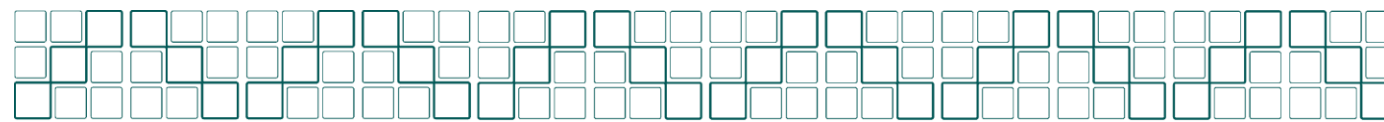


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# Developing A Wellness Program For NIH Intramural Trainees

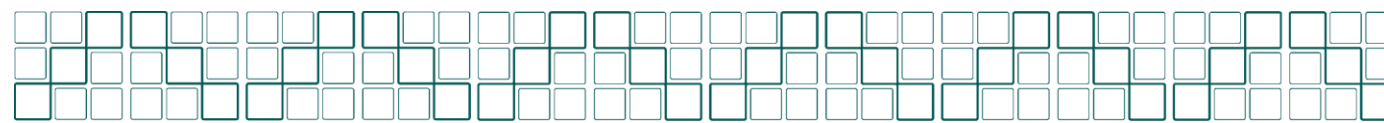
**Dr. Sharon L. Milgram, Director NIH OITE**  
**[milgrams@od.nih.gov](mailto:milgrams@od.nih.gov)**  
**[www.training.nih.gov](http://www.training.nih.gov)**  
**@NIH\_OITE on Twitter**





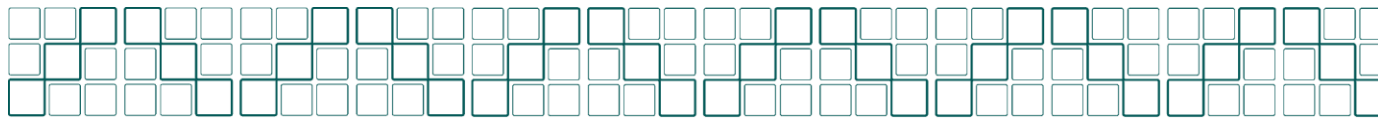
# We Train Thresholders...

- Who May Be Dealing With Complicating Contextual Factors
  - Financial strain, including food and housing insecurity
  - Extent of support network, family challenges/problems
  - Immigrant status/International background
  - Membership in marginalized community(ies)
  - 1<sup>st</sup> generation college/graduate student
  - Previous (or recent) trauma
  - [Chronic] illness including emotional/mental health concerns
  - Culture/atmosphere of program/lab
  - News events, both nationally and internationally
- And who are smart problem solvers who have accomplished a lot to get in their (relatively) short educational careers



# Three Overlapping Goals

- To help trainees appreciate the link between stress management/wellness and school/career/life ‘success’
- To help trainees work through acute stressors with minimal disruption of their academic and research progress
- To better prepare ourselves to deal with more serious mental health concerns that impact some members of our community
- Requires two things:
  - That we frame this as a wellness, not an illness, issue
  - substantial culture change at all levels



# What We Are Doing (I)

- Formal group activities

- Workshops on assertiveness, wellness, resilience, performance anxiety, etc.

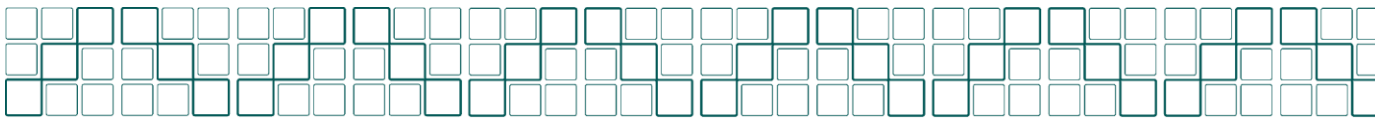
- Key Point – we use captive audiences

- Material embedded into orientation programs and most workshops
- We highlight wellness and resilience at all major events



