

**Part time turnover and the effect it has on operations within Canton Township Fire
Department**

By: Chris Smith
Fire Chief
Canton Township Fire Department
210 38th St. S.E.

A proposed research project submitted to the Ohio Fire Executive Program

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The greatest issue facing Canton Township Fire Department is the turnover of part time employees and the dynamic effect it has on the organizations staffing capabilities. The purpose of this research project is to identify why CTFD has such a high turnover of part time employees and what can they do to reduce this. This research project looks to answer the following questions:

1. Why does CTFD have such a high turnover of part time employees?
2. Why do people apply and ultimately work part time for CTFD?
3. How does part time employee turnover within CTFD compare with other similar departments within the region?
4. What are some changes CTFD could implement to help remedy the part time turnover rate?

As part of this research project a literature review and survey questions were done to try and compare how other organizations have dealt with similar issues. One survey was sent out to former part time employees, one to current part time employees, and a third to surrounding departments in adjoining counties.

The data received from these surveys revealed that CTFD is experiencing much higher turnover than other similar departments. It also revealed that CTFD is much more dependent on part time employees to maintain a full daily schedule which leads to at least one open shift 47% of the year. The results also showed that the main reason people left employment with CTFD was after acquiring full time employment. CTFD has implemented various incentive programs in

an attempt to recruit and retain part time employees, whereas the majority of survey respondents have not.

One of the recommendations derived from this research project is to reevaluate the current part time role within the organization. Currently it requires a minimum of three part time employees a day to maintain staffing 37% of the time, four 53% of the time, and five 10% of the time. This research project went on to show the reliance CTFD has on its part time employees to maintain its daily staffing requirements. In conclusion the research has revealed the need for CTFD to thoroughly review its dependence on part time staff to maintain its current daily staffing and the sustainability of its current model.

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The problem this research paper will address is, within the Canton Township Fire Department (CTFD) there is an excessively high turnover rate of part time personnel. This causes a reduction in daily staffing, placing firefighters and residents at risk during emergency incidents. Some of the issues associated with turnover of part time members are financial, as in background checks, physicals, uniforms, turnout gear, and overtime costs associated with the orientation process. The non-financial issues of concern are constant basic training programs, morale, crew continuity, and lack of advanced training for veteran members of the department.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the cause of excessive turnover of part time personnel. The research will attempt to find out if other similar organizations have the same issues and what they have done to remedy the problem, if any. With the results, (CTFD) would hope to be able to identify specific problems within our organization that could be changed to improve our current situation. This project will use the evaluative research method for this project to attempt to answer the following.

Research Questions

The research questions this project will address are:

1. Why does CTFD have such a high turnover of part time employees?
2. Why do people apply and ultimately work part time for CTFD?

3. How does part time employee turnover at CTFD compare with other similar departments within the region?
4. What are some changes Canton Township Fire Department could implement to help remedy the part time turnover rate within CTFD?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Canton Township is located in Stark County in the north east portion of Ohio. Canton Township is situated approximately 20 miles south of Akron along interstate 77 and state route 30. Canton Township covers 25 square miles and has a population of 13,102 (Census, 2010) residents. The Pro Football Hall of Fame is located on the border of Canton Township, Plain Township, and Canton City. Canton Township Fire Department (CTFD) is a combination department made up of part time and full time staff and provides fire and ALS ambulance service. CTFD responds to an average of 2100 calls for service a year. Canton Township Fire Department has an operating budget of \$3.0 million annually generated from one continuous levy, one five year renewable levy, and EMS billing (Township, 2015).

Full time ranks consist of one full time fire chief, one full time assistant chief, one administrative assistant, one fire prevention officer (FPO), and 13 shift personnel. The FPO and shift personnel are members of the IAFF union. The part time staff consists of a deputy chief and 22-27 shift personnel. Canton Township Fire Department operates out of three stations with daily staffing of seven per day (six minimum). Each station cross staffs for fire and EMS response with a shift commander stationed at one of the stations. Canton Township Fire Department has transitioned to this model over the past five years mainly due to demands for service and a lack of volunteers.

The first seven full time members were hired in 1991 from the volunteer ranks along with a full time chief. At that time the department consisted of five stations and a total of approximately 90-100 volunteers. The full time staff consisted of two personnel working twenty-four/forty-eight hour shifts to provide coverage seven days a week. All full time members were required by the collective bargaining agreement to be a certified fire safety inspector within one year of appointment.

