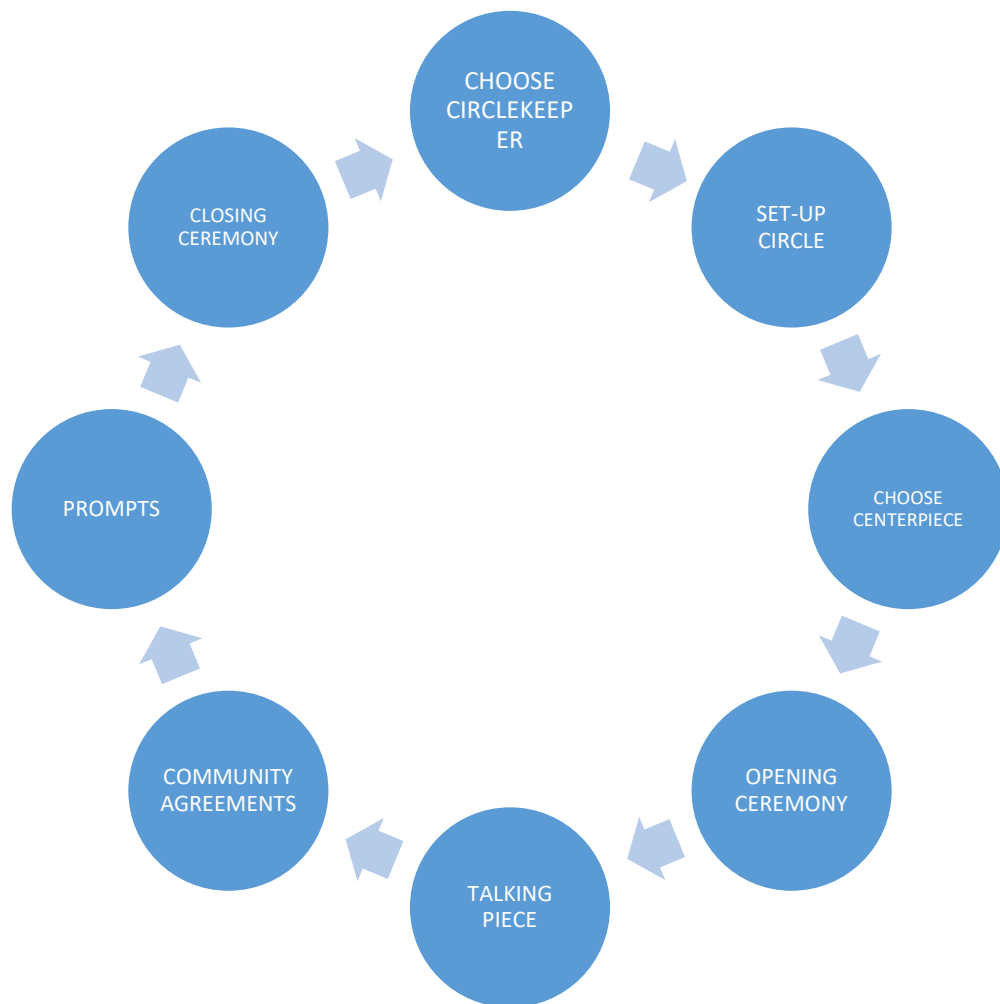
Figure 4 Circle Elements

•Choose Circle keeper

•Set up circle and choose a centerpiece

•Opening ceremony

•Talking piece

•Community agreements

•Prompts

•Closing ceremony

3.3 Small Libatscol Residence Life Restorative Justice Circle Process

Below are the preliminary questions I asked the participants during the pre-intervention interviews. The questions were constructed as a get-to-know-you for the research and the participants. These questions set the stage for the researcher and participant to sit in space together and "just" chat. Humans, especially those in student affairs, like to talk about their experiences. Talking about oneself activates the same brain areas that light up when eating good food, taking drugs, and even having sex.

Simply put, self-disclosure is gratifying. It gives people a neurological buzz (Boardman, 2017). Parts of the participant's responses were used in the final analysis of this study.

The purpose of circles was to provide a safe space to gather and come together as a group, where each person's voice is equally valued; the circle structure allowed us to see and be present with everyone. The importance of the talking piece is so everyone can speak and be heard when it's their turn to hold the talking piece.

Based on the circle's designed schedule, I carved out about 30 minutes before each circle to meet with the circle keeper to agree on what we wanted to accomplish with that week's circle activity. Although the Residence Life group facilitated most circles, with Milo as the circle keeper, the supervisor/researcher occasionally brought in an expert, neutral third party to help facilitate the circle. High stakes for the Residence Life group could mean further harm to someone inside the group or a loss of trust. Having an outside human facilitate the circle in those cases was appropriate. On two occasions, the researcher sat with the researcher before the circle and discussed the goals of the "high stakes" circle.

After meeting with the circle keeper, the researcher sent a message to the group letting them know we had an upcoming circle and shared the specific date and time. The group was also

asked to prepare for one to three hours for the activity. I ask Milo, a staff member in Residence Life, to reserve a space for the circle. The only criteria are a space big enough for ten chairs to be placed in a circle and quiet. We chose not to do a classroom because of the potential noise from adjacent rooms.

Since we know each other, the beginning of the circle gathering was informal and friendly. Sometimes the group had not seen one another for at least a week. Making small talk is fun and accessible in the space. Once we all took our chairs, the circle keeper asked the group to please turn off all devices or at least silence them. One goal of Restorative Justice circles is to be in touch with yourself and the group, and devices can distract from this goal (The Circle Life, 2016). I considered that at least one of our live-in professional staff is typically on call and must have the phone left on audible so they can hear it. To mitigate this, I asked a colleague to hold the phone during this time to avoid this distraction. The circle keeper possessed notebook paper with the group's rounds of questions. As the department leader and researcher, I did not know the actual questions until I heard them along with the others in the group, which was by design. I wanted to feel as much a part of the process as the rest of the group (see Figure 3) for an example of the Residence Life circle).

The circle keeper started by setting the stage for what we were doing that day with the circle activity. They began by naming the circle and stated that the opening readings, rounds, and closing all relate to the circle theme. They then moved on to the mindfulness moment. This was reading or action, like a few minutes of meditation or a moment of silence, or a two-minute breathing exercise. The circle facilitator chose which direction to go.

The circle keeper then moved on to the opening, where they welcomed each member to the circle and thanked them for their participation.

The circle facilitator then shared the guidelines for the circle. Values are among my favorite parts, different from the usual circle activities. Before we moved into the rounds of questions, our circle facilitator asked, "what would prevent you from participating fully today?" This question led to the group members stating that they need to bring as much authentic self to the conversation as they see fit. Some responses, among others, center on giving grace, understanding, being authentic, and seeing and hearing what they have to say.

The circle facilitator shared one more reading related to the theme, typically leading to the first round of questions. The rounds, which take most of the time, start with one question at a time. Once the talking piece was passed to them, each participant had the opportunity to respond. They can choose to speak to the question or pass on the question. As the conversation gets deeper and participants are fully invested, the circle facilitator pays close attention to the questions. Sometimes the circle keeper expands on a question because participants may have more emotions and need more time. Sometimes the line of questions does not produce the desired outcome of getting the staff to connect as a team, and the circle facilitator must pivot. Milo says it is essential to recognize this within the group one is leading.

3.3.1   Circle Guidelines as Presented by Circle Keeper

- We will share our names as a benefit for all here
- Listen and speak with authenticity
- Be mindful of time so that everyone who wishes to speak does so. If something someone says resonates with you, make a note of it, and contact the person later to connect and build community.

- Honor privacy and confidentiality, understanding that what we share in a circle is respected as confidential. We will have no recordings, and we expect conversations will not be shared outside of this space, as people may share intensely personal and private experiences. Keep the stories; share the lessons.

- Focus on the present moment by turning off phones and minimizing other distractions

3.3.2 Describe the Circle Process

- Welcome: Thank members for participating in this voluntary process.

- Acknowledgment: We acknowledge we are standing on stolen land from the Sauk and Meskwaki tribes. We acknowledge Indigenous Peoples as sources of learning and wisdom that have shaped the work of restorative practices. We borrow and adapt these practices with respect, recognizing and understanding that they are not our own.

- Purpose: Circles are safe for us to come together as a group, where each person's voice is equally valued, and the circle structure allows us to see and be present with everyone.

- Talking Piece: Explain that we use a talking piece, so everyone can speak and be heard when it's their turn holding the talking piece.

3.3.3 Intervention Introduction Questions

The researcher asked the following questions at the initial meeting. Again, the questions were constructed as a get-to-know-you for the research and the participants. Parts of the participant's responses may be used in the final analysis of this study.

- Why did you go into the field of Student Affairs (be specific with your response)?
- What about the institution or department that influenced your decision to join?
- What did you like/love about the institution/department during your recruitment?
- What specific things motivate you to show up for work each day?
- What factors prevent you from showing up to work each day/what makes it challenging to be excited about work?

