

YOUTH WORK COALITION

February 2007

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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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.

Addressing the Work Force Challenge

Jane Quinn

One of the greatest challenges in the world is to be able to envision something that doesn't yet exist. And even harder is to invent something that is both systemic and functional. In November of 2006, a group of 40 youth work professionals gathered in Baltimore to address just this kind of challenge: conceptualizing and beginning to craft a workforce agenda for youth workers. This two-day meeting of the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition, which was sponsored by Cornerstones for Kids, addressed a persistent problem in the youth development field—how to attract, develop and sustain the workforce. Building on a set of ideas created at a Wingspread gathering two years ago that launched the Coalition, the 2006 attendees reflected on key findings from important new research about the nature of the youth development workforce and developed an action agenda to move the field forward. This new research, conducted on behalf of the Coalition by the Forum for Youth Investment and the National Afterschool Association gives insight into the front-line youth worker never available before (see below in Notable Projects).

This edition of the *Next Generation Youth Work Coalition Bulletin* shares some of the highlights of our recent gathering, including insights from frontline youth workers, information on the new study, highlights on parallel work in the UK and New Zealand, and the latest Action Agenda of the Coalition.

Angelina Garner and Kica Gazmuri

Youth Worker Voices at the Table

A Next Gen Interview with Alton Clay

After the **From Knowledge to Action** meeting in November, one youth worker participant, Alton Clay, sat down to share his thoughts with Coalition steering committee members Angelina Garner and Kica Gazmuri. Alton was one of six frontline youth workers invited to attend the meeting to share their expertise and knowledge. He currently serves as the Vocational and Restitution Coordinator for McCune Residential Center and has been in the field of Youth Work for over 10 years in Kansas City, MO.

What was most inspiring to you about your experience of the meeting?

Although I was truly inspired by everything that occurred at the meeting, the one thing that had the greatest impact on me was seeing the diverse group of individuals from across these United States come together to share a vision about the future of the field of youth work. I was impressed by the different perspectives that were shared at the meeting.

What was most interesting to you about the data and implications that were shared?

“Legitimizing Youth Work.” I believe the way youth work in our society today is viewed is a bit archaic. Our youth are the greatest investment we could ever make, but in our society this field is looked more upon as “charity.” It is shameful to think our children and those who impact and help develop their future are looked upon as charity. What I find most disturbing is that other major countries “get it” and have a deep appreciation and respect for the field and have legitimized and realigned their views in recognizing the importance of youth work in their societies.

“I believe the way youth work in our society today is viewed is a bit archaic.”

What were the most rewarding and/or challenging aspects of meeting, networking, and brainstorming with other stakeholders?

I found the experiences rewarding all around although it may have been a bit of a challenge to fully expound on all the subjects as we had hoped due to the limited time frame within the meeting.

What actions developed at the meeting would you most like to see the Coalition move forward?

I would like to see the Coalition continue to grow and be strengthened by building on the information that was shared at the meeting and spreading the material to our own cities and communities. This in my opinion would help in the goal of legitimizing youth work.

After attending the meeting, attaining a new knowledge-base, and reflecting on your experience, how do you plan to further the youth development profession within your community?

I personally have already begun to take steps in finding ways to share the knowledge from the meeting with my co-workers. Although I know I won't be able to replicate the vibrant energy that we all shared in Baltimore, I can only hope that they too see the vision in a way that I now see and came away with from the meeting.

PROMISING PRACTICES

From the Field

Supporting Part-Time Workers: The Children's Aid Society in New York City organizes day-long professional development sessions for its part-time youth workers twice each year. Staff members are paid for their participation, which is considered mandatory. An agency-wide committee organizes the agenda for each session, which generally consists of a keynote speech and a set of workshops organized around a particular theme, such as behavior management or developmental assets. The full-time staff members who supervise the part-time staff are also expected to attend these sessions and to facilitate the application of new learning. These sessions are held on Saturdays in the spring and fall of each year. Participant evaluations provide input into the planning of subsequent sessions.