In 2003 Canton Township Fire Department started staffing a second station with part time members. These members came from the volunteer ranks and had to pass a written and physical agility test before being deemed qualified. The part time staff was initially on duty Monday-Friday 8am-6pm and responded from an opposite station than the full time staff. The part time staff functioned independently from the full time staff and had limited responsibilities other than responding to calls. This combination structure originally caused some challenges with the unionized full time staff. Full time union employees often had a different outlook on part time employees than management. Within Canton Township Fire Department part time employees are a necessity to maintain adequate services for the public. This system evolved over the next two years largely due to the passage of a tax levy which allowed for the expansion of the part time staffing to 24/7. At that time CTFD had roughly 30 part time members supplementing 24/7 staffing out of two stations. The growing pains of incorporating volunteer, part time and full time staffing were vast, challenging and forced Canton Township Fire Department to adapt.

Now with three levels of personnel, volunteer, part time and full time, the organization needed to be at the forefront of change. The volunteers felt they were being forced out of “their stations”, the part time members felt they were now “better” than the volunteers, and the full time members felt threatened by the part time members. The part time and volunteer groups now

struggled with how to coexist within the organization and the full time staff. CTFD attempted to integrate part time personnel into a volunteer station house. Although the part time members were hired from the volunteer ranks they were looked at as outsiders. The full time staff and part time staff were integrated in 2004 to start building consistency and unity. The remaining volunteer structure was changed multiple times over the years in an attempt to accommodate the declining number of volunteers. Canton Township Fire Department went to a paid per call system and volunteers were allowed to schedule time at a staffed station. If they responded on any calls they were compensated for the duration of the call. With increasing training requirements and family demands the volunteer ranks within CTFD kept declining.

In 2013 the last of the volunteer ranks were eliminated. Canton Township Fire Department utilized advertisements in the local paper and posting at two local hospitals for the recruitment of part time personnel. General requirements for applying for a part time position with CTFD is firefighter 2, Paramedic or EMT certification and be at least 21 years old. After an application, written test and interview process candidates were presented to the Board of Trustees to be sworn in. It was after this step candidates would qualify as conditional hires pending physicals and background checks. Once new members were hired they would undergo an orientation process lasting about a week. This consisted of time spent with senior officers reviewing departmental procedures and policies, station/equipment locations and general department operations. Personnel were then scheduled to work shift as a rider to allow for further evaluation and specific check-offs. The overall orientation process takes, on average, 90 days. This time frame can be shortened or extended based on the recruits experience level along with their performance during the evaluation process. The length of time from application to independent functioning with Canton Township Fire Department is generally four to five

months. The part time member's job expectations are the same as full time members just with less departmental responsibilities. These full time responsibilities include being a fire safety inspector, performing inspections and being assigned other related department tasks. They are expected to perform the same daily trainings, station duties and follow the same chain of command.

From 2006 thru 2012 Canton Township Fire Department maintained approximately 35-40 part time members and the full time staff grew to nine. During this time period CTFD had little to no turnover of part time members. During this same time period Canton Townships operating costs went from \$1.6 million with \$888,000 towards staffing costs. In 2012 CTFDs operating costs were \$1.7 million with staffing costs of \$1.1 million (Township, Budget and Operating Expenses & Income, 2006-2012). Canton Township Fire Department failed at passing a levy on two attempts, 2011 and 2012, which resulted in reducing daily staff by one personnel. After passage in 2013 CTFD reallocated existing personnel to a third station to now staff all three stations with 24/7 staffing. This model consisted of a Shift Commander, one full time and one part time member at each station functioning as combination companies (seven total personnel per day).

From 2012-2013 Canton Township Fire Department experienced a loss of 16 part time personnel while only hiring 10. The lack of hiring at this point was the result of a reduced labor force of applicants that met CTFD's minimum qualifications. Stark County in years past had an abundance of qualified applicants. With the recovering economy many of these same applicants were being hired for full time positions with other departments. While other departments in the area had started utilizing the part time model which also affected the labor force.

In 2014 Canton Township Fire Department hired four full time members to fill vacancies left from retirements and promotions. Canton Township Fire Department full time employees are hired from the part time ranks further reducing the number of part time employees. It was during this time frame that CTFD also began hiring part time members who were EMT-Basics. It was decided that there was a need to expand the potential hiring pool by accepting applications from individuals with a basic level certification. Many CTFD members looked at this as “lowering our standards” and not out of necessity. Between 2014 and 2016 Canton Township Fire Department allowed part time members to work 48 hours a week which enabled daily staffing to increase to eight per day. Canton Township Fire Department used a benefit waiver for part time members to work the additional hours. The waiver was in regards to the state maximum 1500 hour rule for part time employees. Canton Township Fire Department part time members schedule 12 or 24 hours shifts and utilize two scheduling models. The first is a “float” schedule. Employees would submit their availability for a six week period and would be scheduled on days that need filled. The second model is a “fixed” schedule. Employees would select a day of the week or a specific shift and would be scheduled routinely on that selected day.