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- Given that this is an entry-level position, how long had you planned to stay once you decided to join?
- What Residence Life parts of your work need to be addressed that have not been addressed as a Live-in Professional Staff?
- What would cause you to consider leaving the department? The institution? The field altogether?

At Small Libatscol, the Residence Life team and other departments have had success with the circle activities. The staff was invested and open to learning about each other and sharing their thoughts, ideas, and frustrations with the group. At the end of the circle activity, the circle facilitator closes the circle with a reading. This reading is typically a poem. The Residence Life team is partial to poems, so most of the circle concluding reading is poems.

Table 1 Team Circle Intervention Schedule

Restorative Justice Circles and Themes

Dates	Activity	Theme
July 8, 2021	Team Circle Activity	Introduction to Circles
July 29, 2021	Team Circle Activity (Frank)	Training Check-In
August 16, 2021	No Circle	Training Prep
August 30, 2021	Team Circle Activity	Managing the Student Affairs Workload
September 16, 2021	Team Circle Activity (Frank)	What's Eating Our Team?
October 18, 2021	Best Practice – Circle Facilitation	How to Manage a Circle

November 1, 2021	Team Circle Activity	Managing Workload while Transitioning
November 22, 2021	Team Circle Activity	Holiday Edition
December 13, 2021	Team Circle Activity	Preparing for Spring 2022
January 10, 2022	Team Circle Activity	Burnout is Afoot
February 7, 2022	Team Circle Activity	Leaning Into the Discomfort
February 28, 2022	Team Circle Activity	Recruitment & Selection Season
March 28, 2022	Team Circle Activity (Frank)	Evaluate the Circle Process
April 18, 2022	Team Circle Activity	Circle Feedback

As mentioned earlier and represented in Table I, I schedule the Restorative Justice circles every three weeks on average for the Residence Life team. For consistency, I asked two facilitators with pseudonyms, Frank and Milo, to be circle keepers during the intervention. Frank is a professional and does this work for a living. Frank had successfully facilitated circles with departments, divisions, and individuals at the time of this study. Frank was introduced to the team early in the pandemic in the summer of 2020. He and I connected, and I thought circles would be a great way to kick off our professional staff training that summer. We completed a two-day virtual circle, and it was highly successful. I asked Frank to take the reins and facilitate the higher stakes circles. Our second facilitator, Milo, is a current member of the Residence Life team. They do this work as an auxiliary assignment and love it. Milo has led about 70% of the circles for Residence Life. They know the staff and can suggest possible topics based on whisperings from the group.

Each circle had a theme based on team discussions, professional development opportunities, post-circle interviews, and logical next steps in "getting to know and understand the group." The intervention occurred over the academic year, broken into the Fall and Spring semesters. The themes for the first half of the semester prepared the team to open the residence halls successfully. Fellowship with peers, training check-in, training prep, and managing the student affairs workload are the first four Restorative Justice circles. Like students' success on campus, the first six weeks to two months are especially critical in building a team. Ideas are better received, and trust is achieved more successfully (Tinto, 2000; Kuh, 2005). The fifth circle, what's eating our team, derived from a discussion mid-fall semester when the staff felt overwhelmed, unsupported, and had lost another live-in staff member, placing an additional burden on those who stayed. At this moment, I realized I needed to be ready to pivot because of the ever-evolving nature of the staff's ideas combined with the circle activity.

The themes featured at the end of the fall semester were how to manage a circle, managing workload while transitioning, the Holiday edition, and preparing for Spring 2022. The team asked for opportunities to learn how to lead a circle, so our circle facilitator agreed to describe how they prepared for and facilitated the circle for the group.

During the spring semester or the second half of the academic year, the themes were burnout, learning in the discomfort, recruitment and selection season, evaluating the circle process, and summer in sight. The spring semester in our division is more robust than the fall. It brings many new opportunities, from welcoming a handful of new students to college, recruiting and selecting new students and professional staff, and creating the room draw process for our incoming fall students. Therefore, the themes complimented the vigorous landscape of the spring semester.

3.3.4 Take-Aways from Fall Circle Activities

Although each circle activity was unique, I learned there is always something more to learn about the group and yourself. As a participant, I got to sit back and watch the team's growth throughout the semester. For some, there was a stark contrast between the very first circle and, for example, circle number five. Those who were more reserved have come out of their shell and are pushing back on various parts of the job and workplace. Others could find their voices after several iterations. Each circle had the same eight or nine participants, the circle leader, our Program Coordinator (who doubles as the circle leader for 70% of the circles), four live-in professional staff, an associate director, an assistant director, and the researcher.

Within a few days of each circle activity, I followed up with the individuals of the circle for a Restorative Justice post-circle follow-up recorded interview. The interview questions are static. See the section (post-circle follow-up interview questions) for the list of questions. Even though the questions are the same, they are essential in allowing me to know whether we are achieving the goals of the intervention. One goal is to get a pulse on whether the circle activities meet the goal of bringing the team together and relieving stress. The other goal is to determine whether parts of the circle need to be tweaked or removed altogether. I will discuss more in the analysis chapter, but the group felt the *value* portion of the circle was no longer needed. They felt we knew one another enough and knew that circles are about active listening, respect for others' comments, and a safer space for all involved. Another piece that came out of the post-circle follow-ups was the need for staff to discuss burnout and specifically attrition of the team, as we had experienced losing another member during the fall semester. As part of the analysis in chapter four, I discussed and shared the findings of the post-circle interviews in-depth and how they

transformed the course of my initial hypothesis about the circle activities. See the next section for an example of the 1ˢᵗ circle of the second semester. Burnout is Afoot.

Title Residence Life Circle–Burnout is Afoot

Mindfulness Moment: Poem

Can you coax your mind from its wandering and keep to the original oneness?

Can you let your body become supple as a newborn child?

Can you cleanse your inner vision until you see nothing but the light?

Can you love people and lead them without imposing your will?

Can you deal with the most vital matters by letting events take their course?

Can you step back from your mind and thus understand all things?

Giving birth and nourishing,

having without possessing,

acting with no expectations,

leading and not trying to control:

this is the supreme virtue.

-Lao Tze

Opening:

"Have you ever sat silently, not with your attention fixed on anything, not making an effort to concentrate, but with the mind silent, really still? Then you hear everything, don't you? You hear the far-off noises and those that are nearer and those close by, the immediate sounds, which means you are listening to everything. Your mind is not confined to one narrow channel. If you can listen in this way, listen with ease, without strain, an extraordinary change will take place within you, a change that comes without your volition, without your asking; and in that change, there is great beauty and depth of insight."

-J. Krishnamurti

Rounds: One question at a time will be presented. Once the talking piece is passed, each participant can choose to respond. They can choose to speak to the question or pass on the question.

Guidelines:

You speak only when you have the talking piece.

Use "I" statements.

Practice active listening, meaning listen to understand, not to respond.

Pass without judgment

Are there other values that we need to keep in mind?

Poem Related to Content

Listening: "How do you listen? Do you listen with your projections, through your ambitions, desires, fears, anxieties, through hearing only what you want to hear, only what will be

satisfactory, what will gratify, what will comfort, what will for the moment ease your suffering? If you listen through the screen of your desires, then you listen to your own voice. Is there any other form of listening? Is it not important to find out how to listen not only to what is being said but to everything? Listening has importance only when one is not projecting one's own desires through which one listens. Can one put aside all these screens through which we listen, and really listen?"

-J. Krishnamurti

Burnout is Afoot

Why are you here? / What brought you here? / What were your expectations?

How are you doing now? What contributes to that? (Burnout - Overworked; Under-appreciated; Dumped on)

How would you characterize the communication within Residence Life? How can communication be improved?

What thoughts do you have about the Division of Labor within Student Affairs?

What resources do you need for this coming semester?

What are you grateful for in Residence Life?

What do you want to do after Small Libatscol? What skills do you need, and how can they be gained while you're here?

Closing: Poem

"Do not depend on the hope of results. You may have to face the fact that your work will achieve no significant results. As you get used to this idea, you concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself. You gradually struggle less and less for an

idea and more and more for specific people. In the end, it is the reality of a personal relationship that saves everything."

    - Thomas Merton

Figure 6 – Agenda from the first circle of 2022

3.3.5 Restorative Justice Post-Circle Follow-Up Interview Questions

- What was important to you about this week's restorative circle activity?
- *What were three takeaways for you?
- *In terms of job stress on a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest, what was your stress level going into the circle activity?
- *Have your relationships with peers/colleagues changed because of the circle activity? How?
- *What impact has the circle process had on your ability to feel good about those you work with?
- What impact has the circle process had on your ability to feel good about your work?
- What would you like to see come out of the circle activities?
- *How open and honest were you with the group?
- What question did you feel most connected to?

