

## YOUTH WORK COALITION

July 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

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## What is the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition?

*The Next Generation Youth Work Coalition brings together individuals and organizations dedicated to developing a strong, diverse youth work workforce that is stable, prepared, supported and committed to the well-being and empowerment of young people.*

Each of the four workforce characteristics—*stable, prepared, supported and committed*—connects to a concrete strand of work currently underway in organizations and communities to address the challenges that threaten the ability of youth work professionals to do their jobs *and* live their lives.

### Who should be involved in the Coalition?

The mission of the Coalition is to provide a forum and a vehicle for *all* individuals and organizations at the national, state and local levels who work with and on behalf of youth. The Coalition is for those who influence or are influenced by workforce issues to come together to discuss, determine, document and form an action agenda. The action agenda is for building a strong, diverse workforce starting with a commitment to addressing the needs of front-line workers. The focus is the local youth work workforce, in particular those individuals working directly with children and youth.

The Coalition's membership includes:

- youth workers (front-line and management)
- funders (public and private)

- employers (public, private independent and affiliates)
- intermediaries (e.g. state and local networks, coalitions, alliances and support organizations)
- universities and colleges
- policy makers and influencers
- research and training organizations (national, regional and local)
- workforce investment boards
- young people interested in youth work

All are critical links in the chain that connects practice to policy.

### Why should I be involved?

Because, whatever your vantage point, you have a strong desire to:

- understand this rapidly growing workforce;
- engage in discussions about how to strengthen it;
- share information about workforce developments in your organization and community;
- begin or strengthen discussions among and between youth work professionals and others;
- access information, ideas, guides and tools that will help you make the most of your efforts;
- feel structurally connected to a larger movement and have your efforts and insights with those of others—be an active part of the voice and future of the Coalition.

By joining, you will receive the quarterly Next Generation Youth Work Bulletin and be on the mailing list for other publications. You can receive tools to host a workforce discussion in your organization, network or community. The primary role the Coalition will play, however, is to inform and support discussions about the public policy, institutional, organizational and individual practitioner changes needed to create a strong, diverse workforce.

***We are looking for change makers who want to be involved.***

## Youth Work Workforce Goals

### Stable:

**Reduce turnover by improving recruitment, increasing rewards, expanding career paths.**

### Prepared:

**Increase preparation by providing multiple opportunities and delivery systems.**

### Supported:

**Increase job satisfaction and performance by addressing needs for recognition, supervision, training and professional development and work/life balance.**

### Committed:

**Increase youth benefits by making the values, principles and goals of youth work clear and rewarding those who demonstrate them regularly in practice.**

# VOICES FROM THE FIELD - The Front-line Youth Worker

By Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom, *Forum for Youth Investment from Next Generation Youth Work Coalition Report*

*“If you are going to be a good youth worker you need someone to check in with on a regular basis, to make sure you are doing alright, taking care of yourself and really embracing your boundaries. That should be more of a focus in this field, making sure people get the help they need so they don’t get burned out.”*

The Next Generation Youth Work Coalition engaged over 140 front-line youth work professionals from both mid-sized and large urban areas, as well as rural towns, in focus groups across the country. During these discussions, youth workers discussed realities and surfaced tensions related to entry into the field, support and retention.

The quotes outlined below capture key themes raised during the focus groups, and demonstrate both the tremendous diversity of the field and some of the ongoing challenges that need to be addressed in order for youth work to continue as a strong, viable field into the future. The Forum for Youth Investment, which conducted the research on behalf of the Coalition, is developing a forthcoming report on the focus group data which will explore these and other themes in more detail.

## **Entry into the field:**

*“I was always interested in working with kids, so it felt natural to go into education. So I went to school, and got my teaching certification, and just realized that I did want to work with kids, but my aim was just a little off. So I kind of stumbled into it through AmeriCorps, which, to me, was a great entry.”*

*“I didn’t realize when I got into this position that I was a youth worker, and that it was youth development that I was doing.”*

*“I was a secretary for 16 years, and I was talking to a friend of mine and telling her I wanted to go into another field. I said, ‘I’m tired of pushing papers, and I want to do something for somebody. I want to make a difference.’”*

*“I never thought about getting into this field. But I did it as a summer job when I was 18, and all of these talents that were inside of me began to come out.”*

## **Support:**

*“I feel like I am very supported by my supervisor, and I feel very supported as an individual. But youth work is a piece of our organization. But it is not our entire piece, and it is not our entire focus. So I personally feel like when the time comes for cutting something, youth is one of the first things that they look at.”*

*“If you are going to be a good youth worker you need someone to check in with on a regular basis, to make sure you are doing alright, taking care of yourself and really embracing your boundaries. That should be more of a focus in this field, making sure people get the help they need so they don’t get burned out.”*

*“I don’t see youth work—the whole movement—having a voice or face. People can’t identify it, see it. We need a spokesperson who cares enough and can communicate who we are, the work we do, that we’re not going anywhere and that we need your support.”*