In early 2016 due to mandates within the Affordable Care Act (Affordable Care Act) all part time members were reduced to 24 hours per week resulting in a decrease of one shift member per day. This resulted in a daily staffing decrease from seven to six 55% of the time for 2016. The ACA required all employers with 50 or more full time or full time equivalent employees (FTE) to provide health insurance. FTE employees are defined by hours worked and full time hours worked was now defined as over 30 hours per week. If an employer employs less than 50 employees they are not required to follow ACA mandates. This mandate accounts for all township employees. Previous to ACA mandates CTFD allowed part time members to work 48

hours per week under a state 1500 hour benefit waiver. Canton Township Fire Department had roughly seven part time employees who would work 48 hours a week consistently. With this model CTFD was over the 50 employee threshold and was advised by legal counsel to reduce their part time hours worked to fewer than 30 per week. This was required to reduce their employee count to fewer than 50 FTE employees. Canton Township Fire Department does not have the financial capacity to provide additional healthcare insurance had it continued its staffing model. Canton Township Fire Department is funded by two fire levies one is a continuous and the other is a five year renewable. Both levies generate approximately \$2.5 million dollars and EMS billing about another \$500,000 annually. Canton Township Fire Department current staffing costs are \$1.3 million in part time and full time wages only. Pensions and healthcare costs account for an additional \$348,000 per year. The demographics of Canton Township are that of which will not be able to support any further tax increases. The savings realized from hours cut due to ACA requirements was put back into staffing in the form of part time raises. The raises consisted of \$1.75 per hour for paramedics and \$1.50 for EMT basics. Canton Township offered 48 hours of PTO time to part time members who committed to a fixed schedule. This was done to help maintain CTFD current staffing after the hour restrictions were implemented and assist with recruiting potential applicants. Unfortunately even with raising the rate of pay and instituting additional incentives the available applicants remained limited. Turnover rates kept increasing and CTFD instituted a reimbursement of hiring costs, to the Township, if an employee resigned during their probationary period.

From 2015-2016 CTFD hired 18 part time members and lost 18. Canton Township Fire Department does not have the budget to constantly supplement staffing by utilizing overtime. It is only utilized to maintain a minimum six per day or to meet contractual obligations. In 2013

CTFD spent \$23,000 for overtime to cover part time vacancies either from call offs or no personnel available to cover these open shifts. From that time on it was determined to judiciously use overtime and leave some shifts unfilled. Without the ability to quickly and effectively replenish the ranks of lost part time staff members, daily operations, trainings and service will continue to become more challenging to maintain. Canton Township Fire Department views hiring just a “warm body” counter-productive but has found that having qualified, experienced and character people to choose from has become very difficult. The end result is inconsistent staffing levels, reduced morale and stagnant training programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature focus consisted of the review of previous research papers related to this topic from OFE and EFO. Data was collected from the U.S. Department of Labor and various articles in relation to part time employee retention/turnover in both public and private sector employment. The topic of this research paper is not new, but ever more prevalent in today’s fire service. The information that exists is very broad and ranging from private sector, public sector, and various types of industry employment. This research will attempt to answer more specific and pointed questions which will make the literature review more challenging.

This research evaluated the resignation letters from former Canton Township Fire Department personnel to determine reasons for voluntarily resigning. This found that of the 38 members that resigned from 2012-2016, 18 (43%) were to accept full time positions with other departments. Seven members were hired full time by CTFD to fill vacancies within the full time staff. Four members were on extended leaves of absence (LOA) and never returned. Nine already worked full time jobs and no longer wanted to commit to an additional job or had life changes

that hindered their ability to work continued hours (Township, 2010-2015). These letters reveal only what the employee wanted to as Canton Township Fire Department did not previously conduct exit interviews. CTFD will be conducting exit interviews of any future resigning members and the results will be included in this research project.

