

YOUTH WORK COALITION

May 2006

THE GOAL of the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition is to help achieve its vision of a strong, valued youth work profession through documentation, education and communications activities and by serving as a locus for joint action and collaboration within the field. We believe this entails progress in five key areas:

- Standards and competencies
- Professional development and training resources
- Learning delivery systems
- Career ladders and compensation guidelines
- Research and evaluation systems

in this issue:

- 2 Just Imagine
- 3 Voices from the Field
- 4 Promising Practices From the Field
- 5 Notable Projects, Studies & Events
- 7 Learning from Other Fields
- 8 Developing Wealth

Welcome to the second edition of the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition's Bulletin.

The Coalition's vision is of a strong, valued youth work profession whose workforce is stable, prepared, supported and committed to youth.

This issue begins with a picture of what it might look like when we have achieved progress in the five key areas that help build the youth work profession: standards and competencies; professional development and training resources; learning delivery systems; career ladders and compensation guidelines and research and evaluation systems. Dale Blyth, University of Minnesota, begins this issue by helping us imagine the future of the youth work profession.

Voices from the Field includes feedback given to Kica Gazmuri from frontline youth workers about these issues. Promising practices outlines some recent and ongoing efforts to collect information that will help us understand and be better able to support youth workers. *Notable Projects, Studies and Events* includes some recent publications and activities as well as some to watch for, and *Learning from Other Fields* focuses on what can be learned from child care. This edition concludes with commentary by Karen Pittman on *Ten Ideas for Enriching the Profession*.

Just

IMAGINE

Reflections by Dale Blyth

University of Minnesota

Imagine a time and place when . . .

The field of youth development has in place five key components that can make a difference.

Imagine a set of standards and competencies . . .

That act as magnets to pull the field of youth development together.

Magnets that allow the field to sculpt great efforts from the bits and pieces that currently exist and fit the community, the organizations, and the people

who make a difference. Imagine a set of standards and competencies strong enough to help hold us together yet not so strong that they create rigid approaches and unyielding mandates.

Imagine a set of training and professional development resources . . .

That act as building blocks to help the field create wonderful new learning opportunities for youth development professionals.

Imagine building blocks that work together, like Lego blocks, because they are designed to fit together in a myriad of wonderful ways and come in a variety of formats and sizes.

Imagine Learning Delivery Systems . . .

That deliver the learning experiences that youth workers need on a just in time, anytime, basis. Imagine systems that help those designing training to deliver stronger learning opportunities and build sets of opportunities that can lead to certification, degrees, and credentials that matter. Systems that help youth development professionals find and receive the training they need and which have value across organizations and communities.

Imagine Career Ladders and Compensation Guidelines . . .

That provide youth development professionals with a map and many paths to a better future. Maps that can guide their careers and help ensure they receive fair rewards aligned with their talents, knowledge, and experience. Maps that ensure those working with youth do not have to switch careers—moving up into administration or out of the field altogether. Maps that include ladders and guidelines that also help organizations and communities reward staff fairly and at levels appropriate to the individual's skills and the roles they play.

Imagine a Time When Research and Evaluation . . .

Help us to understand what is working, craft better training opportunities, more effectively recruit and retain the best youth workers, improve the intentionality of their practice, and craft policies that support these essential components in a cost-effective fashion. A time when science helps us build a system with credibility and authority.

Finally, imagine a time when the investments an individual makes in their career and the investments an organization makes in their staff pay off in making a difference in the lives of youth everyday. Isn't it time we stop just imagining and start building a sensible national approach to strengthening and supporting those who work with youth?

Including Youth Workers in Building the Profession

By Francisca B. Gazmuri, *CalSAC*

“In many cases any one youth worker acts as case manager, teacher, mentor, advocate, program leader, coach, and so on.”

A year and a half ago I was presented with a unique opportunity to participate, as one of five youth worker representatives from across the country, in the Wingspread conference on Attracting, Developing and Retaining Youth Workers for the Next Generation. I joined the conference as a representative from the Bay Area’s Youth Development Peer Network (YDPN), an advocacy and professional development network of youth development professionals. When asked their opinions on the building of a professional development system for youth workers, YDPN members had this to say:

- We need our field to be recognized as a real profession and valued by society in general and by the institutions and organizations we work in and partner with.
- We want clearer ways to train for and develop a career in youth work.
- We want adequate compensation for the work we do, and clear connections between our experiences, knowledge and skills and advancement opportunities.
- We need the organizations we work for to dedicate time and resources to support our professional development.
- We need sustainable systems through which to support, learn from, share with and advocate for each other and the field.