Posing follow-up questions after the activities reminded participants to stay engaged. Just as engaging with participants, it is equally important to properly close out a circle (Responsive Classroom, 2020). It is important to follow up with participants as they have given their time to be in space and, most times, be vulnerable to others. As mentioned previously, one goal of circles was to create a space where the staff felt comfortable sharing. To understand if the goals were met, pulling together the group individually for follow-up interviews was essential. An in-depth interview is a special kind of conversation. The qualities of the research relationship researchers

co-construct with their interviewees determine the sharing that occurs (Josselson & Ruthellen, 2013). Engaging in the interview after an emotional session can be therapeutic. It also offers an opportunity for the participants to recenter.

Responding to
student concerns

Documenting
those concerns

Following up with
the student

Documenting the
follow up

Fatigue sets in
while waiting for
the next crisis
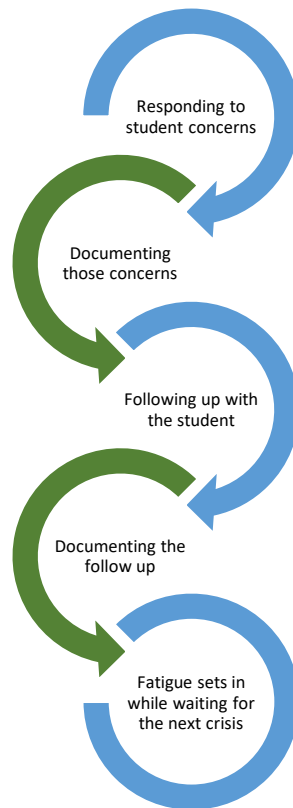
Figure 5 Compassion Fatigue-Inducing Cycle Without Intervention
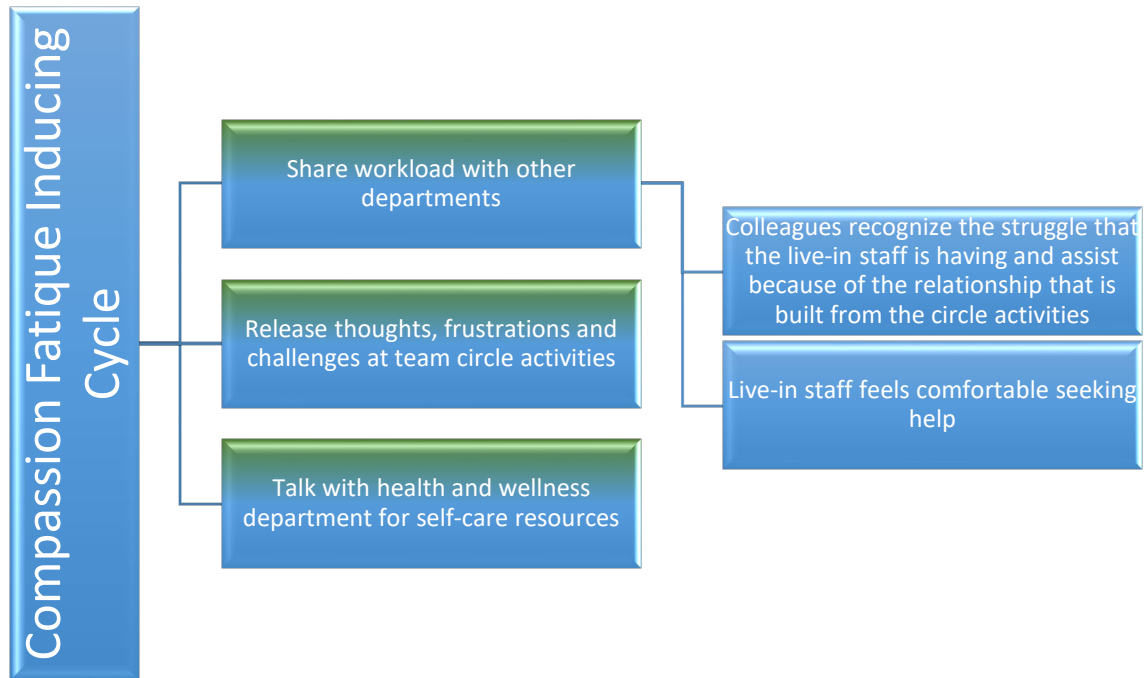
Figure 6 Circle Activities are Incorporated

3.3.6 Circles and Interrupting the Cycle

In Figure 5 (shown above), restorative circles have not been introduced. Live-in staff responds to the student incident, deal with the incident, document the incident, follows up with the student, and document the follow-up. This is an example of a single incident that is not the norm. The on-call live-in staff often responds to several incidents simultaneously, producing higher stress and anxiety levels. Because of the work, live-in staff are overburdened and stressed. They are constantly called on to do more with no relief, and most do not know they are dealing with these concerns. In the next section, I outline how incorporating Restorative Justice circles interrupts the stress levels and feelings of job loneliness, creating a situation where individuals feel part of their teams. Compassion, understanding, and grace are just a few of the byproducts of influential Restorative Justice circles.

When the compassion fatigue-inducing cycle begins (Figure 6), live-in staff feel comfortable engaging in one of three ways to break the cycle because of the circle interventions. They feel confident that they can share their thoughts, frustrations, and challenges with their teammates without judgment during the Restorative Justice circle activities. They have a level of agency to call on others to share the workload within and outside the department. Finally, they can also seek resources for their mental health through the campus health and wellness department since self-care is one tenet of the circle activity (Rethink Together, 2020).

3.4 Methods

In this section, I describe why I chose Restorative Justice circles and what I expected to occur by using them. Through the process of Restorative Justice circles, I collected data about their efficacy. With the three research questions in mind, I solicited information from live-in professionals asking whether the factors and influences affected their decision to stay at Libatscol or leave either their post as a live-in professional or the student affairs field of higher education altogether.

I used interviews as the primary method of research data collection. All participants were invited for an in-person interview. The initial interviews ranged from forty-five to sixty minutes through a semi-structured sequential design model and addressed the "setup questions." The second round of interviews addressed the circle activities, and the post-circle interviews collected feedback on the circle activities and what needed to be tweaked or changed or discarded.

I collected information to help determine the next steps for dealing with the attrition concerns at Small Libatscol. This data will be analyzed through qualitative techniques to explore how live-

in professional staff attrition factors. I hypothesized that several root causes and organizational characteristics would influence the attrition of live-in professional staff. In the following section, I explain the process I used to analyze the recorded interviews.

3.4.1 Significance of Intervention

Student Affairs at Small Libatscol measures its success with various metrics, considering different categories. The organization of this analysis is often around evaluations created by the Department of Human Resources, departmental and divisional expectations, and departmental success based on goals. The work by live-in staff often has the professional staff going above and beyond the call. They also have several "supervisors" acting in their on-call capacity, making it difficult to stand out and appreciate their work.

At my institution, Small Libatscol, I lead the residence life department. Throughout my short time at the college, I have faced challenges with my direct reports. I have seven direct reports, and it has been a major supervisory challenge. I have also had five live-in staff leave their posts at the college. Three of the five had been in their role for less than two years. This was the main reason for conducting this study. I want to understand my department's attrition and if it can help me focus on answering the question, "why are newly minted professionals leaving residence life?"

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

As the primary researcher, I set up the interview rooms in a neutral location to discuss the purpose of the study and elucidate my role as a doctoral student first and then as Director/Assistant

Dean for Residence Life. I used semi-structured interviews with the participants. A semi-structured format provides flexibility for the interview, allowing the researcher to adapt to the flow of the conversation and get emerging views on the topic from the respondents (Merriam, 1998). The interview of the professionals follows an interview protocol that comprises leading questions, probing questions, and follow-up questions (Merriam, 1998; Rabionet, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

3.5.1 Intervention Introduction Interviews

I used recorded interviews as the primary data source, as stated earlier. Interviews allow for a personal one-on-one perspective of both the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewee is essentially telling their story and telling stories and making meaning. Selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and making sense of them makes telling stories a meaning-making experience (Seidman, 2019).

I did the initial intervention interviews in a one-on-one setting which lasted forty-five minutes to one hour. Participants were encouraged to share candidly about the circle process, the impact, whether they feel connected as a department, and what needs to be tweaked or changed as we work through the semester and iterative process. During all the interview processes, I recorded the interview with a recording device and took written notes to create a data source for later analysis. I used formally tabulated Microsoft Excel Data Analytics. Data was exported from the initial intervention introduction question interviews, empathy questions, individual one on ones, and post-circle follow-up interviews.

I provided participants with a consent form to take part and reminded them that the sessions would be recorded, whether online or in person. The interviews were recorded using a portable

digital recorder for data collection purposes, and they were transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings. All interviews were conducted in the comfort of the participant's office or the Student Affairs' suite conference room. Interviews began with a statement that introduced the researcher to the participant, established some rapport for the interview, including a consent and confidentiality statement, and provided some context for the research (Rabionet, 2011). After the interview, I thanked the participants for their input and re-emphasized the confidentiality of their responses. Participants did not receive monetary compensation for their participation.