An OFE research paper by Vecchi showed findings of a correlation in longevity between those members that are certified as paramedics and those that are EMT-basics. It was further identified within his own organization that amounted to an average longevity of approximately two-to-one for paramedic versus EMT's (Vecchi, 2014). One component of employee turnover in today's workplace is generational. The workforce has become much more demographically diverse. It is not uncommon to find three different generations within the workplace. The Pew Report finds that millennials (18-34 year olds) have surpassed Generation X (35-50 year olds) workers as the largest share of the workforce. The Baby Boomers (over 50) still make up a small percentage of the workforce (Fry, 2015). In an article from Jeanne Meister she explains "generational tension" in the work place as a "lack of respect for someone who is from a different generation than you." She goes on to explain how we need to realize that each group has a distinct set of skills that they bring to the work place and not allow the differences to impact their work place. She encourages cross- generational mentoring to facilitate learning, sharing of knowledge, and experiences (Knight, 2014). The literature has shown that today's workforce is becoming more diverse and time restraints have contributed to the turnover of employees. This has been found to be true in both the public and private sector.

The trending "by choice" part time work force is one reason that people work part time. According to statistics from the Bureau of Labor there are six million people choosing to work part time. Their reasons vary from just working enough to pay their bills to pursuing a hobby or

other passion. This number reflects a 12% increase since 2007 according to (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). While most people enter the fire service to try and attain a full time job there are some that never succeed. This is due to age restrictions, life circumstances, or inability to meet standards required for full time status. This ultimately does not cease their desire to serve.

In a 2013 study it was discussed which workers from which industries would be more at risk to working reduced hours under the Affordable Care Act. The ACA defines part time hours to be less than 30 hours per week. The study found that 6.4 million workers work 30-36 hours per week and an additional 3.6 million have varying work hours and are at risk of having work hours reduced. The industries that were found to have the highest percentage of workers slightly over 30 hours were restaurants, nursing homes, accommodation, healthcare, retail trade, education and building services. The study also found the calculations for Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employees was complex and burdensome (Center, 2013). Businesses with 50 or fewer FTE employees are classified as a small employer and are able to operate outside of the ACA mandates. Organizations with 50-100 FTE are classified as a large employer and have to follow the mandates in the ACA.

To further explain the many variables of the part time workforce and define them this review looked at the U.S. Department of Labor report. This report showed that there are various classifications of part time workers. These are the “voluntary” and “involuntary” part time workers. According to the Department of Labor report involuntary part time workers are those who have had work hours reduced by their employer. The data reports that in 2015 the involuntary workforce was at 5.6 million. Voluntary part time workers are those who chose to want a “home/work” balance and choose part time work. The report goes on to document the “multiple job-holders” in the work force. This category lends to be the majority within the fire

service and can be a better reflection on the trends within the fire service. The data shows that there were 7,706,300 multiple job holders. This in coloration with the “involuntary” work force is a two million worker increase and it can be asserted that most, if not all, involuntary part time workers are also multiple job holders (Labor, 2015). The literature review reflected the workforce trending across all spectrums. Part time workers fall into two categories, voluntary or involuntary, and do so for many reasons. This review revealed the impact made by the Affordable Care Act and the part time work force. The ACA also had a dramatic effect on employers both large and small.

There have been multiple studies conducted to compare various turnover rates and the cost of turnover. In a report from the Center for American Progress, they convey the complexities of comparing the various costs and reasons for employee turnover. They state that because some jobs have very high costs of turnover and others far less significant, there is wide range of estimates across all types of employment. In this report there were 30 case studies done across various employment arenas. The turnover costs range from 5.8% up to 213% dependent upon the job and the skills needed to perform a particular job. In conclusion the report states that many companies could avoid high turnover cost and retain effective employees with policy changes (Boushey & Glynn, 2012). They go on to conclude that family-friendly and work place flexible policies will help retain valuable employees thus reducing costs associated with training new members. In reviewing Canton Township Fire Departments hiring costs the following was found. The costs associated with hiring part time personnel can be broken down as follows:

(Marks, 2017)

- Pre-employment drug screening- \$175.00
- Background check- \$50.00
- Uniforms and turnout gear-\$3000.00

- Overtime (orientation process)- \$1050.00
- Extra ride time costs- \$3000.00

In an OFE research paper by Vecchi it was found, from a small survey sampling, that the majority of their part time staff was dissatisfied in two categories, schedule flexibility and external training. He also finds that regardless of retention strategies implemented by similar fire departments in Ohio, there is no solid correlation between the incentives and rate of turnover (Vecchi, 2014). The most common forms of incentives found with similar departments were schedule flexibility, external training opportunities, internal promotions to full time, and holiday pay. While many departments now offered these incentives the majority had found no significance change in retention rates. The literature review showed that limited data was available to turnover comparisons. It did reveal that incentive based programs had no direct impact on retention rates. With the revelation of turnover costs and the failure of incentive based programs employers need to more efficiently spend their funds.