Validate Youth Work through Existing Channels. In 2000, the U.S. Department of Labor took an important step to improve the quality of DOL-funded youth programs and legitimize the youth work profession. They recognized youth work as one of 850 "apprenticeable" occupations, a designation that could potentially lead to industry-wide standards for training those who wish to work with young people in an array of publicly-funded programs. During 2000–02, the DOL Office of Youth Services funded nine local intermediary organizations and three national organizations during 2000–2002 to develop, replicate and strengthen apprenticeship programs that included extensive on-the-job training, supervision, classroom instruction, and a progressive wage structure. Today 4-H youth development workers in Vermont that complete related instruction and on the job training, receive a \$250 salary increase for Year One, a second increment in Year Two, and \$500 upon successful completion of the program.

Extend Existing Models. The T.E.A.C.H.® model from the early care and education field has been successful at increasing practitioners' education and compensation levels. It has now been extended to school-age care workers in seven states. T.E.A.C.H.® was founded in 1990 and has grown from a small pilot project serving 21 teachers in North Carolina to a national movement that is in place in 23 states. T.E.A.C.H.® is composed of four components: (1) Educational Scholarships— support for tuition and books, a travel stipend, and often the provision of release time; (2) Formal Education— a set amount of college coursework leading to a credentialed degree; (3) Compensation— an incentive in the form of a raise or bonus and; (4) Commitment— a promise to remain in the sponsoring child-care program or the field for a specified period of time.

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.

NOTABLE PROJECTS, STUDIES AND EVENTS

Putting Youth Work on the Map is a research brief summarizing key findings and implications from two recent surveys—one conducted by the Forum for Youth Investment on behalf of the Next Gen Coalition, and the other conducted by the National Afterschool Association. The findings from the two studies were quite consistent and thus are summarized jointly below. The full research brief, as well as detailed reports on these and related studies, can be downloaded from <http://www.nydic.org/nydic/staffing/workforce/nextgen.htm>.

1. Youth workers are a particularly varied group.

Specific Findings:

- Youth workers vary in terms of age, background, and prior educational and professional experience.
- Youth work is a young profession. Half of those surveyed by the Coalition are under age 30, and one-third are under age 25.
- Youth workers tend to enter the field in two waves. Many enter the field young and leave before their 30s, while others enter in their 40s and 50s from related fields.
- Most come from related fields (e.g. education, child care, social services); two-thirds have some kind of relevant “credential” (AYD training, school-age certificate).

Implication: *Capitalize on unique entry patterns. Create more formal short- and long-term pathways into the profession.*

2. Career advancement and training recognition opportunities are notably absent for most workers.

Specific Findings:

- While many youth workers have been in the field for several years, most are quite new to their jobs and organizations.
- Though training is available, links between training and tangible rewards are weak.
- Most youth workers say there are no clear opportunities for promotion within their organization.

Implication: *Create clearer organizational steps and career ladders.*

3. Many youth workers are employed part-time.

Specific Findings:

- Half of those in the Coalition sample work part-time, along with just over one-third of the NAA sample.
- Part-time workers report extremely high levels of job satisfaction—levels equal to those of full-time workers.
- Part-time workers anticipate staying in the field as long as full-time workers.
- While 60% of part-time workers in the Coalition study were interested in full-time work, 40% were not.
- One-third of NAA’s respondents said that flexibility and hours were what attracted them to the field.
- Part-timers earn less and are much less likely to have benefits.

Implication: *Consider the role of part-time employment.*

4. Compensation levels are low, especially for part-time workers.

Specific Findings:

- *Compensation levels are low. In the Coalition study, the median salary range was \$25,000 – \$25,999 and the median hourly wage was \$9.00 – \$10.99.*
- *Fewer than half of the workers surveyed by the Coalition have access to health insurance, and 39% report no benefits at all (including insurance, paid vacation, sick leave, and retirement savings). Access varies significantly by employment status—the vast majority of part-time workers lack benefits.*
- *Pay is cited as the number one factor influencing decisions to leave the field, regardless of demographics, part-time status, job satisfaction or setting.*
- *27% of full-time and 53% of part-time workers in the Coalition sample hold second jobs.*
- *Focus group participants raised two concerns related to compensation—the livability of part-time wages in particular, and the fact that increased earnings means moving further away from direct service.*