# OITE Resilience Workshop

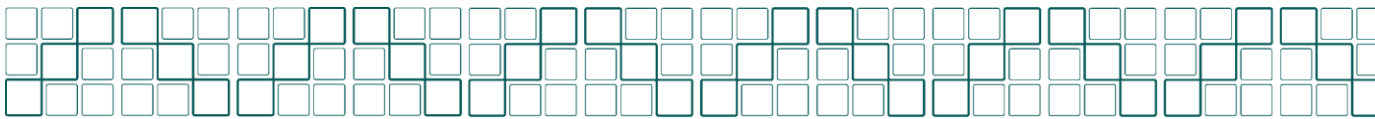
- Knowledge, behaviors and attitudes with goal of building a “resilience toolkit”; topics covered:
  - Fostering a growth mind-set
  - Negative self-talk, imposter fears and cognitive distortions
  - Holistic self-care (brief intro followed by in-depth workshop)
  - Shame and shame resilience (sometimes)
  - Feedback resilience (becoming a stand-alone workshop)
- Key micro-messages:
  - Resilience = people + process + preparation
  - To do well, we have to be well



# OITE Wellness Workshop

- Based on a four-quadrant model for wellness
  - Physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health
- Components
  - Discussion of the short- and long-term impact of stress
  - The benefits of mindfulness
  - Self-compassion
  - Holistic health and self-care
- Includes a self-care assessment and a short meditation

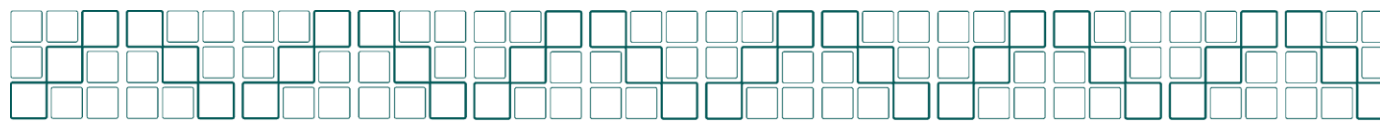
NOTE: We present a workshop covering both resilience and wellness at National meetings and on university campuses



# What We Are Doing (II)

- Less formal group activities
  - Drop-in meditation groups
  - Resilience Discussion Groups
  - Wellness Wednesdays
  - Monthly wellness/community building events
  - Affinity group activities and brown bag lunches

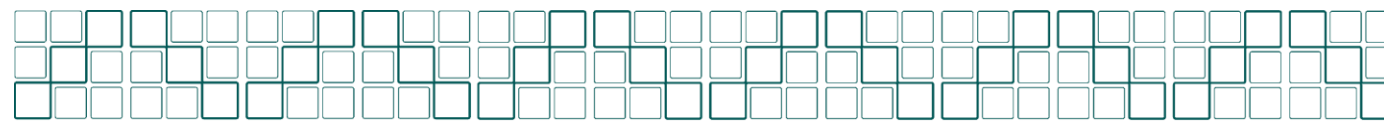
NOTE – We see both formal  $\longleftrightarrow$  informal



# OITE Resilience Discussion Groups

- Facilitated by a therapist with knowledge of NIH
- Popular topics
  - Job search stress
  - Conflict and difficult conversations
  - PI and lab group challenges
  - Imposter fears, assertiveness and self-confidence
  - Application anxiety/career decision making stress
  - the stress of national and international news
  - self-compassion and kindness
  - For trainees....
    - navigating NIH and life while dealing with emotional or psychological challenges
    - who are care-givers
    - who are living with chronic illness and disability
    - who are international
    - who are LGBTQ+
    - who are People of Color