The five youth workers at the conference were given an invaluable gift that we took full advantage of, as our voices became an integral, and at times, provocative part of the conversation. Many of the concerns and ideas that we shared at the conference came from our direct experience in the field, including:

- The impact of a professional development system on the current diversity of the field and the future recruitment and retention of quality youth workers: youth workers that bring a wealth of knowledge and competencies because they often come from the very same communities as the youth they serve.
- Our belief that high quality youth work is and should be a full time job. In many cases any one youth worker acts as case manager, teacher, mentor, advocate, program leader, coach, and so on.
- Meaningful youth worker engagement as the planning continues. Youth workers should be telling their stories, sharing their thoughts, voicing their concerns, engaging their peers, and helping to build the system.
- Engagement of youth workers in ways that work for them, through channels that they can easily access.
- The potential for this level of real and meaningful involvement in system building to provide professional development opportunities for youth workers in the areas of research, evaluation, public policy, advocacy, and training.

Moving forward, we cannot forget that, not only should the voice and engagement of youth workers be central to building a system, but the leadership of the next generation of youth workers will be critical to maintaining and growing it.

A Snapshot of the Youth Work Profession

By Nicole Yohalem, *Forum for Youth Investment*

“There is no national data set on youth workers, or on youth-serving programs. While several large, national youth-serving organizations collect data on their own programs, much of the data are unreliable and often inaccurate... as with other sectors we studied, the lack of good information about youth workers and what they do stands in sharp contrast to the documented benefits of youth programs.”

Despite the stark reality captured in the Casey Foundation’s 2003 paper, *The Unsolved Challenge of System Reform* (see sidebar), several recent studies, combined with some that are currently underway, should soon provide us with the clearest picture to date of what the youth work profession looks like. The research will give us information about—who youth workers are, where they work, how they are supported on the job, and what their aspirations are.

This summer, reports from the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition (through a project hosted by the Forum for Youth Investment) and the National Afterschool Association should yield important insights into the profession, drawing on a vast array of survey and focus group data that has been collected over the past several months all across the country, with support from Cornerstones for Kids. Outside of this work, other recent efforts summarized below have helped fill in some of the gaps.

Indiana Youth Institute Workforce Study

In 1999, the Indiana Youth Institute surveyed full-time youth professionals and agency directors across the state of Indiana. They learned that their average worker was age 36, had two children, worked approximately 44 hours per week and earned between \$20,000 and \$29,000 annually. The average respondent had been in the profession for eight years, and spent only 25-50% of her time in direct service with youth. While 80% of the respondents reported having health insurance, the majority described it as “substandard.” Slightly more than half of those surveyed saw themselves continuing in the field, with salary, benefits, length of the workday, and family obligations playing into that decision.

CUNY’s Workforce Development Study

In 2002 – 2003, a landscape study of Youth Workers in Out-of-School Time was conducted in New York City by CUNY’s Workforce Development Initiative. The staff that participated were predominantly female, under age 30, single, and of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Seventy-three percent of front-line staff had some college experience; 13% had a bachelor’s degree. While only 22% of those surveyed had been employed at their current job for over three years, 80% reported the desire to remain a youth worker (75% of those in college wanted to remain in the field). While their most consistent job responsibility was providing homework help, professional development in this area was rarely available.

Massachusetts Out-of-School Time Workforce Study

In 2005, in *Strengthening After-School Programs for All Children and Youth: The Massachusetts Out-of-School Time Workforce*, Achieve Boston drew on several data sources to piece together a picture of the state's school-age care and after-school workforce (not including those serving ages 14-18). While OST staff reflect significant racial and ethnic diversity, those in managerial positions are predominantly white. Staff come to the field from a variety of paths, and a significant proportion need further training in child and youth development. Forty-one percent of SAC and 38% of after-school staff hold an associates degree or higher. Two-thirds of OST staff work part-time, and the average wage for an assistant group leader is \$8.45 per hour. Only one-quarter of OST staff receive health benefits through their employer (compared with 44% of all part-time workers in the state). One-fourth to one-third of staff leave their positions annually.

San Francisco Beacons Workforce Study

In February 2006, the Beacon Workforce Study revealed a workforce with an interesting paradox of high job satisfaction (90%) combined with high turnover (65% have been in their position two years or less). Staff reflect the diverse ethnic and gender composition of San Francisco, and the average Beacon worker is 23 years old. Thirty-three percent say they plan to stay in the field for a total of five years or less, which may be associated with stress (72% find their work stressful) and other extrinsic factors such as pay and working conditions. Forty-three percent are offered no benefits at all (including insurance, vacation and retirement), and less than half feel they have access to adequate working space. Among the 63% who feel they have opportunities for promotion, most (69%) intend on staying in their jobs.