Implication: *Address concerns about compensation directly; small changes may make a big difference.*

5. Pay is the main reason workers might leave; making a difference is the main reason they stay.

Specific Findings:

- *Youth workers are attracted to and remain in the field when they feel they can make a difference.*
- *Stress plays a major role in workers' decisions to leave the field (after pay, stress is the top factor influencing decisions to leave youth work).*
- *Supervision and support matter. Less satisfied workers are much less likely to say they get the feedback they need.*
- *Many focus group participants raised the need for more networking opportunities—both professional and personal.*

Implication: *Create and strengthen support systems and networks.*

6. Youth workers want to know they are valued.

Specific Findings:

- *Youth work professionals feel underpaid and underappreciated.*
- *Despite the essential role youth workers play in society and their vast numbers (in 2003, Annie E. Casey Foundation estimated there were between 2 – 4 million frontline youth service workers), little is known about the workforce or the field.*
- *Focus group participants characterized their work as invisible and called for major public awareness efforts.*

Implication: *Legitimize youth work.*

OTHER FIELDS AND COUNTRIES

Youth Work in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, all youth workers—full-time, part-time or volunteer—are expected to hold appropriate qualifications that are achieved through multiple pathways, linked to definable positions. Youth workers can acquire credentials through certified training programs or higher education institutions. The structure and diversity of certification paths offer opportunities to all types of workers, including those who may lack high school degrees or are not interested in college. Training programs vary in length and focus and involve substantive field experience. While training programs are developed by a range of employers, colleges and universities, they are centrally certified and therefore vocationally and academically trained workers hold equally portable degrees that are recognized across the region and pegged to a consistent set of employment positions with different levels of responsibility and pay. For more information go to: <http://www.nya.org.uk/>

Youth Work in New Zealand

Ron Hooper, Senior Policy Analyst, Ministry of Youth Development, New Zealand

New Zealand has had a recognized youth work sector for over 30 years. In 2005, a national research project provided a snapshot of youth workers in New Zealand. This research showed that while there is good evidence of strong commitment and sound practice amongst most youth workers, the youth work sector in New Zealand still struggles due to the lack of:

- a national policy framework to guide the direction of youth work and the development of the youth worker workforce;
- a united voice through a national association or other professional body;
- a widely accepted code of ethics to guide practice;
- an adequate, high-quality, and accessible training to strengthen the quality of practice and the status of youth work.

This research and the formation of a nationwide network of youth workers has provided the opportunity for government to respond to the needs of the youth work sector. This response is being led by the Ministry of Youth Development (MYD), a government agency set up to promote the interests of young people.

MYD launched the *Youth Workers Workforce Development Project*,¹ which is being undertaken in close collaboration with the national youth work network to ensure that youth workers have the major say in determining the development of the youth work sector. The project seeks to identify, and implement practical ways in which the professional development of the youth work sector can be supported and strengthened.

There is optimism within the youth work sector in New Zealand that an opportunity now exists to make real progress in making youth work practice safer, more ethical and more effective to the benefit of New Zealand's young people. For more information go to: <http://www.myd.govt.nz/bestpractice/youthworkersworkforceproject/youthworkersworkforceproject.aspx>

¹ <http://www.myd.govt.nz/bestpractice/youthworkersworkforceproject/youthworkersworkforceproject.aspx>

CRAFTING AN ACTION AGENDA

Those gathered at the November convening—*From Knowledge to Action*—agreed that progress is needed on several interconnected challenges that emerged from study findings and their implications about the workforce. The Coalition is using these recommendations to build a targeted action agenda that can be advanced by a range of community, state and national organizations and partners, including those in attendance at the November meeting. We hope these ideas spark continued action by a range of people and organizations around the country that work on different aspects of the issue and bring different areas of expertise and that you will join us in doing this work as the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition.

Increasing awareness of youth work and the central role its workers play—or “legitimizing” the field—was seen by the November meeting participants as the single most important undertaking the Coalition could pursue, followed by addressing **compensation**. Although these two challenges were considered high priority in terms of importance and were viewed as changes that could have a profound impact on the workforce, few felt progress could be made on them quickly. Areas that were identified as ripe for short-term progress were improving **support systems**, strengthening **pathways into youth work**, and developing **career ladders**.