As the intervention progressed, the circle process was working; there was little to no nervousness among the participants, as they felt comfortable discussing the circle and perceived value. The questions at the beginning of the interview were designed to break the ice and have participants remain connected to the study. The remaining questions were directly related to a research question in the study. Questions were open-ended to extract information relevant to the overarching research questions.

3.5.2 Inductive Approach Method

An inductive approach was used to analyze the data for this inquiry. There are three purposes for using an inductive approach, (1) to condense raw textual data into a brief, summary format, (2) to establish clear links between the evaluation or research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data, and (3) develop a framework of the underlying structure of experiences or processes that are clear in the raw data (Creswell, 2002). A separate worksheet was used to code the open-ended response questions from each participant after the interviews concluded.

Although transcription of interviews can be arduous, researchers who transcribe their recordings come to know their interview material better (Seidman, 2019). I used a Windows-based software entitled Sonix to transcribe audio-transcript. I could connect my audio recorder directly to my computer, open the folder, and start the file transfers. A detailed and careful transcript that re-creates the verbal and nonverbal material of the interview can significantly benefit a researcher who may study the transcript months after the interview. Recordings offer other benefits as well. By preserving the words of the participants, researchers have their original data. If something is unclear in a transcript, the researchers can return to the source and check for accuracy (Irving, Seidman, 2019). Later, if they are accused of mishandling their interview material, they can return to their sources to demonstrate their accountability to the data. In addition, interviewers can use recordings to study their interviewing techniques and improve upon them.

3.5.3 Interview Demographics

Demographic characteristics collected from the interview participants included gender, ethnicity, age, how long they had worked in Student Affairs, and if they served in an on-call capacity or followed up with students in crises. The other demographic details are expanded on in the tables below.

Gender. As seen in Table 2a, of the 10, six participants identified as women, three identified

as men, and one identified as Genderqueer.

Table 2 Gender

Gender	N=10
Women	6
Men	3
Gender Queer	1

Ethnicity. As reflected in Table 2b, eight of the participants were white, two were black,

no one who interviewed identified as Hispanic, Asian, Native, or other.

Table 3 Ethnicity

Ethnicity	N=10
White	8
Black	2

Age. As displayed in Table 2c, the largest category of participants, four (40%) aged

30-34, two (20%) aged 34+. 1 (10%) participant reported being 20-24 and three (30%)

participants reported being 25-29.

Table 4 Ages of Participants

Age	N=10
20-24	1
25-29	3
30-34	4
34+	2

Table 5 Years in Field

Years in the Field	N=10
0-2	3
3-5	3
5-7	3
7+	1

On-Call. As seen in Table 2e, seven participants indicated they served in an on-call capacity or assisted with the student follow-up stemming from crises. Three participants indicated that they did not serve in this capacity.

Table 6 On-Call Capacity/Crisis Follow-Up

On-Call Rotation	N=10
On-Call	7
Not On-Call	3

Participants included in this study were 10 members of the division of Student Affairs at Small Libatscol. I conducted face-to-face interviews with all participants. The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed using computer software, Sonix, and analyzed by the researcher using a qualitative research methodology.

All 10 of the participants volunteered to take part in an in-person interview. Interviews ran concurrently with the data collection. Interviews were conducted as an introduction to the study and after each Restorative Justice circle. All interviews were conducted at the location chosen with the participant's input. It is common in Student Affairs to have significant variance in job titles, despite similar job functions across institutions. Therefore, the researcher has characterized the job function of participants as Entry-Level (Residence Life Coordinators, Directors), Mid-Level (Directors, Assistant/Associate Deans, Senior-Level).

3.6 Reflections on Participant Characteristics

Although aspects of participant demographics are elucidated throughout this chapter, it is necessary to examine the qualitative results of this research within the context of the participants' shared and unique characteristics. The characteristics of participants likely influenced the data gathered and the interviews examined in this study.

To begin, six of the ten participants worked in Residence Life at Small Libatscol. They all had previous experience in their graduate programs or as professional staff at other institutions before coming to Small Libatscol. Professionals who have worked in aspects of residence life understand its uniqueness. It has been said that it takes a particular person to do the work of a live-in professional, and this statement is accurate. The remaining three participants had varied professional experiences yet appeared equally eager to discuss their thoughts about Residence Life and what they perceived was going on. They considered themselves allies to housing and residence life and were some of the first to step in and help when things were tough.

3.6.1 Plan-Do-Study-Act

This study used a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle as the primary method of inquiry to implement change (Bryk et al., 2016). A PDSA cycle shows the specifications related to the aim of the study–including goals, steps, and timeline (Appendix B), as it pertains to the understanding overall improvement of intervention through the cycle. The change idea in the study included the implementation of Restorative Justice circles for the Residence Life team to help live-in staff build trust, improve relationships, and feel appreciated for the work they do in their role. Key questions

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and predictions on expected results were collected and analyzed using a qualitative lens during the fourteenth session, complete academic year PDSA cycle.

4.0 Results

This study aimed to examine the impact of Restorative Justice circles on entry-level live-in professional staff to reduce attrition guided by three research questions. This chapter discusses the findings from this study around each research question.

In each section, subsections reflected the research questions that guided the study, which will assist in the study's presentation's results and findings. Before I answer the research questions, I must share the participant's rationale for entering the field of student affairs. This is important to illuminate as I found evidence of why entry-level staff come into the field and depart so soon.

4.1 Intervention Inquiry Question I: Attitudes for Entering the Field

The data that addresses this question comes from the introductory interviews conducted before the intervention. The data from this research question yielded the following themes and sub-themes. The overall theme was a lack of congruencies in the live-in position. Three questions from the introductory interviews provided data to help answer research question one. The theme that was most prevalent for this question was student affairs being an altruistic field; entry-level professionals want to help students in their change to college life. Other things mentioned included residence life being one of the few places with multiple positions, the size of the college or university, being tapped by a mentor, and being closer to home.

4.1.1 Student Affairs as Altruistic Field

Those who choose to do this work are entry-level professionals who want to help students adjust to college life. Entry-level staff are typically close in age to the traditional student who lives in the residence halls, so they understand that college, especially in the first year, can be challenging. Because of this, entry-level professionals sign up to give their time and expertise from successfully navigating college and graduating to new and returning students. Staff identified as first-generation- low income (FiGLI) described this as the ultimate "pay it forward" opportunity. We know that those doing college for the first time may have little to no support and therefore want to be there to help these students, amongst others, succeed.

As explained by themes from introductory Question Two, the altruistic experience is not what participants got once they were in the role. The following data that addresses this question comes from the post-circle activity interviews.

The main themes for this question are all interrelated and included untenable work, lack of awareness of live-in staff, an unmanageable on-call system, challenges of student mental health concerns, and a lack of congruencies in the live-in position held a higher priority than the altruistic experiences that entry-level staff thought they would receive. I will share excerpts from the participants in each section to support these findings.

The following excerpt depicts the feelings of three participants who shared similar thoughts on the altruistic nature of wanting to do this work.

> I was so excited to get to the opportunity to work at a small college. The idea of connecting with and helping students is cool. But things haven't gone like I hoped they would. I eventually want to move up in Reslife, but I have to say, I'm feeling burned out already. And there's a tremendous bottleneck in mid-level or housing positions. Well

higher right to it, but um, specific to Reslife, for sure. And you know, when I was considering what we are dealing with right now. It's hard to imagine that I will want to continue in the department or in higher education in general, which is kind of sad.

When the participants state the phrase, "what we are dealing with right now," they are referencing the on-call duties work, lack of support from others in the division, and the strains of COVID-19 on campus.

4.1.2   Untenable Work

The live-in staff shared that their role had become untenable due to them having to do the most challenging and undesirable parts of their job. Some of the most undesirable duties included hospital runs with students, checking in on residents who are late for classes, other duties as assigned, lack of accountability in other departments, student toxicity, and tough on-call nights with little support went beyond the staff's thoughts about what it meant to support students—most state they were not prepared for the high-touch atmosphere that is Small Libatscol. Staff were expected to accompany ill students to the hospital, mainly in the middle of the night, having to sleep in the lobby without knowing what was happening to the student.

Several participants shared what they felt was an unfair standard placed on them in their role as live-in staff. One participant stated,

I felt like we were held to a standard of being perfect. We had to get everything right, all the time. If we missed anything, it would be magnified and we would often hear about it multiple times, first from campus partners and then our direct supervisor. I was on edge most of the time whenever I need to submit a report, wondering if I was going to get

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a negative reach out. This was hard, because I was already up late and half asleep, but worried about how someone would respond to the actions I took.

The quote above illuminates how participants felt held to a higher standard and that they had to perform as if they were superhuman, which aids in the live-in position, feeling untenable. Another participant stated,

Finding balance is hard! I usually don't take myself seriously, but I learned that students do. About once a week, I would hear from you (supervisor) about how a student reached out because I hadn't responded to their email. They were emailing at midnight the night before, and I hadn't even checked my email the following morning before I was being ratted on. That makes balance in this job impossible. Most of the time, the student issue was not even an emergency, which put me in a terrible mood and made me feel like what is the use in helping.

