



Summary Findings from Focus Groups

In addition to the survey, seven focus groups were conducted by Pam Garza between September 2006 and December 2006 in four cities: New Orleans, Indianapolis, Minneapolis and Tucson. Most of the groups were a mix of faith-based and community-based youth workers. The groups were small (between three and six participants in most groups).

Consistent with the survey findings, there is a remarkable degree of alignment around youth work priorities. And though there is expressed interest in collaborative learning, there are also significant barriers—once again driven by mistrust or misunderstanding between the groups of youth workers.

Focus Group Participants

Focus Group #1 New Orleans

Harold Davis
TALKS Mentoring
Cassandra Moore
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Middle TN
LaKesha Wallace
CLUSTER Community Services
Matthew Watts
HOPE Community Developmet Corp
Candace Wheeler
Restoration Ministries

Focus Group #2 Indianapolis

Trish Barton
Murray Calloway County Community of Promise Coalition
Kimberly Bash
ECLIPSE Partnership
Barbara Brahm
Ohio State University Extension
Janis Hagey
National Education Association
Marty Rothey
The Findlay-Handcock County Community Foundation

Mary Beth Thaman
Partners for Healthy Youth

Andrea White
Partners for Healthy Youth

Focus Group #3 Minneapolis

Arthur Brown
Center for 4-H Youth Development
Arnoldo Curiel
CYD
Juliet Mitchell
The Camphor Foundation
Robert Osburn
MacLaurin Institute
Marika Pfefferkorn
Minnesota Youth Work Institute
Kimberly Roam
Center for 4-H Youth Development
Dr. Margaret Stimmler
St. Joan of Arc

Focus Group #4 Minneapolis

Kathy Buss
Association of Alaska School Boards
Michael Clark
Center for Strength-Based Strategies
Gary Eagleton
Tape

Focus Group #5 Minneapolis

Wendy Acosta
Possibilities Unlimited, LLC
Hannah Anker Williams
Partners in Education
Lydia Bloom
H.S. Jacobs Camp
Mark Holman
Ventura Missionary Church
Marlys Johnson
Timothy "Scott" Wood
Butler Church of Christ

Focus Group #6 Tucson

Georgia Eddy
Community Justice Board
Linda Lammers
Anger Management Intervention
Sun Lee
University of Arizona
Damaris Linares
Our Family Services
Laurie Mazerbo
Our Family Services
Megan Sanes
Our Family Services
Jason Thorpe
Open Inn, Inc

Focus Group #7 Tucson

Precious Amey
Our Family Services
Regina Barnes-Gillis
Our Family Services

Larissa Basaldu
Our Family Services
Mark Hollinger
Wright Flight Inc
Pamela Moseley
Marana HS/PCAO Community Justice Board
Marie Scofield
Tanque Verde Extended Care Program

Informal Discussions

Mark Farr
Points of Light Foundation
Major Gary Miller
The Salvation Army National Headquarters
Carter Savage
Boys & Girls Clubs of America
Mark Scott
Big Brothers Big Sisters
Lt. Colonel Terry Griffin
The Salvation Army Western Territory
Major Charles McCarty
The Salvation Army Central Territory
Major Richard Munn
The Salvation Army Eastern Territory
Lt. Colonel Charles White
The Salvation Army Southern Territory
Major Gary Miller
The Salvation Army National Headquarters

Definition of Spiritual Development and Youth Development and Their Roles in Youth Work

To get an understanding of where individual youth workers came at the issues of spiritual development and youth development, focus group participants were asked to give their individual definition. To get as individual a response as possible, focus group members were asked to write down their own definition and then share with the focus group. These were groups below. (The numbers following statements indicate the number of participants who mentioned each statement out of the total number who completed the exercise.)

There was not any one definition or much consistency between individuals' understandings of spiritual development. Since these were personal answers, the question provided an array of different perspectives about what spiritual development and positive youth development meant to youth workers. Given that, there were a few themes that emerged around the definition of spiritual development:

- Spiritual development is building a personal relationship or connection with a higher power. (13/31)
- Spiritual development is learning and the development of life skills. (4/31)
- Spiritual development is a life-long process. (3/31)

Other understandings of spiritual development included:

- Spiritual development can take place in activities outside of religion.
- Spiritual development is the adoption of a religious doctrine.
- Spiritual development is a connection with others and the universe.

There were also a few themes that occurred around the definition of positive youth development:

- Youth development involves multiple types of development (i.e., cognitive, physical, spiritual, skill, etc.) (9/38)
- Youth development is preparing youth for adulthood. (6/38)
- Youth development is providing resources and access to opportunities. (4/38)
- Youth development is preparing a young person to become a member of society. (4/38)

Other understandings of positive youth development included:

- Youth development is getting to know young people and building relationships with them. (3/38)
- Youth development is reinforcing the good in young people. (3/38)
- Youth development is helping young people develop their voice. (2/38)
- I do not know what youth development is. (2/38)

To understand what place spiritual or youth development might have in their work with youth, we asked for each person to answer this question after they had given their definition. The main themes for spiritual development included:

- As a youth worker, I serve as a guide to help young people create their own definition of spiritual development and spirituality. (11/39)
- I incorporate spirituality in youth work. (7/39)
- I am a role model to youth by trying to live a life that is an example of spirituality. (7/39)
- My spirituality serves as a personal motivator when working with youth. (5/39)

The main themes for the place positive youth development plays in their work included:

- I implement youth development through programs and teaching. (7/27)
- I actively engage youth in leadership and focus on the importance of youth voice. (5/27)
- I provide the basic needs (i.e., counseling, resources, money, family, faith, etc.) they will need for their transition to adulthood. (4/27)
- I am available to young people and build relationships with them. (4/27)

Skills Needed to Be a Youth Worker

Many skills were identified as necessary in working with young people. Below are consistent themes that were mentioned.