In an article in the Five-Thirty-Eight it was stated that the Affordable Care Act hasn't caused a shift from full time employment to part time. It has rather forced employers to reduce part time workers hours further impacting those workers who are most vulnerable. In essence the report finds employers are capping current part time workers hours at or below 30 to avoid providing health insurance. The report goes on to state that the ACA has had a separate unexpected positive affect. He states that "many workers who would rather work part time are now able to" (Casselmann, 2015). The ACA now affords part time workers the ability to acquire health insurance through the market exchanges not solely relying on a full time employer. So those members of the workforce who are only working full time jobs to qualify for health insurance now have options. He concludes that the dynamics of the ACA across the American

workforce is both diverse and undefined. The part time employee who had hours reduced but now have access to health insurance via the exchanges. Does the tradeoff benefit one side or the other? Only the individual circumstances can answer that.

A research paper by Brad Kavetski stated that “the largest expense for most municipal departments is workforce”. Employee turnover “replacement” cost to municipal departments approach 50 percent of the departing employee’s salary. Mr. Kavetski goes on to surmise that if this statement is accurate “employers should now be implored to do whatever it takes to retain employees”. This is due to the amount of time, energy and money that is invested in the employees compared to the added cost, training and morale issues in replacement. It was also determined that the annual cost agencies experience from turnover is approximately \$72,000. Mr.Kavetski concludes that organizational leaders need to recognize that they have a retention problem and be willing to identify the factors involved. This will then require forward thinking and change management to rectify the factors involved (Kavetski, 2016).

The literature review showed that there are many factors that impact part time employment. This ranges from the worker who only wants to work part time to the worker who has limited options. The Affordable Care Act has shown to have a dramatic impact on the employee and employer. Many employers have had to reduce part time hours due to mandates resulting in the need for many to attain further part time work. The review has showed that costs for training new employees has increased for employers due to higher turnover rates and that incentive based programs have little impact on retention rates. This revelation should force employers to look harder at the causes of turnover and attempt to change those that are within their control. The literature review showed that part time worker issues are prevalent across all forms of industry and business.

PROCEDURES

The focus of this research paper was to gather information and data in regards to part time turnover rates in similar departments. The basis of initial information gathering and trending among local, similar staffed, departments was conducted utilizing surveys.

In an effort to collect data for this research project the surveys were focused on part time turnover rates, the effect on the organization, and steps taken to address the issue(s).

One aspect of data collection will be from Canton Township Fire Department instituting exit interviews. CTFD has never conducted exit interviews so this is a new process instituted into the resignation process. In order to collect a data sample of past part time employees a questionnaire was sent out to 33 former part time members via emails. A similar questionnaire was distributed to 24 current part time members via emails. The goal is to gain insight into why these members left CTFD and what they can do as an organization to maintain our current staff. A third survey was distributed to 144 departments in three surrounding counties. Of the 144 surrounding departments this research looks to focus on departments that utilize part time employees. This may limit the number of respondents and data collection from this group.

The exit interviews will attempt to collect data and information in an attempt to identify both internal and external factors related to part time employees and the department. This research project looks to identify the weaknesses within CTFD's part time system and steps that they can take to improve their retention. The exit interviews hope to also identify the positive aspects of their part time staffing and continue to improve those points.

Some of the data this project looks to collect with the surveys, questionnaires and interviews from former and current part time employees is as follows: What were or are their

motivations to work part time with CTFD? What did they find to be the most positive aspect of their employment with CTFD? What did they find the most negative? This research will also inquire about what CTFD can do to improve its part time staffing.

Research will review past employment records with CTFD to compile any data that they have in the form of number of hires over the past three years and resignation letters of those that have departed. It is suspected that data will be limited since CTFD has never conducted exit interviews. CTFD has recently implemented exit interviews so this new data can be compared to any older information that may be attained.

Definition of Terms

Full Time shift employee- An employee who works 50.66 hours per work working 24 hours then off 48 hours.

Part Time shift employee- An employee who works no more than 28 hours per week working 12 or 24 hour shifts.

Affordable Care Act- The Affordable Care Act (also known as ACA or Obamacare) is legislation passed in 2010 that changed how Americans enroll in and receive healthcare coverage. The legislation is overseen by the United States [Department of Health and Human Services](#). (HealthIT, 2016)

Combination department- A fire department that utilizes part time and full time employees for staffing.