The above quotes illuminate at least two ways that the work of the live-in staff had become untenable. They felt they were always on and did not have time to have a break, which could have made the position feel less untenable.

4.1.3 Lack of Awareness of Live-in Staff

Another area where there appeared to be a mismatch between espoused values and actual values was the lack of awareness of live-in staff and their position at the college. Often, campus partners would have little to no idea what the live-in staff did. After meeting and engaging with the participants for several months, I saw many of the issues they mentioned. Participants

articulated that they thought everyone in the division was there to work together to assist students, but they discovered that the division was highly siloed. While everyone has a role to play in their departments, there could have been a better understanding of how to support departments or colleagues that were struggling. Every department had its way of assisting students and had no time to have a true partnership. It also appeared that the idea of the division coming together to help was espoused, but not actually. The following comment brings in a slightly different perspective regarding campus partners being unaware of their role.

> There is so much made of us being part of one division and that we help one another. I don't feel that. Whenever I would go to the office, if it were later in the day on a Friday, I would be asked to check on a student. I would want to push back and say that I'm not the staff member on call, but I knew better, so I didn't. It just showed me that my colleagues didn't bother taking the time to understand our system. I want to have a life too.

4.1.4 Unmanageable On-call System

On-call is divided between all live-in professionals every week. Each live-in professional works for seven consecutive days. However, because of the extreme nature of on-call, the live-in staff asked for support from the division to help allay some of the high-stress situations they endure. Participants talked about unmanageable systems because of high levels of stress and burnout from serving in an on-call capacity. As you will read below, this was one area where several live-in staff had a lot to say. They stated they need a new system with more administrative staff and student health care support.

One participant shared,

I think the emotional cost of the job, like the emotional impact of the nasty on-call stuff that, you know, accumulates, and it doesn't just dissipate on its own, at least for me. And so that was something I had difficulty with for a long time. And obviously, part of that is, you know, bringing trauma from on-call jobs in my undergrad and at my previous institution. That made it a challenging experience, too, like, carrying the phone around with me because you don't know what's going to be on that phone call. And the mental state of being that I think I, you know, handled that with is just really tiring.

Another participant had similar thoughts regarding the on-call parts of the position. They had this to say:

You know, for me it's the duty phone. Whether the phone rings, it's kind of the persistent anxiety about what is going to happen? What's it going to be today? Like, I'm going to go to bed now at 3:00 a.m. But what? What if I get woken up at 20 minutes? Like, Um? And then you know, if the phone rings, and it's a student contemplating harming themselves, I'm stuck. Interfacing with actively suicidal students or students who have been through their own traumatic experiences and trying to help them navigate that, but then feeling the secondhand burden of being involved in those situations. It's hard to delineate what is on call and over the top. Most of the calls seem over the top, which makes it hard to do this work. Again, the student mental health crisis is at an all-time high, and I see it almost daily. When I was in grad school, I think I would have said that being on call was my favorite

part of the job because I was pretty good at it and deciding on the fly. That has changed because everything is a crisis, and I can never turn it off.

Another participant stated,

I'm good at talking to angry or sad people and helping figure that out. But I just feel I burned out on that part of the job. I'm not for being on call after this role. And I think that just comes from, like, I'm in a place now where I need to unplug my brain for a little, and you can't do that while you're on call. And I don't feel like I've been able to do that or why not being on call but being live-in any time.

The on-call responsibilities experienced by the live-in staff became one of the major themes of this study because of the high-stress nature and unpredictability of the situations. Even if the live-in staff was not on call, the anxiety produced made on-call challenging.

4.1.5 Challenges of Student Mental Health

The single most considerable disconnection between live-in entry-level staff and their sense of altruistic views of the position was the student's mental health challenges. It was one of the critical factors why live-in staff would leave their positions soon after accepting it. While it appears to be a suitable definition of altruism, the mental health state of students took a toll on the very staff put in place to serve them. The staff stated they lose sleep worrying about students and

their mental health crises. They also consider the hospital runs and whether a student will make it. Participants cited that the work they had been recruited to do no longer matched the work they were currently doing. Students' mental health concerns were more significant than they imagined, and they were unprepared to work with students because the live-in staff did not have the background to work with them. All participants mentioned student mental health crises as challenging, but two participants shared specific thoughts.

I heard that [Small Libatscol] had high numbers for students with mental health crises, but I did not know. Every time the phone rings, I wonder if it's a student who has tried to harm themselves and worse if they were successful. To be fair, I haven't had to respond too many suicidal ideation calls, but what is "too many?" Is one enough when you're not equipped to handle these types of crises. It is way too stressful.

Another participant stated,

When I came on and sat with the other live-in staff, they talked about duty and said that it was a three-week exercise on your mental health. I didn't know what that meant, but I quickly found out. Although each of us is only one week at a time, the week before you're on is the anticipation week; then there is the week you're on, and then, depending on how back it was, you need a week to debrief or see your therapist. Student mental health crises are no joke; it's the worst thing in this job.

Student mental health concerns at Small Libatscol will continue to be an issue as the number of students who come to the college with some level of mental health is rising. Although

trained well in crisis management, live-in staff are not equipped to work with students with high-level mental health concerns.

4.1.6 Lack of Congruency in the Live-in Position

The final theme of this section speaks to the overall lack of congruency in the live-in position. Participants stated that when coming into the role, they were told they would get to mentor students and student leaders, are at the table with other staff and faculty decide, they would lead initiatives and start new programs, and be part of a division that values them in their role as live-in staff, the first response of students who live in the residence hall. However, they experienced untenable work, a lack of understanding of their work, student mental health crises, and an unmanageable on-call system. Much of their daily work does not coincide with what they were told they would do and has made the experience less than favorable. Here are one participant's thoughts.

> This probably won't be a surprise, but first, the number of different directions that I feel are pulled in all the time and that our attention is sometimes debilitating. You know, I have 15 emails that are all flagged as hyper, ultra-urgent tasks. Which ones are the most hyper, ultra-urgent task? And so, I would say that's a big part of it is just like kind of being, you know, the deer in the headlights in the middle of it, like an intersection with cars coming from 10 different directions.

The participants were always tasked with something new. They were in a position that was always in flux, which is reflected in the participant's excerpt. Emails were coming in so rapidly

that some would go unread, which caused students to reach out to upper management, which more pressure on the live-in staff. For a while, this cycle continued.

4.1.7 Intervention Inquiry Question #2: Effectiveness of Restorative Justice Circles

To answer the second research question for the qualitative component of this study, most of the data is derived from the post-circle interviews. As stated previously, Restorative Justice circles provide groups with an opportunity to come together as a team and provide members with a sense of value. Participants were allowed to be interviewed following each of the circle activities.

For Question Two, I used the same format as the intervention inquiry Question One. The data suggest that, as the Restorative Justice circle intervention activities concluded, the live-in staff had formed a closer bond with one another, had developed a sense of trust with the team at large, and were excited to get to know one another in different ways, and stated they would stay longer in their roles because of feeling a sense of purpose. They could also identify systemic issues that, if addressed, would allow them to feel heard and seen. There were fourteen circles from the beginning of the intervention from July–April (see Table 1 in Chapter Three). Because of the design - each circle had its topic–several themes were garnered from the interviews. Several themes emerged throughout the intervention: trust, connection to the group, appreciation of their role, coming together, the pandemic, and preventing trauma in circles.

4.1.8 Trust

As mentioned above, the more circle activities were done as a group, the more open and vulnerable the group became. The work remained challenging throughout the year, but the

relationships that the Residence Life team could form were the silver lining. Participants talked about building trust and honesty among the team, two critical values in Restorative Justice Circles. Participants highlighted that this helped their overall wellness and self-worth as they felt a sense of compassion that they had not felt before starting the position, or for some, never. Participants highlighted that, in the beginning, they were uncertain about trusting others because they did not know whom they could trust. Restorative Justice circles' value-latent concepts helped the group connect the philosophical ideas of the circles and how they translated to the work they were trying to accomplish. One participant stated,

> In the beginning, some folks who aren't here took part when we started doing circles. There was a turning point where I felt like we had a breakthrough where everybody was. The group had gotten to a point where they were finally getting things off their chest. Some of the group confided in me and stated that I feel heard and seen even if nothing changes.

The personal statement above illuminates the feeling of one participant as they trusted the circle process and their peers. Most participants did not know they could be in a space where trust was a value because, up to that point, they had not experienced it in their position. Other participants spoke about the wellness aspect of the circle activities. One participant highlighted the following.

> I felt like I didn't deserve to be well. It was ironic that HR sent out the all-staff bulletin about taking an hour of wellness each week, and I felt that didn't include me. I felt like I had more work, not less, and there was no way I should take time for myself. The

circle activities highlighted that others felt the same, which was comforting but disturbing. We started walking together at least three times a week. It has been great.