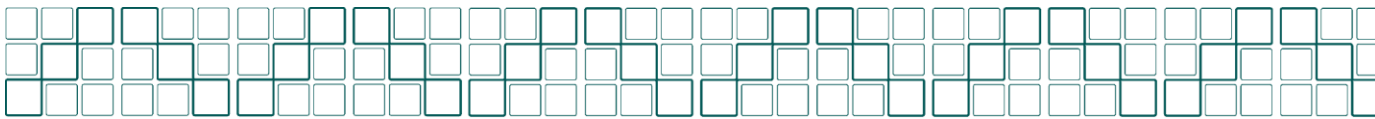




# Why Facilitated and Not Peer Driven

- The facilitator is skilled in....
  - discussing confidentiality and creating a supportive environment
  - making sure everyone has a chance to speak while respecting and working with individual differences
  - summarizing, validating emotions, and generalizing information
  - making referrals when needed
  - reporting back to me about general issues I need to address or know about

NOTE: Trainees engage in five ways – **required**, **voluntol**, preventative, acute need, maintenance after a major stressor

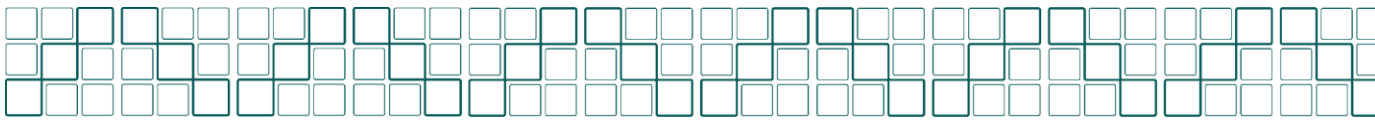


# What We Are Doing (III)

## ■ Individual activities

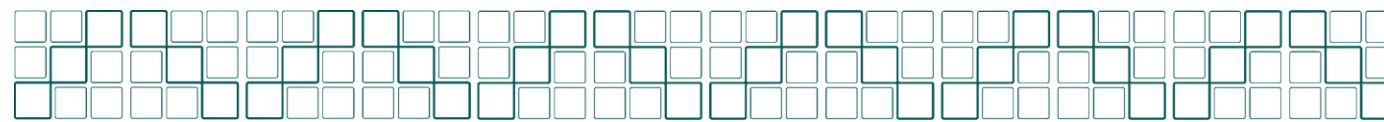
- Offering individual wellness advising
- Asking/sharing about self-care and stress management when talking with trainees (100% of the time)
- Asking about and discussing counseling, providing referrals and addressing concerns (stigma, privacy, monetary, specific language and/or identity needs, about getting the most out of it)

NOTE: For me, finding someone happy to make therapist referrals based on the specific situation has made a big impact



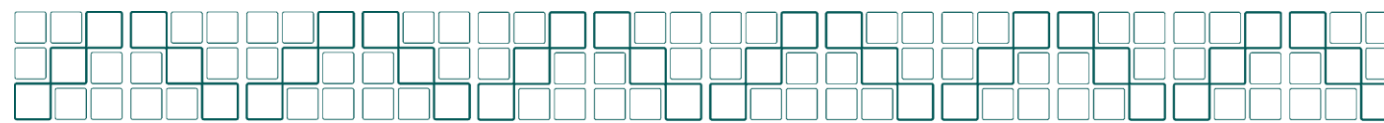
# Wellness Advising

- Wellness advisors are trained professionals
- Short- and long-term (in aliquots of 8; may decrease number due to greater need)
- Trainees self-refer and are referred by peers, PIs, OITE and other NIH staff
- This is NOT therapy
  - BUT many fellows who seek out wellness advising, eventually ask for a referral and most follow through
  - An excellent way to help trainees work through stigma and cultural barriers to counseling