Together, these studies begin to paint a picture of the youth work profession. Yet they are based on different research questions and tools, and capture different slices of the overall population of interest. With new data forthcoming this year, we hope to build on these and have a better information base to guide future planning and action within the field as a whole.

NOTABLE PROJECTS, STUDIES AND EVENTS

WORKFORCE WEBSITE

The mission of **Cornerstones for Kids (C4K)** is to improve the lives and circumstances of vulnerable children. C4K is a not for profit organization formed in 2004, and led by the Cornerstone Consulting Group, to house and manage the Human Services Workforce Initiative (HSWI). The premise of HSWI is that human services can positively impact the lives of vulnerable children and families, but that we cannot produce better outcomes for these individuals without addressing the workforce charged with helping them. In partnership with key national and state organizations in the fields of child welfare, juvenile justice, child care, youth development and employment service, C4K is identifying the challenges facing this workforce, highlighting best practices, and working towards policy solutions. HSWI is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more information about Cornerstones for Kids and HSWI, please visit: www.cornerstones4kids.org.

PROFESSIONAL AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT LISTSERV

A new **Community of Practice** (CoP) has been developed by National 4-H Headquarters to further the work of the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition. The purpose of this CoP is to promote the professional growth and learning of youth workers. Designed for those who have interest or responsibility for training, staff development or the professional development of youth workers, the *Giving Them our Best* listserv uses the 5 key components identified by the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition as the framework for sharing knowledge in an online space. You can subscribe by sending a message to: lyris@lyris.csrees.usda.gov and leave the subject line blank and type the following message in the text area: subscribe givingthemourbest

EVALUATION EXCHANGE ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The current issue of the *Evaluation Exchange* from the Harvard Family Research Project, focuses on evaluating **professional development** across a range of fields, including after school and youth development, education, early childhood education, and child welfare. Many authors share innovative methods in professional development and many others give practical tools for measuring their impact. Find the issue online. Download a copy or read the HTML version at:

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue32/>

NEW YORK CENTER ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, RESEARCH AND POLICY

The After-School Corporation (TASC) has launched a new **Center** that will serve three interconnected functions: professional development, research, and policy. The Center will integrate courses, workshops, continuing education into professional development program models that will permit tiered access to meet the needs of individual staff. To complement these models, the Center will support research and policy initiatives that promote professionalization in the field. For more information contact: Millicent Paisley, mpaisley@tascorp.org

Setting the Stage for a Youth Development Associate Credential: A NATIONAL REVIEW OF PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS FOR THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME WORKFORCE

NIOST—the National Institute of Out-of-School Time—releases its **national review** in May 2006 that gleans lessons and captures candid opinions and data from those who have earned credentials, administered programs, and evaluated the impact of credentials. This review provides an assessment of the utility and benefits of credentials to improve the quality of OST services and working conditions for OST staff. For more information, contact Ellen S. Gannett at egannett@wellesley.edu.

NON-PROFIT SECTOR WORKFORCE LITERATURE REVIEW

American Humanics will release in April 2006 a **bibliography and literature review** titled, “Workforce issues in the nonprofit sector: generational leadership change and diversity.” It was researched and written by R. Patrick Halpern, a consultant to American Humanics. The bibliography includes information on the most recent research on such topics as workforce diversity and inclusiveness; workforce pipeline; leadership development; volunteer management and fundraising professionals; sub-sector workforce trends and needs; nonprofit sector careers; and general trends in the United States workforce. For a copy of the bibliography, contact Steve Bauer, Director, Initiative for Nonprofit Sector Careers, American Humanics, sbauer@humanics.org.

CAPTURING PROMISING PRACTICES IN THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF FRONTLINE YOUTH WORKERS

Watch in May 2006 for a new publication from the National Collaboration for Youth that provides **concrete strategies** and recommendations on recruiting and retaining frontline youth workers. In addition, there will be two 4-page Professional Development E-Series Newsletters that highlight these practices and a powerpoint presentation for others to use in this area. For more information contact pam@nassembly.org.

LEARNING FROM OTHER FIELDS

Professional Development Systems in Early Care and Education

By **Ellen Gannett**, *National Institute on Out-of-School Time* and **Nicole Yohalem**, *Forum for Youth Investment*

A strong valued youth work profession rests upon a system, according to the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition, with “a dynamic set of interrelated parts that deliver the desired result when activated in combination with each other.”