Limitations of the Study

This studies limitation revolved around the responses received from the surveys distributed. The factors involved were related to similar size and structure of department, number

of survey responses, and subjectivity of personal responses. The internal surveys not returned could be attributed to members not wanting to participate or inaccurate Email addresses. The same could be said for the external surveys distributed. The lack of responses from the external surveys could also be attributed to the number of departments that utilize part time staff.

RESULTS

This research project utilized three surveys for data collection. One survey went out to part time members who had resigned in the past three years another went out to current part time members and the third went out to departments in adjoining counties to Canton Township.

The results from the first survey to former part time members were as follows. There were 34 surveys sent out by utilizing ZOHO and email addresses. The focus of the survey was “Why they left CTFD?” Of the 34 surveys sent out 13 (38%) were completed and returned. Of the 13 responses all listed their reasons for leaving to be fulltime job related. Of those 13 responses 12 listed their response as specifically leaving after attaining full time fire department jobs and one left due to leaving the profession. Training was listed as the most positive aspect of their work experience with CTFD on nine of the 13 (69%). Of the negative aspects of their time with CTFD minimum hour requirements were the number one negative aspect for past members. Many felt too much pressure from scheduling to meet the required 24 hour minimum requirement. The low number of respondents contributed to the overall data collection. The small sample of respondents could be attributed to the individual not wanting to participate in the survey or no longer having a valid Email address.

The second survey was distributed in the same manner to 28 current part time members. Of the 28 sent out 16 (57%) responded. This survey looked to discover how current part time

members feel about working at CTFD. The highest response that members liked the most was the current group of employees. This was on seven of the 16 responses (43%). The second highest most liked response was training by five of 16 (31%).

The least liked aspect of current part time members with a response by four is they feel there is too much “busy work”. The survey also revealed that the required 24 hours per week created conflict with six of the respondents. These respondents worked another full time fire department job and the required 24 hours a week for CTFD caused challenges. The results and data collection was limited based on the number of returns. Thirteen of the returned surveys were from members who were working multiple part time jobs. The surveys that were not returned were from members who had full time jobs.

The third survey was distributed to 144 departments in four counties. This survey was sent to three adjoining counties of Tuscarawas, Wayne and Summit along with Stark. Of the 144 surveys distributed via Emails there were 36 (25%) responses returned. Of these responses 21 (58%) came from combination departments utilizing part time and full time. The next was 10 (28%) respondents came from volunteer organizations and the third was five (14%) from all part time departments. The surrounding counties to Stark are a mix of rural volunteer/combo departments, larger career departments, and have varying financial climates.

It was revealed that 53% of part time members worked 12-24 hours per week while 31% worked 24-36 hours per week. This survey revealed that 14 (53%) out of the 36 that answered have no staffing issues in regards to part time turnover and only three (1%) said they did.

Respondents were asked “How many part time members have you lost in the past 12 months?” The results showed that each respondent had some turnover of part time members but only three departments resulted in daily staffing issues. Respondents were asked “What is the top

reason part time member left?” The largest percentage was 21 (60%) left for full time job opportunities and the second and third reasons listed at seven (20%) were family (personal) and other (not listed). The smallest percentage was financial concerns at two (1%). Realizing that departments were experiencing turnover the survey attempted to find out what, if anything, they were trying to do to decrease their turnover numbers. What was found was that 10 said they would do nothing at all and five were very likely to implement changes. The other respondents, 16, stated that they were unsure if any changes would be implemented. The survey also asked if any organizations had implemented any changes and how successful they were. Of the respondents five (15%) said that they did implement changes. Of those five there were two (6%) that responded that the changes were effective.

The exit interviews conducted consisted of six interviews. The interviews revealed similar results as the surveys. All six were leaving part time employment with CTFD due to newly acquired full time jobs that left them with time constraints. One revelation from all six was the feeling amongst the part time members that the full time members thought less of them.

Research question one, “why does CTFD have such a high turnover of part time employees?” can be answered based on survey one. The results of the external survey of past members pointed to two leading factors resulting in resignations. The first is the 24 hour per week requirement and the gaining of full time employment.

Research question two, “why do people apply and ultimately work part time for CTFD?” can partly be answered based on survey two. There were 31% of respondents that listed training as their second most liked response. The current group of employees was number one.