Preliminary recommendations that were identified include opportunities to influence policy (both legislative and regulatory and on the state and federal levels), strengthen organizational capacity, increase consensus within the field and improve external positioning. They vary in terms of the locus of action, spanning national, state and local levels and implicating different stakeholder groups including youth workers, employers, intermediaries, funders, researchers, national networks, policy makers and advocates. Many are systemic in nature—meaning their successful implementation would result in progress for the entire youth work “system” as opposed to individual organizations or networks.

Influence Policy

Analyze federal policies. Review existing legislation pertaining to youth-focused or youth work-focused federal departments to identify workforce-related programs, guidelines or requirements (related to certification, human resources, compensation, support, or professional development) that youth work advocates could promote and/or influence.

Influence implementation of the Federal Youth Coordination Act. Ensure that workforce issues become a priority for the Federal Youth Development Council that this newly passed legislation calls for. The Council’s role is to assess and make recommendations concerning the improvement of the quality, coordination, accountability and youth/family engagement of the federal programs for disadvantaged youth *and those who work with them*.

Expand pathways/incentives for youth work. Pursue discussions with key federal government stake holders about opportunities to insert youth work, by name, into existing legislation that affords those entering the field opportunities for loan forgiveness, educational stipends, credit union membership, etc. These could be especially useful avenues for upping the attractiveness/compensation for part-time work.

Influence current expenditures. Develop and disseminate guidance about how to effectively use existing technical assistance or professional development set asides, such as those that exist within 21st CCLC allocations to states, to address workforce challenges.

Strengthen Organizational Capacity

Provide guidelines and incentives to local organizations to strengthen supervision and support for youth workers and to identify and address gaps identified in supervisor training, time on the front line, etc.

Influence funder practice. Document/assess any expectations or requirements funders have for grantees related to HR, compensation etc. Document promising funder efforts to support workforce development beyond professional development/training.

Explore strategic alliances with the corporate community to strengthen the human resources capacity of youth-serving organizations. Explore relevant models or approaches from business as well as cost-sharing opportunities.

Increase Awareness/Consensus in the Field

Document promising state practices. Identify promising state practices (e.g. Pennsylvania's Keys to Quality) that demonstrate how incentives to sustain, support and prepare youth workers can be built into definitions of program quality that are then subject to monitoring and improvement.

Identify opportunities for innovative use of public funds. Assess the extent to which existing public funding streams related to prevention, youth employment and after-school could be used to pilot tiered reimbursement systems that link compensation to experience/training levels.

Explore linkages between youth worker associations. Partnerships among associations could lead to expanded services for members and the diffusion of effective models and practices for local associations and networks.

Educate and engage key decision-makers. Develop focused conversations with the National Conference of State Legislatures, state after-school networks, children's cabinet directors and other key decision maker groups about policy opportunities to address workforce gaps. Create a youth workforce lens that policy makers can bring into their analyses of youth program legislation.

Improve External Communications/Positioning

Engage the business community. Engage industry leaders, through partnerships with organizations like Corporate Voices for Working Families and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, as advocates for strengthening the youth work field because of its key role in preparing young workers (both as program participants and staff).

Explore social marketing strategies. Work with a social marketing research firm to test language, messaging, and public perception of the field. Make sure the purpose is to position youth work, not youth programs. Explore potential for a national campaign in collaboration with the Ad Council.

Create cross-system learning opportunities. Engage in deep critical analysis of other systems in the U.S. (e.g. child care) and in other countries (e.g. the U.K) which we can learn from.

The Coalition is committed to providing a forum and a vehicle for interested individuals and organizations to discuss, refine and act on the above recommendations, in order to develop a workforce that is strong, stable, supported and committed to the well-being of children and youth.

To learn more about the November convening, research discussed in this brief and the Coalition's action agenda, or to sign up to receive future bulletins, visit www.nydic.org/nydic/staffing/workforce/nextgen.htm. or contact Pam Garza at pam@nassembly.org.

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 from dependence to independence.

the next generation **YOUTH WORK COALITION BULLETIN**

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