



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

# STAFF WELLBEING & KALA WELLNESS CASE STUDY

The impact of Medicinal Movement™  
on UNHCR Call Center Agents

## AT A GLANCE

### DETAILS

Started: April 2018

Completed: Ongoing

Participants: 12

Format:

- Two classes virtually a week
- One annual weeklong in-person sessions

### CHALLENGES

- Turnover
- Stress
- Lack of productivity
- No movement with long working hours
- Weak team connection
- Bored routine

### GOALS

- Increase:
  - Employee retention
  - Productivity
  - Moral
  - Reliance
  - Team building
- Decrease:
  - Turnover
  - Presenteeism
  - Stress
  - Burnout

## OVERVIEW

Men and women working for the United Nations on the front lines suffer the emotional toll of listening and trying to assist refugees. Often overlooked are staff manning the hotline. UNHCR's call center agents work in a soundproof setting. Agents handle an average of 150 calls per day with few and strictly scheduled breaks. No refugee calls with good news and agents rarely have a positive answer to their poverty. There is no time during the day to release stress, frustration, and sadness.

## SOLUTION

To increase productivity and retention of our highly trained call center staff, UNHCR began a pilot project in 2018 with KALA Wellness to see if a meditative form of exercise, Medicinal Movement, could improve the call center KPIs. The KALA Wellness instructors started the course in Jordan with in-person daily sessions over the course of one week. Having conducted the initial training and formed the bond, the instructors returned to the U.S. and have continued virtual sessions twice a week since 2018. The instructors have returned to work in person with the team, starting with a one-day retreat, and continuing with onsite sessions each day.

## MEDICINAL MOVEMENT™

A combination of Eastern medicine concepts, modern science, and movement techniques strengthening the connection between the physical, emotional, and mental self - releasing stress, increasing resiliency and prioritizing total wellbeing.

## BENEFITS

- 1:** Turnover was high. Once this program began not a single employee has quit.
- 2:** Agents are more present and productive at work.
- 3:** Agents have tools to manage stress on the job & home + reduced work-induced body pain.
- 4:** Improved morale & pride in their work along with care, concern, commitment to each other and their job.

## LEADERSHIP

“There were so many levels of positive impact that occurred over time. The focus, of course, was to reduce stress levels for frontline staff, thereby reducing number of sick leave days and improving retention/burn out. But the unintended outcomes were equally positive. What started as just a class, became a community of practitioners. This community (the call center agents) prized their commitment to the class and guarded the relationship that they were developing. What we found was renewed empathy and commitment among the team.”

### ELIZABETH BARNHART

Head of Unit

“I can confidently say that there is a reduction in the work stress and negative thinking along positive change in everyday life. The team feels more relaxed and joyful with improved mood. Finally, the team bonded much better than before.”

### RASHA BARARSEH

Helpline Manager

## FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

- Continuity of the program is a must.
- Increase frequency to have an enhanced impact.
- Expand to other UNHCR operations.
- Ensure having space, tools, etc. for a successful program.



## STATISTICAL FINDINGS

As per the Helpline Standard Operating Procedures and the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the agents shown in Table 1, the Helpline team needs to go through a monthly evaluation and coaching sessions to ensure that we are meeting the set KPIs. Over the past four years, the overall score for the team has improved, primarily for the staff members doing Medicinal Movement which also in return helped enhancing the performance of the team as a whole.

Table 1: KPIs – Staff Performance

1. Performance Quality	
	Etiquette
	Policy & Procedure
	Knowledge
2. Agent Efficiency	
	Breaks
	Missing hours
	Morning Late
3. Productivity	
	Average Handled Calls per hour
	Average Handle Time (AHT)

Table 2: KPIs – Staff Performance Example

Staff doing Medicinal Movement				
	2019	2020	2021	2022
1	76%	88%	89%	92%
2	85%	87%	90%	89%
3	83%	82%	91%	90%
4	NA	NA	92%	92%
5	NA	NA	84%	91%
<b>AVG</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>91%</b>
Staff not doing Medicinal Movement				
1	83%	83%	87%	91%
2	80%	80%	88%	89%
3	80%	70%	88%	85%
4	NA	NA	83%	83%
<b>AVG</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>87%</b>

Table 1: indicates the components for the KPIs.

Table 2: shows an example of the final scores for some staff members (doing/not doing Medicinal Movement) for the whole year

## TAKEAWAYS

- Learned to disengage and have a better work/life balance.
- Improved morale – pride in what they were doing.
- Notable team and community building – care, concern and commitment to others within the team and to the job.
- Sense of empowerment – feeling able to lead and demonstrate to others.
- Breathing helped the team to come over the stress they face inside and outside the job.
- Less headaches because of the movements.
- Less neck and backpain because of the movements.

**AGENT EFFICIENCY,  
PERFORMANCE QUALITY,  
PRODUCTIVITY IMPROVED**

**76% TO 92%**