Research question three, “how does part time employee turnover at CTFD compare with other similar departments within the region? This can be answered with the results from survey

three and respondents from the surrounding counties to Canton Township. The results showed that Canton Township was experiencing a greater effect from part time turnover than any respondents. It was also revealed that CTFD relies much more heavily on part time personnel to supplement its staffing

Research question four “what are some changes Canton Township Fire Department could implement to help remedy the part time turnover rate within CTFD?” can be answered using all aspects of the data collection. The largest number from survey two, 12 of 13, of responders listed the minimum 24 hours week requirement and time constraints as their greatest reason for leaving. Relaxing of the minimum 24 hour per week requirement may be a solution CTFD could consider. Another solution could be to offer shorter shift hours to allow for greater scheduling flexibility.

DISCUSSION

Part time staffing at Canton Township Fire Department has become a virtual revolving door over the past three and a half years. This was not always the case. From the implementation of part time staffing in 2003 up until 2013 CTFD experienced very little turnover and exceptional growth within the part time staff. The part time training and job requirements have remained the same and are equal to that of a full time member. The rationale has been that the expectations shouldn't be any less if CTFD is asking for the same performance from every member of the team. There are of course some part time members that feel that this is just their “B” job and they should not have to meet the same demands as full time staff. This is met with some understanding but it is understood that they accepted a position with an understanding of

the requirements and expectations. Since the beginning of 2013 Canton Township Fire Department has experienced a loss of 33 part time employees for varying reasons but mostly due to gaining full time employment. This was confirmed with the results of survey one. The turnover creates a large expense in continual training, orientation, pre-employment and outfitting. Turnover rates increased so dramatically that CTFD instituted a reimbursement policy, (to the township), for all cost incurred for hiring, if a new member leaves within their probation period of six months. There have been incentive plans, monetary and scheduling, implemented in an attempt to keep employees and attract trained applicants. It was revealed with the results of survey three that CTFD is in the minority of departments implementing change due to turnover. The available new hires come with very little experience and only the basic training level which affects the progression of staff training and costs. What was found through this research project was that many departments that utilize part time staff do not rely on them for daily staffing only to supplement. It was also discovered that many departments allow minimal hours worked which reduces the amount of shifts that they could cover if utilized to their full potential. Only three respondents stated that they offer any type of “incentive” for part time members reflecting that they had minimal turnover issues. It has become evident through this project that as long as CTFD continues to utilize part time staffing in the manner that it has they will continue to have issues with staffing. The effect of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) on CTFD, beginning in 2015, has been a major contributing factor to their workforce. This essentially led to the reduction of hours worked per week creating seven open shifts per week (one per day). The ACA and the natural turnover of employees created a “perfect storm” for staffing shortages within its organization. Incentive programs and flex scheduling have been implemented over the past three and a half years but have yielded few positive results. Part time members who are utilizing the

“fixed scheduling” system are entitled to 48 hour of PTO time or they can cash those hours in for pay. In light of that incentive for part time members, it was added to the union contract to allow the “cashing in” of two vacation days for pay in lieu of time off. This accounted for a potential of 40 part time shifts and 30 full time shifts that would not need to be covered if the cash option was utilized. Canton Township Fire Department estimated that 50% would take advantage of the cash option which would create 35 fewer open shifts. Unfortunately, no one took this option leaving CTFD administration to conclude that it is the time off benefit and not the monetary that the employees want most. The external factors that Canton Township Fire Department has little to no control of have a very dynamic effect on their part time staffing. These factors include:

- Full time jobs
- Multiple part time jobs
- Family concerns
- Attaining full time employment
- Training requirements

It has become apparent through this research that the external factors have a greater bearing on the decision of a part time member to stay employed with Canton Township Fire Department than the internal. CTFD would do well to be more vigilant and focused on these external factors when possible. While not being able to control these factors, it would enable CTFD to try and forecast potential short comings. While the issue of staffing would appear to be a more global issue this research and its responses would suggest that it is a more local issue. Canton Township Fire Department could benefit from focusing on more local factors affecting their turnover and addressing them. Realistically Canton Township Fire Department needs to look at their current overall part time staffing and determine if it is sustainable. The effects on the available applicants are somewhat out of their control so emphasis should be placed on those factors that they can control. This may require an honest look at current operations and the need,

or not, for their current levels of staffing. This is a dynamic problem that will continue to call for constant evaluation and adjustments as the organization moves forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

At the conclusion of this study this research has concluded the following recommendations.

