

NATIONAL **Youth** DEVELOPMENT Learning Network

Professional Development Series E-Newsletter

May 2006

The National Youth Development Learning Network (NYDLN) is a project of the National Collaboration for Youth (NCY), a coalition of youth-serving agencies that collectively serves more than 40 million youth, employs over 100,000 paid staff and utilizes more than six million volunteers.

Retention

Maintaining a stable workforce can only come about when organizations recruit the right people for the right reasons, are clear about their expectations, and train, support and fairly compensate their staff.¹ It is equally essential to create supportive environments, respect staff and provide opportunities for staff to learn from each other. All these factors are key elements in staff retention. For more strategies see *Capturing Promising Practices in the Recruitment and Retention of Frontline Youth Workers*.

Provide Adequate Compensation, Benefits and Promotions

“There is a notion that people who do the work do it because they are passionate and committed; however, people need adequate compensation to provide for their families.”

-Sharon Edwards, *Cornerstones for Kids*

Youth service workers have been characterized as “an extraordinarily dedicated workforce drawn to the sector by non-monetary rewards, but who are struggling to meet growing financial responsibilities with significantly lower salaries than their classmates entering other sectors.”² Effective strategies need to alleviate the combination of heavy workloads, irregular or insufficient hours, limited access to essential resources, and low pay.³

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1 Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2003). The unresolved challenge of system reform: The condition of the frontline human services workforce. Available at <http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/hwsi/>

2 Ballard, Amanda (2005). “Understanding the Next Generation of Nonprofit Employees: The Impact of Educational Debt.” A Study Conducted for The Building Movement Project. Berkeley, CA: Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California at Berkeley.

3 Annie E. Casey Foundation (2003). Op. cit.

Increase Full-time Positions: Many of the part-time staff at Camp Fire USA Alaska Council work second jobs within the school district or at local businesses. Realizing that wages and benefits are important to retaining qualified and competent staff, the council created a task force that has been looking for ways to make youth service work competitive with other businesses in the area. Sensing that one of the biggest reasons staff were leaving the agency was because of their ability to get more hours elsewhere, rather than higher wages, the organization has gradually increased the number of full-time positions it supports, with benefits. The organization has also become more intentional about letting the community know about the value of the work being done with the youth in their area.

Prioritize Benefits for Staff: Youth service organizations are typically small and many employ staff on a part-time basis. As a result, youth workers often have limited access to affordable health and dental insurance as well as retirement or other benefits that are available to individuals working in other professions or larger companies. The Massachusetts School-Age Coalition (MSAC) has responded to this challenge by developing a plan that offers benefits to their workers. Local youth service agencies who are members of MSAC are eligible to purchase insurance and other benefits from an agent who has contracted with the membership organization. The plan began with health benefits and has expanded to include retirement and other basic benefits.

Plan for Promotions: A key strategy at Camp Fire USA Alaska Council is promoting program aides to paid staff positions. Site directors talk with each aide about what it means to them to work at the

WHAT IS THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES?

“Through its extensive experience in the field, the Casey Foundation has found that a stable, prepared, and motivated human services workforce yields real reform and better results for children and families.”

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
Human Services Workforce Initiative

Any organization’s ability to make a difference in a young person’s life is dependent upon the people in that organization. Success requires dedicated, skilled and creative people able to lead organizations, manage and implement high-quality programs. The Professional Development Series explores promising strategies in youth development designed to further attract, develop and retain youth development workers. The publications are short, 4-page snapshots of work being done in the following areas:

- **Competencies**
<http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/Competencies.pdf>
- **Training and Training Approval Systems (Pre-Service, In Service)**
- **Blended Learning**
http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/Prof_Series_ENews_4.pdf#4%20REV.pdf
- **Mentoring**
http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/Prof_Series_ENews3.pdf
- **Recruitment**
- **Recruitment and Selection**
http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/Prof_Series_2_3-19.pdf
- **Professional Associations**
<http://www.nydic.org/nydic/staffing/profdevelopment/documents/ProfessionalAssociations.pdf>
- **Program Standards**
- **Career Development (Registry, Portfolio, Career Opportunities)**
- **Certificates, Credentials, Degrees**
http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/Prof_Series_ENews_5.pdf#5.pdf
- **Recognition**
- **Compensation and Benefits**
- **Retention**
- **Resources for Professional Development**

agency. They ask, for example, whether aides see their position as a summer job or as the first step toward a possible career. Those who respond the latter are then mentored by the site director and receive specific training and planned exposure to a variety of youth work experiences. Of the agency's current 100 frontline youth workers, 10% were promoted from a program aide position to program staff.

Insist on Professional Development & Training

There is a strong consensus that staff training and professional development are crucial to the success of out-of-school-time youth development programs.⁴ Staff are more motivated to seek additional training if they are able to see some personal benefit as a result of that investment of time and effort.⁵

Require Training, Offer Incentives: The Community Agencies Corporation of New Jersey/Clinton Hill Weed and Seed Partnership (CAC of NJ/ Weed and Seed Partnership) requires its staff to attend 30 hours of in-house training, outside training or college class attendance per year. All staff members prepare a professional development plan that details how they will implement the skills they have acquired and indicates any additional training they feel they need to assist them in their work with youth. Five to 10 percent of the budget of the organization is allocated to training and capacity-building; in addition, 20% of the cost of outside training is covered as an education incentive. CAC of NJ/ Weed and Seed Partnership also offers a graduated pay incentive each year for staff who have completed the training. This benefit, which represents 3 to 5% of the agency's budget is contingent on staff members' number of years of service and performance evaluations. As staff see the increase in their paychecks for the training they have completed, they become more enthusiastic about their program service and more committed to staying with the organization.

Create Mentoring Systems: The YMCA of Greater Kansas City attributes the improvement in its retention rates to an increase in training, resources, and staff support. New direct care staff attend initial orientation and training sessions. Participants are then offered a mentoring relationship with more experienced staff who provide them with additional support and deepen their learning and skill development. This facilitates a sense of connectedness among the staff. Guidelines specify that the mentoring pair spend between one and two hours per week for eleven weeks, reviewing the employee handbook and YMCA policies, and discussing general employee issues. After completing the training, the mentor continues to provide support and ongoing communication with the new staff member throughout the first year of employment. An increase in staff retention has been noted and attributed to the agency's supportive work environment.

4 Little, P. M. (2004). "A Recipe for Quality Out-of-School Time Programs." The Evaluation Exchange, 10, 18-19. Available at: <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue25/expert3.html>.

5 Light, P. C. (2003). Op.cit.

Value and Respect Youth Workers

Value Staff and the Work They Do: Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara strives to maintain a work environment that is supportive and challenging—one in which staff not only work well together, but also have fun together. Administrators believe it is essential to communicate to staff that they are making a difference in the community. Events such as staff appreciation dinners and awards programs promote solid collaborative relationships and build a more cohesive work environment. In addition, social events for staff and their families are held several times throughout the year. The agency also believes it is important to communicate to the community the value of the work being done with youth, and to show how it contributes to the future welfare of the Santa Barbara area and society in general.

Engage Staff as Active Participants in Decision-making: At Methodist Children’s Home in Waco, Texas, successful retention of high quality direct care staff is in part the result of the organization’s commitment to emphasizing individual strengths while promoting teamwork and a stimulating work environment. Turnover among direct care staff is minimal, with many individuals working at this organization from recruitment to retirement. The core model used at Methodist Children’s Home emphasizes the strengths of both staff and youth. Young people are viewed as active participants and “partners” in planning, decision-making and program evaluation. As a result, the general mind-set within the facility is one of joint involvement and responsibility partly as a result of this equitable approach, the organization has experienced an improved staff retention rate over the past four years. Likewise, youth display more enthusiasm for program participation and problem behavior has decreased dramatically.

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