*“What would be great is to see where I can go with my experience aside from exactly what I do right now. Because I love what I do, but I’m going to need change and I know that. I can’t have the exact same position for 12 years. So what else can I do with what I’ve learned?”*

**Retention:**

*“After watching this go on for five years, watching the turnover at our agency, I think somebody needs to recognize that if they paid more in this field, they would get people to stick with it. I think about the amount of turnover, and think, do people consider this a career?”*

*“That is a challenge with this work, in general. They want people who have degrees, but then the jobs are so terminal. You cannot progress unless you leave that agency. And that’s kind of frustrating because some people are leaving the field only because there’s no next [position].”*

*“If there was one body representing youth workers that would help. We really are low-income folks, you know. How can we be exposed to incentives like they have for teachers [e.g., homebuyers and loan forgiveness programs]? How can we get counseling and assistance on financing further education? You know, things that would help us stay in this field.”*

## Definition of a Youth Worker

**A youth worker is an individual who works with and on behalf of youth to facilitate their personal, social, and educational development and enable them to gain a voice, influence, and place in society as they make the transition for dependence to independence.**

## PROMISING PRACTICES From the Field

**Glimpse at how one system has used the resources from the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition to strengthen their Professional Development work.**

**By Barbara Stone, National 4-H Headquarters**

**4-H** was taking steps to frame a comprehensive national professional development system at the same time the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition was forming. In fact, National 4-H Headquarters was a co-sponsor and active participant in the Wingspread Conference in 2004 that launched the Coalition and 4-H staff members have served in a leadership position since that time helping to form the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition. The process for outlining goals and objectives (framework) created at the Wingspread Conference in 2004 was a perfect fit for 4-H: their ground-breaking work was verified for use by the National 4-H Professional Development Task Force and a subject matter expert panel. The professional development framework was slightly refined for 4-H and, then officially adopted by 4-H in 2005. The professional development system provides

a common language for 4-H and across the field of youth work. It also strengthens cooperation and innovation within and across organizations in order to meet the broad needs of youth workers across the span of their careers.

This framework is being broadly communicated and implemented across 4-H. To encourage adoption and diffusion, a professional development Community of Practice (CoP) was launched and states are using the 4-H professional development framework to focus their limited resources towards critical areas of learning for 4-H youth workers. The CoP provides an opportunity, based on the matrix, to share resources and ideas for dissemination and enhancement. Funds have been targeted towards studies that will paint a broad picture of 4-H youth worker needs and towards learning and development efforts that promise a strong impact on front-line youth workers and their daily practice.

The goal of the 4-H professional development system is that 4-H educators reflect quality, distinction and leadership in the field of youth development which leads to positive outcomes for young people. State 4-H program executives also expect that the system will help them be more accountable to the organizations, systems and funding partners that support 4-H youth development.

## NOTABLE PROJECTS, STUDIES AND EVENTS

Below are some of the projects, studies and events that document and disseminate notable activities in the youth work workforce arena.

### STATEWIDE SUMMIT ON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

In December 2006, Community Network for Youth Development, the Youth Development Peer Network and the California School Age Consortium, *in partnership with the national Next Generation Youth Work Coalition*, plan to co-sponsor a statewide summit on workforce development for youth workers in California. The purpose of the summit is to provide youth workers and organizational leaders with an overview of the state of workforce development for the afterschool and youth development field. Participants will have an opportunity to examine national, statewide and local efforts to build a system of support for youth workers and to form a local coalition of stakeholders interested in moving this work forward in the San Francisco Bay Area.

### Forthcoming Coalition Research

This fall, the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition through funding from Cornerstones for Kids will release a report highlighting key findings from two major workforce studies focused on front-line youth workers, conducted by the National Afterschool Association and the Forum for Youth Investment (as host for the Coalition). Together, the studies reflect the views and experiences of over 5,000 workers across the country, working in a range of after-school and other youth development programs. The report will shed important light on key workforce questions such as, Who are youth workers? How are they supported on the job in terms of compensation, training and supervision? How satisfied are they in their work? What do they think would most help advance the field? Implications of these findings for policy and practice are also discussed. Watch for a summary and link to the report in the next issue of the Bulletin!

## MONTANA REPORT ON FRONT-LINE YOUTH WORKERS

A new report provides some surprising and encouraging insights into the status of professional youth workers in one northwestern state. Titled *More Than Child's Play: A Profile of Professional Youth Workers in Montana*, the report collected information from more than 100 youth workers during April and May 2006 using questions from the Indiana Youth Institute and the Coalition's front-line youth worker survey instrument. In sum, Montana youth workers are well-educated and experienced—with an average of 14 years in the youth development field. Montana's youth workers are also more likely to be satisfied with their jobs than counterparts in other states, and are more likely to see themselves working in the youth field in five years time. To read the full report, visit the Montana 4-H Center for Youth Development website at: [www.montana4h.org](http://www.montana4h.org). Click on the "Research" tab.

## FULL PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION

The **North American Certification Project (NACP)**, sponsored by the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice (ACYCP), began pilot testing of the full professional certification level in May. This event marks a significant development in the establishment of a nationally recognized credential that spans the entire field of child and youth care.