The statement above highlights the need for wellness to be incorporated into the culture of care so that live-in staff can feel and trust that their supervisors and upper administrators have their best interests at heart.

4.1.9 Feeling Connected to the Group

Two essential values of the Restorative Justice circle process were to build trust and honesty among the team, which were achieved by the staff and produced an overall better sense of wellness. After a few months of working through the issues, the group felt a higher level of trust among the entire team. When asked what they appreciated in the building trust portion of the activities, participants stated that they appreciated the founding principles of Restorative Justice circles and what they could do to emulate the process for their small teams.

The data also showed that the participants respected the community-building circles with a particular topic, like the holiday circle. Participants highlighted that in the beginning, they were so stressed from the work that they just wanted to get the meetings over quickly. They were uncertain about trusting others because they did not know whom they could trust and had not made the time to do so. Restorative Justice circles' value-latent concepts helped the group connect the philosophical ideas of the circles and how they translated to the work they were trying to accomplish. This aided in reduced stress levels which supported their overall wellness. Participants shared various pieces regarding this section. Here is an excerpt where three of the participants shared their thoughts.

The holiday edition of the circles was fun. I get into the holidays, especially

Thanksgiving and Christmas. I felt like you can't name that these days, however. At least

with this group, I felt supported and didn't feel that the rest of my team thought I had an

ulterior motive for wanting to talk about and celebrate the holidays. I know they are

Christianity-slanted, but it's not always about that. I feel closer to the group, knowing I'm

not being judged.

The holiday edition circle was successful because we stayed the course throughout the

semester. There were undoubtedly weeks that the staff felt down and out, and the last thing they

wanted was to sit in space and reveal their deepest, darkest secrets. However, we recognized as a

group the importance of staying in circles; I continued to do the things that made them feel good

about circles and sharing. I listened. When I felt challenged, I did not abandon them.

4.1.10 Appreciation of the Role

The data shows that participants shared that the circles helped the team bond, making them

feel like they were understood on a different level, leading to better staff well-being. One

participant noted that, although they had only been in the position less than six months, the job

responsibilities continued to become unmanageable. However, the circle activities gave them a

space where they could bring up questions and ask for help completely differently, without feeling

awkward. A participant stated they felt they could trust the others in the circle because they were

live-in staff and appreciated the job and its challenges.

Another participant stated,

I was so excited about joining the team. When you all recruited me, I thought, wow, I hit the jackpot. I can't wait to be part of this fantastic team and work with students and other staff doing good work. But that has not been my reality. I wanted to appreciate a live-in role, but it's been hard. Now that we have talked about the position and others experienced similar feelings, I don't feel back and can appreciate the role very differently-now that I know others see the difficulties. We must keep the circles, or at least some form, as we welcome our next group into this space.

The above excerpt highlights one of the first times participants shared that they thought there was hope for the future. The participants stated, "we need to keep the circles for the next group." I found this statement to speak to the success of the circles.

4.1.11 Pandemic

Participants wanted to spend quality time discussing the position and felt this could only happen in a circle. They articulated feeling frustrated with professional staff training because they felt that COVID-19 interrupted the learning they could have had. The constant interruptions to assist other departments put a damper on the experience they thought they would have, and COVID-19 protocols put their health at risk. They spoke about having to regulate students masking in public and what happens when they choose not to comply with the policy. This was a meta moment for the staff as they shared that they felt most vulnerable during the circle and in their live-in position. See how one participant expressed their feelings that COVID-19 took on their health.

I didn't want to deliver meals and mail and the other ten things being asked of me because I was nervous about being infected. That's not a popular or team-player response, so I shut my mouth and head down and did what I was told. They weren't ready to hear from the struggling staff because we were all supposed to be in this together. There were two groups, essential staff and non-essential. I was part of the essential group, which meant I was expendable- I felt expendable.

Another participant stated they felt COVID-19 was a big deal, and some situations arose with student staff and students about various respect pieces. They tried to bring up the issues a few times, but it never felt like the right time. As an example, one participant said the following:

It was time for us to figure out how to check in the students for the fall semester as a team. The campus communication made such a big deal about staying local, vigilant, and careful. Don't hang around groups that are larger than six people and absolutely no congregating. So, it surprised me when (you) our supervisor said that we had to be in person to welcome our students back to campus. This was utterly antithetical to the pandemic messaging as a whole. I know the administration said they took steps to ensure my safety but didn't trust it because I felt expendable. I thought, why should I trust them? They don't even trust to hear what I have to say. Because I didn't have a good relationship with the other live-in staff, I didn't say anything, but through the circles, I realized I was not the only one who thought that was a strange and uncaring moment.

The circle activity provided some guidance to respond to the staff in a positive and less-frustrating way. Overall, the stress levels were reduced, and the staff felt their wellness had become more positive, but it is a work in progress as not everyone is experiencing better wellness.

4.1.12 Preventing Trauma in Circles

As part of restorative practices to deal with the past traumas and cultural identities that the team intentionally or involuntarily took on, Edgar Schein (2016) posits that climate culture is the feeling conveyed in a group by the physical layout and how members of the organization interact with each other, with customers, or with other outsiders. Reducing trauma and preventing harm at all costs in circles is essential. Knowing that there are no absolute safe spaces, how do we prevent trauma? When thinking about a better sense of well-being, Milo stated the following:

> Sometimes you're surprised by what people say, and it's not even related to the question, but it'll remain. It will remind them of something that happened in their childhood. And then when that happens, I'm almost like giddy, and I'm like, oh, you know, like, not that I'm happy they have to relive the trauma, but it's just such like that tipping point when they finally are like, it goes over the edge and then open. It's such a pleasant feeling.

Although participants may not realize it initially, circles offer a structured form of dialogue (Circle Forward, 2020). We can engage in challenging conversations most fruitfully when we first cultivate our shared values. Setting aside time to build relationships based on what we have in common circles creates a safe space for participants to express different views and intense emotions as they discuss complex issues later. The process helps communicate and make decisions. Participants also stated that the Restorative Justice circles had created a sense of peacefulness in a sea of chaos.

Taking part in circles is inherently transformative because wellness is built into the concept. We experience the world from more perspectives than our own. Slowing down to listen to a fellow peer, classmate, roommate, or co-worker has a powerful effect on the psyche and overall well-being of the human (The Circle Way, 2016).

4.2 Research Question #3: Support from Upper-Management

In this section, I discuss research Question Three, its impact on the live-in staff, the themes presented, and how the data is framed around the attrition of live-in staff and their role. To answer the third research question for the qualitative component of this study, a similar analysis was done as described in research questions one and two. The results are presented below. Using the data collected from Question Five in each of the introductory questions and post-circle activity interviews, I will provide answers to research Question Three. Two themes emerged from the data regarding research Question Three. Participants shared that providing "real support" to entry-level staff and being open to feedback were the most important to them as it relates to what systemically creates attrition and prevents live-in staff from remaining in their role.

4.2.1 Staff Assistance as "Real Support"

In looking at the data, staff help and the concept of "real support" appeared to be presented as interchangeable ideas. I followed up during the interview by asking what "real support" looks like. To that response, one participant stated that for them, it meant going beyond words and actively supporting. They stated the following:

Emailing that you're sorry I had a rough night is okay but do something to change our circumstances actively. Can we do something different concerning on-call? Can the live-in staff come to meetings about our work and interact instead of just doing what they decided? Can we all put our heads together and devise a plan that works for everybody so that we are all thriving and not just surviving?

From the excerpt above, the participant terms genuine support as more action-oriented and beyond words. While it is good to hear that they did a good job, participants wanted upper management to recognize when they were struggling and reach out to support options. This was the best way for participants to feel that real systemic change was happening. One participant captured perfectly the thin line between espoused and lived values when they said,

When our leaders speak to groups of parents and students, either on panels or in chat rooms or frankly to other campus partners, they talk about how great it is that we in our division are in partnership. They talk about the great work we do together to find solutions and that everybody on the team matters. Hearing these words, the first few times made me feel warm inside. I was like, oh, how cool, some departments say that we are in this together, but my division means it. That's not the reality, unfortunately. As COVID became more of a problem and as people left the division and those who stayed picked up the slack, the message got lost with upper management. It became easier to just tell the folks at the bottom of the totem pole what they would do instead of providing opportunities for us to have a voice. That has been disappointing, but I think they can easily change this. Just carve out some time and listen to our ideas. We have some good ones.

The above excerpt illuminates a thread throughout this study. Entry-level staff wants to have a seat at the table. They want a role in the decisions that are being made about the work they do, and upper management are the gatekeepers to these opportunities.