It would be wise for Canton Township Fire Department to thoroughly reevaluate its current part time staffing to determine the overall efficiency of its operation and its sustainability. Is Canton Township Fire Department adequately staffed? Is Canton Township Fire Department meeting the expectations of the community? Can Canton Township Fire Department continue to meet the needs of the community in the future? These questions are ones that this research project has created that need to be answered moving forward to allow CTFD to address their need for an increase of part time members and the retention of current staff. A recommendation should be made to work with other local organizations in forming “working pools” and sharing of the labor force. This may help CTFD sustain a viable part time worker program. With the communities’ demographics and tax base (growth) limited the increase of funds for more full time growth is not realistic. Canton Township Fire Department must continue to develop and explore ways of recruiting and retaining qualified part time members. Canton Township Fire Department already offers competitive wages and uniforms along with extras such as PTO days, paid training (CE), Paramedic school reimbursement (with three year commitment) and flexible scheduling. It is apparent that these factors alone will not sustain Canton Township Fire Department part time staffing but are factors within their control.

Canton Township Fire Department could also offer stipends for specific certifications

helping to attract more experienced part time applicants while maintaining its current staff. This recommendation would also allow for participation in specialty operations further enhancing their efficiency. It would probably be beneficial for CTFD to further investigate the expectations from their part time staff as to what motivates them to continue employment or what keeps them employed. There may be some factors involved with minimal economic impact, or none at all, that could improve the standing of the part time staff.

As a last resort Canton Township Fire Department may have to consider a reduction in service or staffing if their current situation continues to trend downward. This research has shown that relying on part time employees, for other than supplementing staff is not a standard practice. This would be the least favorable recommendation but the only sustainable one if CTFD part time turnover continues. Canton Township Fire Department would need to anticipate the ramifications of this recommendation and be prepared to manage the challenges of such a change. In order to assist with these decisions it would be recommended that Canton Township evaluate its community's wants. This could be accomplished by developing a "customer survey" and also assist with a strategic planning process in the future.

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APPENDIX 1 – OUTSIDE DEPARTMENT SURVEY

What size is your department?

- 10-20
- 20-30
- 30-40
- 40 and over

What type of department do you operate?

- All full time
- Full time and Part time (combination)
- Paid per Call
- Volunteer
- All part time

How many part time members do you employ?

What is your minimum daily staffing?

What is the average hours worked per week of a part time member?

How many part time staff members do you staff on a daily basis?

Does part time turnover create staffing issues within your organization? If yes, can you briefly explain?



How many part time members have you lost in the past 12 months?

What are the top reason part time members leave your organization?

- Full time job opportunity
- Family (personal) restrictions
- Department leadership
- Financial
- Other: _____

Do you offer any part time incentive(s)?

- Yes
- No

How likely is your organization to implement changes to help with your part time turnover rate?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Likely Not at all likely

How effective have these changes been?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Effective N/A

How effective has your organization been in implementing changes to improve turnover?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Effective N/A

What were the changes?

APPENDIX 2 – CURRENT PART TIME STAFF SURVEY

How long have you been a part time staff member at CTFD?

Why did you apply to CTFD?



What aspects do you like the most working at CTFD?



What aspects do you like the least?



What changes, if any, do you feel could be made to improve our part time model?



How has your overall experience been with CTFD?



APPENDIX 3- FORMER PART TIME MEMBERS

1. How long were you employed as a part time employee by CTFD?

2. Why did you apply at CTFD?

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3. Why did you resign from CTFD?

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4. What were some positive aspects of working at CTFD?

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5. What were some negative aspects of working at CTFD?

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6. What was your overall experience working part time at CTFD?

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APPENDIX 4 -PART TIME EMPLOYMENT EXIT INTERVIEW

I would like to take a moment to thank you for your service to the Canton Township Fire Department and its community. It is unfortunate that you have to leave employment with us but I wish you well in your next endeavor.

I would appreciate if you take a moment to complete this exit interview. This will allow us to monitor reasons for leaving and gain insight on what we can improve upon.

- 1. Why are you resigning from CTFD?

- 2. Is there anything that CTFD could have done different to improve your part time employment with CTFD?

- 3. Is there anything, in your opinion, that CTFD could do differently with our part time staffing model?

4. What did you find to be your best experience with CTFD?

5. What did you find to be your least enjoyable experience with CTFD?

6. Do you feel you were treated fairly by members of CTFD? If not, please explain.

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions as we are continually looking for ways to improve the work experience here at Canton Township Fire Department.

Date

Name

Christopher Smith

Fire Chief

Canton Township Fire Department