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	ATTITUDE	BEHAVIOR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of different information reception • Education • Diversity • Know the lingo • Knowledge of appropriate age-related activities • Stages of youth development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to community resources • Collaborate • Creativity • Flexibility • Listen • Patience • Relational skills • Resourceful • Technology skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance • Experience • Passionate for youth • Recognize the different gifts youth have • Sacrifice their time • View youth as equal partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have fun • Honesty • Humility

Bridging Between Faith-Based and Community-Based Youth Workers

Along with specific strengths of each group of youth workers, a common theme throughout the focus groups was that both types of organizations have similar goals. In preparing staff, both groups of youth workers want what's best for youth and there may not be as many divisions as one might expect.

Faith-based organizations:

- Have a thorough understanding of the spiritual development of young people.
- Are disciplined in their goals because of their focus to fulfill a mission.

Community-based organizations:

- Are skilled in the training and professional development of their staffs.
- Have a larger reach throughout the community because their services are not narrowed based on denomination. This also gives more access to community resources.

The most common responses regarding what either faith-based or community-based organizations have to offer included:

WHAT FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS OFFER

- Discipline and structure
- A realization of a bigger mission
- The idea of a systematic approach to producing adherents – systematic teaching
- Address spirituality and the needs of the whole person
- Youth workers can bring a lot more of themselves into the situation
- An understanding of spirituality and a belief system
- Mobilizing volunteers

WHAT COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS OFFER

- Skilled in time management and organization
- The credibility of research and research-based explorations
- Professional development workshops, classes and learning opportunities
- Education
- Experience in using community resources
- Community-based orgs have a larger reach in a community
- Training of volunteers

Pitfalls or Dangers in Trying to Connect Youth Workers

Focus group members identified a number of pitfalls and dangers one might encounter in working with a faith-based organization or a community-based organization and the common challenges that may arise in creating collaboration between the two groups of youth workers. Some common themes include:

- The exclusiveness of faith-based organizations.
- Ownership issues of each community.
- A lack of understanding and respect for each other’s work.
- The ownership issue of who will get credit for the work.

Pitfalls in working with faith-based organizations	Pitfalls in working with community-based organizations	Common challenges that may arise in creating collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Division among religious groups in faith-based organizations • Judgment of youth and families who do not live within the moral constructs of a particular faith • Aren’t as open to allow “anyone” to participate • More focused on their message than necessarily what the people in their program need • Religious/spiritual concepts can be intimidating for some youth • Many people have felt ostracized by faith-based organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be difficult for community-based orgs to adopt an all-inclusive spirituality language • A misperception of who faith-based organizations are and what they do • Pass judgment on the faith community when public leaders “fall off the wagon” of their faith 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership issues • People do not talk to one another. We are turning people off that way. • Devaluating of each other’s work • Getting over the hesitancy – “Am I the target for this?” • Suspicion of each other’s goals and work • A lack of understanding of each other’s values and backgrounds • Misunderstanding • Polarization, alienation, and mutual prejudice • Not respectful of differences • If a collaboration were created, where would it physically be located? Church, community center?

Moving the Conversations Forward

Focus group participants had suggestions for how to move the conversations forward. Some common themes among the focus groups included

THEME	EXAMPLES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opportunity to get to know each other.• Integrate each other's strengths into their respective work with youth.• Look together for solutions to make a difference with youth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth workers from faith-based and community-based organizations simply need to get to know each other.• Faith-based organizations can learn how non-profit organizations can assist in legal issues and how they train in certain aspect of working with youth.• Faith-based organizations can learn how to transfer their spiritual activity into the real world.• Comparing faith facts with the physical facts of something to provide the youth with well-rounded information, so that they can better make choices for themselves.• We need to start looking at solutions.• How to look for the best youth workers in each setting.• Bring a community together to address community issues (i.e. gang problem).• We need to just put action behind our words in order to reach youth.

In addition, there were groups mentioned that should also be a part of finding common ground.

- Legal entities (judges, probation officers, courts)
- School systems
- Local pastors of different faith traditions
- Funders
- Youth
- Parents and guardians
- People who attend congregations (churches, mosques, synagogues, etc.)

Three Wishes for Finding Common Ground

Focus group participants expressed an interest in faith-based and community-based youth workers to work together for the betterment of youth, but only with the foundation of mutual respect and understanding for each other's work. The top wishes were:

THEME	EXAMPLES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build a growing understanding between the two communities of youth workers.• Establish a mutual respect for each other.• Create a collaboration to make a difference with young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get at the table to clear up any misunderstandings.• Secular organizations understand that faith-based organizations are not the enemy.• Break down the perceptions of each group.• Create understanding and tolerance.• Setting our prejudices aside in working towards a common goal so that we're united and respecting the work.• Respect for one another.• Greater communication that will lead to respect and honoring each sector.• Greater collaboration to pull strengths to solve global community issues.• Willingness to collaborate and support one another.• Realize we all want to make the community better.• Share ideas and resources.• That we approach it from finding a common ground and building from there.