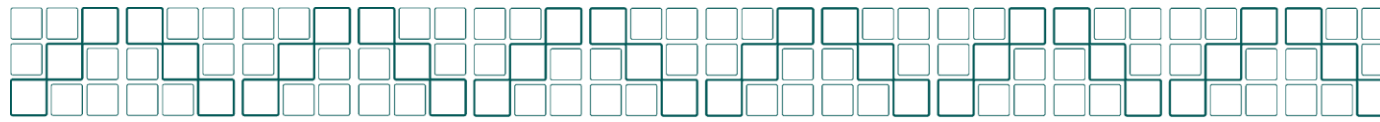
# PIs Are More Engaged In the Process

- Resilience and wellness is now embedded into the training we offer tenure-track investigators at NIH (from both sides)
- PIs who hear us speak (about wellness, leadership or about our services) are significantly more likely to reach out.
- Recently offered a workshop, “Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Intramural Trainees” for PIs and admin staff
- Piloting a coaching program for PIs

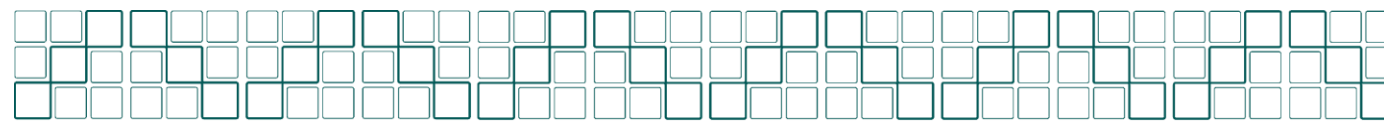


# Why We Are Making Progress

- Trainees hear these messages **again and again**, from many different people, in many different contexts, and embedded in all of our programming.
- There are multiple entry points and trainees can choose what makes sense for them.
- Wellness staff are integrated into the OITE Career Center to break down barriers for reaching out.
- Active learning makes the material more fun and personal.
- I use my social capital and institutionally-derived power to get students to participate.
- I take time to address the elephants in the room.

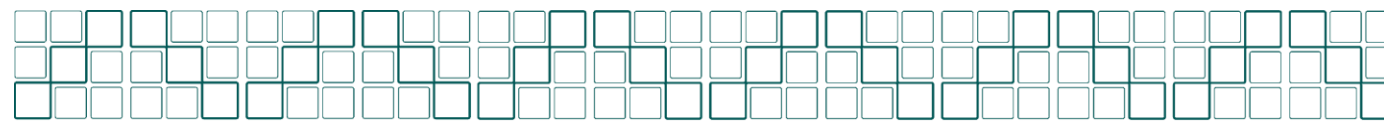


How can one be well in a system that is not well?



# Our Efforts In That Regard

- All harassment cases involving NIH trainees are a collaboration between NIH Civil and OITE and we provide a lot of wellness advising throughout the process
- All trainees must participate in person in a new training – “Your Rights and Responsibilities As An NIH Trainee”.
- We are piloting (with some clear success) a paper-based climate/mentoring survey



# An Effort To Expand Our Reach

- Piloting programs for PIs and program directors at national meetings and during campus visits
- Continuing to host the NIH Train-the-Trainers event
  - July 20-21, 2020 here in DC
  - Will involve multiple sessions on student mental health and wellness, with 30 therapists attending on Day 1 to lecture and facilitate role plays for participants
  - Data suggests that participation in this program has a profound impact on staffs' commitment and ability to deliver wellness and resilience programming
- We are in the process of evaluating our programs now, using survey instruments and focus groups





# Acknowledgements

- NIH trainees who share their stories, frustrations and dreams with me
- AAMC GREAT group for their enthusiasm, interest and willingness to collaborate on the NIH Train-the-Trainer event
- OITE staff and especially our wellness advisors and career counselors
- Many colleagues who contributed to my learning
  - Hile Rutledge, OKA and Associates
  - Robbye Fox, Parent Encouragement Program
  - Annie Scheiner and Jonah Green from Jonah Green and Associates (and the many therapists from JGA who advise me and who work with our fellows)