4.2.2 Be Open to Feedback

The participants' responses about being open to feedback varied. About half of the participants wanted more transparency of work and equal expectations for all. Two asked for circles, like the ones being done for the team, to be conducted with an outside moderator, and two others just wanted upper management to hear what they were saying and not have a curt response. As stated above, another participant shared their thoughts on collaborating with upper management. They state,

> The work of live-in professional staff has changed. Staff members no longer want to just be on the periphery of the processes and procedures; they want to be at the table with other professional staff making and being a part of the decisions.

One participant highlighted that the live-in position is the only disproportionate position on campus. In every role, there are things that the subordinate does not get to weigh in on; however, during a pandemic, when live-in staff are asked to perform duties that are not in their job description, it might not be the best time to leave them out of the conversation. As they were thinking about system changes, one participant articulated this.

> Currently, the position is marketed as an opportunity to work with students, teach a first-year course, and participate in developmental opportunities. We talk about well-being and what contributes to it. Allowing my peers and me an opportunity to be at the

table to openly discuss some of the antiquated notions and ideas within our live-in positions would go a long way in changing the system in ways that better serve the role.

The above sections highlight several themes related to this study. One significant theme that concludes this section is the need for upper management to get involved. One hallmark of the Student Affairs profession through the professional organizations of ACPA and NASPA is mentorship. Some scholars argue mentors are chosen, while others say they just come into your life in times of need. I think both occur. More than ever, this is an opportunity for upper management to mentor our entry-level professional staff. Bring staff into the conversations; we can have carte blanche for everyone to sit in space with management. We can invite those who are asking and have ideas to share. This will help strengthen the field while providing the appreciation that entry-level staff are craving.

In conclusion, this qualitative research study sought to answer three research questions. I present the results from this chapter to explain how the responses to specific interview questions answered specific research questions. This chapter also included the results and themes of the Restorative Justice circles and their efficacy in mitigating feelings of despair and attrition from the live-in staff. While the themes highlighted above were the major themes, live-in staff face multiple stressors associated with their role on campus (Barr, 2014). Some of the other themes presented by participants were general anxiety about the role, lack of an accurate teamwork model for the specific large-scale events, the current on-call system, lack of after-hours assistance from campus offices, lack of appreciation from campus partners, and a missing investment in the well-being of the live-in staff. These themes and sub-themes were not significant enough to warrant individual sections but were worthy of note.

Restorative Justice circles successfully provided an outlet for staff to express themselves, build trust among their peers, and feel a sense of recognition and appreciation as a Residence Life group. Most of these themes arose from the perceptions of ten participants. One was about the circle activities. Six of the ten participants stated that circles should continue as they help encourage live-in staff by supporting them in their role, showing appreciation for their work, and reducing attrition. The remaining four participants agreed they should continue with minor tweaks.

The next chapter will discuss the findings, including the following salient themes from interview data about circles. Finally, recommendations for preventing attrition, future research, limitations of the study, and implications for the field of Student Affairs are explored.

5.0 Recommendations and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine, through a qualitative methods approach, what causes live-in professional staff within Student Affairs to leave their post within five years, what experiences led to them leaving, and whether the Restorative Justice circle intervention could disrupt live-in professional attrition. Since over 50% of entry-level new professional staff leave their posts within five years (Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006), the need for emotional and psychological support for these new entry-level professionals is paramount.

Considerable literature shows that entry-level live-in professional staff work has become increasingly unmanageable and challenging, and the need for support is at a critical junction. Using Restorative Justice circles as an intervention helped provide support, build trust, and allow live-in staff to rely on one another as they built a strong team bond. The literature supports that Restorative Justice circle activities focus teams and groups on bigger goals (The Circle Way, 2016). I recognized that live-in professionals were no longer excited about their work because of a lack of appreciation. From being involved in circle activities, I also recognized that a Restorative Justice circle could provide camaraderie and team bonding for a group to feel they matter. I acknowledged a need to examine the implications of a Restorative Justice circle activity for the live-in staff to address the problem of practice discussed in Section I.

5.1 Summary of Findings and Discussion

In the local context at Small Libatscol, the interviews yielded data that supported the researcher's hypotheses of staff feeling burdened with the most undesirable work, perceiving that upper management was reluctant to adjust expectations for the position and the lack of appreciation for the live-in professional staff as reasons staff leave their posts. Live-in staff want the same things as those in the national context. They want to feel included and matter as individuals and in their position. Participants mentioned they felt like just another employee instead of someone who matters within the system. Mental health crises concern students and those who assist them, but no one talks about the live-in staff and their mental health, and the live-in staff wants to see that change.

Live-in professional staff are staying fewer and fewer years in their entry-level positions because the system has not changed. They want upper management to sit with them and figure out better practices for well-being and over position sustainability, not just quick fixes and a thank you. The themes highlighted in Chapter Four are also found in the literature about entry-level professional staff roles. The intervention of the circle activities provided a much-needed reprieve from the high-stress and mass exodus of the live-in staff. Still, it will not be enough to sustain a new generation of live-in staff who want to see systemic changes in the position and attitudes within the field.

We must also include our professionals in the wellness opportunities we provide students. Related to two themes from Chapter Four, *pandemic* and *real support from upper management*, wellness is not only something that the entry-level staff crave but also something that the division leadership espouses as a value.

Participants of this study spent time throughout the year with the researcher, engaging in ways to answer this question: what can be done systemically to improve the live-in situation? As stated throughout this chapter, most of the changes introduced throughout the Restorative Justice circle activities over the last nine months have been communicated to upper management and implemented. These changes have helped to alter the complexion of the system for live-in professional staff. An example of one such sweeping change is staff having to accompany students to the hospital. All the live-in staff who participated in this study remember having to accompany students to the hospital and stay with the students, sometimes for hours. In the most extreme cases, the student would be discharged, and the staff does not know, causing extreme frustration for the live-in staff. Live-in staff no longer must stay at the hospital with the injured student.

Ten individuals took part in the interviews that were conducted for this study. Although a tiny sample overall, more than half of the interview data was very telling in what the participants had experienced. All the participants have been negatively affected by either the institution, coworkers, or students, attributed mainly to lack of awareness and feeling overworked. While Restorative Justice circles provided the team an outlet to be heard and seen in their roles, the systemic concerns have introduced another opportunity to see the system. During one of the circle activities, the team acknowledged that the circle activities were working to create a more cohesive and trusting team. However, they asked how they could interrupt the current system to provide live-in staff with a sense of overall satisfaction within the position.

5.1.1 Limitations

This section outlines the limitations of this study. There is very little research on Restorative Justice circles being used as team builders. Most of the information provided related

to circles being conducted in other industries. All ten of the participants worked in the division of student affairs. They were familiar with the concept of Restorative Justice circles, but the majority, 60%, had not done a circle activity. A second limitation was the impact and limitations that COVID-19 had on this study. The additional work and responsibilities incurred by the live-in staff directly resulted from the pandemic. It also made it more challenging to meet in person at the start of the data collection portion of the study. At the height of the pandemic on campus, live-in staff was asked to wear many hats because they were essential staff who lived with the students. A third limitation of the study is the participants' willingness to be part of the study. The live-in staff were in such an untenable situation that they would try anything to break out of the cycle of being overwhelmed. This could be viewed as a limitation because, although the staff were given the option to take part, dire circumstances may have dictated their participation more than it would have in a non-pandemic and high-stress year. Another limitation includes the role of the researcher in the study. While I served as the lead researcher in the study, I simultaneously directed and instructed the Department of Residence Life as the direct supervisor of 80% of the participants. All questions and concerns could be directed at me during my role as director and then assistant dean. I even determined when the Restorative Justice circle activities which occur, which may have contributed to response bias in the interviews.

The final limitation comes as criticism of the circle design. As mentioned earlier, all circles had a topic. Questions for the circle were not released until the actual circle occurred. However, a variant of comments suggested we release the questions ahead of time, along with the goals of the specific circle. As we continue circles, that is one of the few changes we would make to the process. In terms of other pieces of feedback, participants liked the topics chosen for the circles, as they had a voice in the creation. However, they provided mixed reviews about whether they were

effective or worked well. Most thought it was good to have topics but thought they should have subtopics or subthemes. For example, the October circle, *how to facilitate a circle*, was straightforward and required no additional prep. However, managing a workload while transitioning, the first November circle could have used some context. The participants also thought it would have been more beneficial if they could have planned to bring examples from their own experiences to add to the discussion for a more robust conversation.

5.2 Systemic Implications

In this section, the results break the implications down discussed in Section III. An in-depth explanation is provided as to the connection between the findings, the review of the literature in Section I, and its role in understanding implications in live-in staff attrition and Restorative Justice circles.

Based on the literature and the data collected for this study, I recommend three suggestions to help decrease the attrition of entry-level professional staff. 1) Provide ongoing team-building activities like Restorative Justice circles to the culture of the live-in professional position. 2) Add retention to recruitment, selection, and training. 3) Upper management must sit with entry-level professionals to get their thoughts and ideas about the position they serve.