The pilot testing research is being conducted by Dale Curry at Kent State University in collaboration with a committee that represents practitioners, educators, and employers. The research effort focuses on establishing the reliability and validity of the scenario-based certification exam. Information is also being collected on the usability and appropriateness of the application forms, supervisor assessment, reference forms and portfolio.

For additional information about the pilot testing program and competencies, visit [www.acycp.org](http://www.acycp.org). Or contact Jean Carpenter-Williams [jcarpenter@ou.edu](mailto:jcarpenter@ou.edu) or Frank Eckles [passageh2h@aol.com](mailto:passageh2h@aol.com).

## SETTING THE STAGE FOR A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE CREDENTIAL: *A National Review of Professional Credentials for the Out-of-School Time Workforce* NIOST

(National Institute on Out-of-School Time) for Cornerstones for Kids, June 2006.

This paper reviews efforts to create professional and career development systems in the field of youth work. The report explores the value of credentialing programs in enhancing the workforce and improving the quality of programs and positive outcomes for youth. The report additionally includes information from the field of early care and education, which has considerable experience with professional development through credentials, offering valuable lessons for the field of youth work.

This review demonstrates that credentials can offer a support to school-age and youth workers who are committed to their chosen field. If given the opportunity to access training education and advance their careers, front-line workers will be better equipped to "make a career" in this vital industry. If the field can support them in this pursuit by providing healthy work environments with adequate salaries and benefits, out-of-school time workers will be able to provide quality care and services to youth while still being able to provide for their own families.

To download the full report, go to: <http://www.cornerstones4kids.org> or [www.niost.org](http://www.niost.org)

## CAPTURING PROMISING PRACTICES

A common challenge faced by youth service organizations is how to attract and retain qualified individuals. ***Capturing Promising Practices in the Recruitment and Retention of Frontline Youth Workers*** presents numerous strategies from local organizations on how to better recruit and retain direct service providers. To download a copy go to:

<http://www.nydic.org/nydic/CapturingFinalReport.htm>

## THE TALENT CHALLENGE: Developing the Next Generation of Nonprofit Leaders

On September 14th at the **Human Services Leaders Summit in Washington, D.C.**, the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition will present findings from its recent study on front-line youth workers as part of a panel. This panel will also include representatives from the Nonprofit Sector Workforce Coalition who will provide insight into reducing the recruitment and retention barriers faced by professionals of color and the rising student debt as a barrier to careers in the non-profit sector. This is designed to be discussion-based, interactive panel session. For more information, contact [pam@nassembly.org](mailto:pam@nassembly.org).

## FORTHCOMING GUIDEBOOK FOR NON-PROFIT CAREERS

The guidebook encourages diverse, talented, and committed young people to enter the sector, and gives them the necessary tools and information to do so. The book will cover the non-profit sector and its evolving role in American society, the range of sub-sectors and careers/job functions it holds, strategies for finding a position, a complete resource section, and much more valuable information including profiles of great leaders in the non-profit sector. The book will be researched and written by **Shelly Cryer** under the auspices of **American Humanics** ([www.humanics.org](http://www.humanics.org)) and is targeted to undergraduate and graduate students and a range of career “gatekeepers” (e.g., career services directors, academic advisors, service learning program directors, etc.). Watch for its publication in early 2007 and published by the Fieldstone Alliance’s publishing group.

## LEARNING FROM OTHER FIELDS

### Professional Development Systems in Parks and Recreation

By **Peter Witt**, *Texas A & M University*

The Park and Recreation movement began in the late 1800s, spurred by many of the same social forces that guided the development of many of today’s major national youth serving organizations. From its inception, a primary focus of local and county park and recreation departments has been on youth. Efforts to train playground workers began with the creation of the Playground Association of America (PARDs) (1906).

The first university curricula related to parks and recreation was developed before WWII, with an explosion of programs beginning in the 1950s. Today, over 300 universities prepare park and recreation professionals. Through these programs, students develop

the management, programming and planning skills necessary to be successful in operating park and recreation departments (PARDs). In the past this training was fairly general, since most PARDs offer programs for all ages, from tiny tots to older adults.

The development of specific courses to meet the needs of park and recreation students seeking to work with adolescents is a fairly recent phenomenon. However, a number of university park and recreation departments are now offering courses in recreation and youth development, sometimes in conjunction with broader university-wide youth development initiatives.

In addition, most state and national conferences dealing with parks and recreation now feature sessions related to youth development. This is a high demand area of interest among professionals who are seeking to change from a “fun and games” mentality to a focus on planned, purposive programming to help facilitate young people’s efforts to grow to be fully functioning adults. Finally, research on recreation youth development is regularly appearing in the park and recreation literature, and a textbook was published in 2005 to support undergraduate park and recreation youth development courses (*Recreation and Youth Development*, Venture Publishing).

Contact Kathy Spangler for more information on Parks and Recreation at [kspangler@nrpa.org](mailto:kspangler@nrpa.org)

## 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 front-line 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**

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