Professional development systems that take into account the following five components have been quite prolific and shown success in the early care and education (ECE) field:

- Core Competencies that define what staff need to know and do to work effectively with children and youth.
- A Training System that is grounded in the core competencies and is responsive to the diverse nature of the workforce.
- A Training and Trainer Approval System that ensures the quality of both the content and delivery of training.
- A Professional Registry that documents all relevant training and education completed by members of the field.
- Career Lattice and Pathways that link roles, responsibilities, and salary ranges.

All 50 states have some form of, or components of a professional development system for the ECE field (Armory, Morgan.G. et al., 2002; National Child Care Information Center, n.d.), which means that all states have at least some mechanisms in place to support providers in pursuing training and education.

While the majority of youth workers (individuals who work with or on behalf of youth ages 8 to 18 to facilitate their personal, social and educational development) do not benefit from this infrastructure, several state initiatives are afoot to retroactively extend those systems to support the needs of at least school-age care workers, reaching those employed in regulated programs serving children up to age 12. Alaska, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, and New York are all at various stages of developing core competencies, career lattices, and school-age credentials. Indiana has launched a combined school-age and youth development credential and Massachusetts has created a set of core competencies and is in the process of developing a career lattice.

While extending systems designed for young children will not be a perfect fit, there are valuable lessons to learn from the early childhood field, in particular the value of “systems” thinking. For example, the success of a credential will depend largely on the presence of funds to support training and education, incentive structures on the part of employers, and career ladders that allow for professional advancement. Because systems, by definition, have interdependent components that can not operate in isolation, it is critical that our field building efforts in youth work be intentional, strategic and coordinated.

DEVELOPING WEALTH

Ten Ideas for Enriching the Profession

By Karen Pittman, *Forum for Youth Investment*

“CEOs are interested in quality of care, retention issues, and youth outcomes, but when asked about the bottom line—paying youth workers more—the answer is usually no.”

This was one of the insights (see sidebar) offered by Harry Wilson, Associate Commissioner of the Administration for Children, Youth and Families within the Department of Health and Human Services. As a former youth worker, Wilson understands the goals of the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition and the challenges of doing work that, for many, feels like a calling but doesn’t cover the rent. Members of the Coalition spent a provocative hour with him discussing options for helping youth workers take charge of their careers and their lives. Here are some of the creative ideas that emerged:

Cross-site professional development. On-line opportunities for youth workers to document their skills, share experiences and arrange to trade places with youth workers in other cities for a year. The job swaps would be approved by organizations but initiated by youth workers themselves.

On-line credit unions. Opportunities for members of youth work associations across the country to come together around their financial goals—increasing their financial literacy, accessing options for financing education, home loans, saving for retirement.

Youth worker certificates. Flexible ways for youth workers to get portable credentials that matter.

Structured apprenticeships. Limited-time work opportunities, fashioned after Americorps, that allow interested workers to “come in and move on” while contributing to the field.

Personal supports. Youth work can be a high stress profession. Youth workers need access to confidential counseling and personal management supports.

Youth worker alliances. Youth worker alliances or networks whose members are individual youth workers, not organizations, are growing in number across the country. Linked together, these alliances could amass the numbers and networks needed to help youth workers take charge of their professional development and increase their wealth.

Group benefits. Youth worker associations and local and regional intermediaries can come together to secure quantity discounts on health insurance and other benefits that are frequently unavailable to workers through their individual jobs.

Merchandise discounts. The corporate community wants to help youth thrive, but they rarely think of supporting those who work with youth. Companies that support youth could also provide professional discounts to youth workers.

Loan forgiveness. Opportunities for students to work off educational loans if they go into youth work.

Celebrations. Youth work alliances can and should contribute to professional renewal through recognition efforts that involve their families and peers.

Too often, conversations about strengthening the youth work profession focus on the need to increase training and competencies in order to improve youth outcomes. The Next Generation Youth Work Coalition is committed to increasing opportunities for professional development. But it is equally dedicated to shining a spotlight on the needs and passions of youth workers, and on building a strong, stable workforce. This goal cannot be accomplished unless workers come together to identify and increase the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of front-line work with children and youth.

THE COALITION'S INITIAL STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

- Documenting activity and promising practices underway across the country related to building a strong, valued youth work profession;
- Raising awareness of such activity through regular communications;
- Creating opportunities for frontline youth workers and others committed to workforce issues to connect and communicate;
- Serving as a locus for joint action or advocacy efforts related to building the youth work profession as they arise.

the next generation **YOUTH WORK COALITION BULLETIN**

is compiled by Pam Garza, National Collaboration for Youth, through funding from Lilly Endowment, Inc. We thank them for their support but acknowledge that the information and opinions are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Lilly Endowment, Inc.