5.3 Introduce Restorative Justice Circles to Departmental Culture

Based on the introductory and post-circle activity interviews with participants for this study, entry-level professional staff are craving opportunities to feel included, connected, and part of the team. It is not enough to do one-off team builders with new professional staff. Instead, introducing Restorative Justice circles to the team can help build trust, reduce stress levels, and provide a space for the team to share (The Circle Way, 2016). As part of this study, I introduced Restorative Justice circles as an intervention at Small Libatscol to help see the systematic issues and reduce attrition in the position. People in the study bought into the model. The participants felt a sense of trust in their group and could get to know their peers and allies on different levels. The participants could also come together and strategize ways to present their findings to higher management. While the Restorative Justice circles were successful, I plan to tweak them for next year. As mentioned, the staff were in such a dark place that they were open to anything that would help to relieve stress or provide a reprieve. I expect a very different buy-in if we begin with circle activities and make them part of the culture of our staff. For instance, I plan to do circle activities at least once a month, but I will incorporate them into our current staff meeting time slot. The time needed to introduce circles to a brand-new group who have never done them is not sustainable. Therefore, introducing them as something we do with our team could yield faster and better results.

5.4 Recruitment, Selection, Training, and Retention

Based on conversations with members of the human resources department at Small Libatscol, as it stands, human resources, with department and division heads, heavily recruit,

select, and hire new talent. However, for many, it is the last time the employee formally hears from human resources. There are very few check-ins with new staff. Most new staff only hear from Human Resources when there is a problem or they receive blast emails about upcoming professional development opportunities. In this study, I elucidated that sometimes an entry-level staff member leaves because of untenable work. There has been a conversation with the Human Resource Department at Small Libatscol to implement monthly check-ins with all new staff, not just entry-level staff. Monthly check-ins can help staff members feel like they matter and allow the new staff member to share the struggles they may have to interrupt early attrition. If there is no relationship between the new employee and the college, it will be tough to keep young talent (Wright, 2021). As an example of what human resources could do, a Small Libatscol, Human Resources, used to provide a supervisor certificate program for anyone at the college that was in a supervisory role. This was an opportunity for HR to be aware of the deficits with the supervisors and how they (Libatscol HR, 2022) could individually or collectively assist the supervisors in getting them to the desired standards. This practice also helps to prevent entry-level staff from leaving because of a poor relationship with their direct supervisor (Tull, 2009). As part of the discussions, there is a chance that this training course will return to campus.

5.5 Management Engage with Entry-Level Professionals

Higher education decision-makers must periodically sit with those entry-level professional staff (Wright, 2021). As mentioned throughout this study, entry-level professional staff are no longer interested in just being directed in their roles. They want more to say, especially for decisions directly affecting their daily work. One way for upper management and entry-level staff

to engage is to provide committee opportunities within the division or department that includes members from all levels. Another way is to use a variation of the Restorative Justice circle process known as Restorative Conversations. These are small conversations designed as listening and hearing sessions for top management and typically those in entry-level or lower positions at the institution (Circle Practices, 2019). It is an excellent way to learn what is happening with those closest to students. The entry-level staff has ideas about students and programming, on-call protocols and procedures, ways that everyone can be well, and even thoughts on a more effective response to students who are experiencing mental health crises. Most of the experiences come from live-in staff in positions where they are front facing the students. Students confide in their live-in professionals and trust them to provide the resources.

5.6 Future Iterations for Practice and Research

Using the improvement science and the PDSA (Bryk et al., 2015) iterative process, I plan to add stimulating conversations to our recruiting and selection protocols. We know what new staff are looking for, but we need to ask different questions in the interview setting to get at what we can do to slow down and prevent attrition at such a high rate at Small Libatscol. We will also incorporate the same Restorative Justice conversations with upper management. Data from the study shows that new professionals want to be at the table making decisions with upper management. While this is not always feasible, sometimes it is, and the conversations can be mutually beneficial. Based on a workplace generational study (Wright, 2021), under the increased understanding of workplace preferences section, managers had the most significant improvement in their feelings of confidence related to understanding the workplace preferences of each

generation. The literature describes that the most successful multigenerational managers will be those who can empathize with the different generations, including understanding the source of their preferences, values, and expectations (Grubb, 2017; Pollak, 2019). The study provides suggestions and advice on encouraging collaboration, being adaptable, developing potential, and embracing differences (McNally, 2017). This is directly related to entry-level professionals' feelings that they want to be included and treated like professionals. Management must adjust to the next generation of entry-level professionals.

Another critical future practice is to continue advocating for after-hours student health services for after-hours on-call professional staff. The live-in staff are ill-equipped to triage the high-level student mental health crisis that presents after hours when the student health center is closed. A dedicated person out of the health office would support the live-in staff while strengthening partnerships.

5.7 Future Research

Research on the student body and their mental health is necessary. Almost half or 47% of the student body has dealt with a mental health concern during their time at the college (Institutional Research, 2018). The 47% of the student body experiencing a mental health crisis is about 18% more than Small Libatscol's benchmarked and peer institutions. The number of residence halls, students to live-in staff ratio, and the high number of mental health concerns are the constants presented during interviews and routine one-on-one meetings. We must do additional research to interrupt this cycle. As these numbers remain steady, new, entry-level professionals on the front line have little chance for longevity and success at the college.

An area of study that would be beneficial is looking at colleges and universities that use Restorative Justice circles as part of the team-building activities. Circles have been used in k12 schools, churches, daycares, and Girls and Boys clubs (Bohmert, M. N., Duwe, G., & Hipple, N. K. (2018). There was much success in using Restorative Justice circles in this study. However, there is little research on Restorative Justice circles used within departments on college campuses for team building. Participants saw them as a tool for team building, establishing trust, and addressing systemic issues within and outside the live-in position. If Restorative Justice circles become a standard tool for departments on campuses, it may help to build better teams while reducing attrition within volatile positions. For those looking to build on this study, I would suggest looking at institutions where Restorative Justice circles are used but not necessarily for team building and bonding. Doing a study on circles could allow upper administrators to add it to their departmental and divisional training.

5.8 Conclusion

Although freshly minted entry-level professionals enter student affairs each year with their master's degrees in hand, their stay is short-lived. New professionals stay less than five years post-master and stay in live-in roles even less. It is of incredible importance that researchers and leaders in higher education alike work to support their retention in the profession. While the results are very much in line with many portions of previous research, it further expands on this knowledge by showing the most satisfying (e.g., nature of the work, benefits, and coworkers) and least satisfying portions (e.g., pay and promotion opportunities) of entry-level student affairs roles. This work additionally shows the stark differences in satisfaction levels through a direct comparison

between those in the field and those who have left, instead of looking at those with intent to leave or working only with those who are already gone. The field of student affairs used to be about altruistic factors; with the next generation, that may no longer be the case. New live-in professionals want equity, reasonable hours, an on-call system that works for everyone, and a collaborative effort from other campus partners when things get challenging. Additionally, they want a sense of worth and wellness. Understanding the importance of several elements of one's first postgraduate professional role and commitment levels in the field can be incredibly helpful to both better inform future research and the practices of student affairs master's programs and employers of new Student Affairs professionals.

This research study introduced Restorative Justice circles to mitigate feelings of despair and attrition from the live-in staff. Live-in staff faces stressors associated with their role on campus (Barr, 2014). Participants specified that some of these stressors are a lack of an accurate teamwork model for the specific large-scale events, the current on-call system, lack of after-hours assistance from campus offices, lack of appreciation from campus partners, and a missing investment in the well-being of the live-in staff. Restorative Justice circles successfully provided an outlet for staff to express themselves, build trust among their peers, and feel a sense of recognition and appreciation as a Residence Life group. Although circles have promised to help small groups come together and feel appreciated, have a sense of worth, and be listened to and heard, they do not get at the more significant systemic issue; additional work is needed to address this.

Based on the data collected in this study, here are five ways that higher education leaders can offer support to entry-level professionals that could help with retention and reduce attrition. The number one way is to redesign meetings, so entry-level staff are at least represented at the table, especially when discussing their position or job expectations.

The second way is to look at current systems within departments and divisions to allow for new "open-door and open-feedback" sessions. These sessions are not meant to criticize current management but provide a space for entry-level staff to feel heard and valued as employees, colleagues, and peers.

The third-way leaders in higher education can interrupt attrition is to create retreat spaces at the beginning of each academic year and Spring Semester to allow everyone to analyze a personality test or get-to-know-you exercise thoroughly. Hence, all groups feel included, and everyone meets one another.

The fourth way is to introduce some iteration of Restorative Justice circles into the culture of the department or division. These do not have to occur weekly or even monthly, but they should occur regularly to allow the staff to get to know their colleagues and peers on a different level.

Finally, the fifth and final idea that higher education professionals could do to reduce attrition and support entry-level staff is to start up committees at regional or national conferences that address these concerns. Some of this is already being discussed at those levels. Still, if higher education administrators lead the charge to interrupt attrition actively, entry-level staff will take notice and stay the course longer than they are currently.

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