



Youth Community Connections
Minnesota's Statewide Afterschool Alliance

Minnesota Core Assets and Capacities for Youth Workers

Foundational and Practical Knowledge Needed when Working with Ages 10-18 Executive Summary

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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. (Garza, Gannett, & Blyth, 2006)

Youth Development has only recently begun emerging as an established profession. The lack of a formal foundation for the work means that child and youth development programs and the skills and knowledge—the *professionalism*—of the people who administer and staff them vary widely and dramatically.

In 2004, Youth Community Connections (YCC) convened a cross-organizational team of professionals who began exploring the issue of workforce development by considering and identifying the foundational and practical knowledge needed in the effective practice of youth work for youth development. The group researched and reviewed materials related to standards and competencies across two decades of life and engaged in extensive dialogue and information gathering with youth work volunteers, service providers, program providers, and program administrators, as well as school-age child care providers, funders, and intermediary organizations.

From the synthesis of this work emerged a framework of eight professional development categories *crucial to the effectiveness and improvement of the field*. The table that follows shows the eight categories and includes examples of how youth development professionals might incorporate them into their work.

| Minnesota Youth Work Professional Core Assets and Capacities | |
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| Categories and Indicators | |
| Categories | Sample Key Indicators |
| Applies human development principles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands and applies child and adolescent development principles across all aspects of development including physical, social, emotional and cognitive outcomes. • Attends to current research, trends, and issues in the broader field of youth |

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| | development that are relevant to youth served. |
| Develops positive relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibits respect for, concern with, and interest in the experiences of youth. • Provides opportunities for young people to practice pro-social behavior. • Promotes social bonding between peers and between young people and adults. |
| Uses effective program design and delivery methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses best practice and program models to inform design and delivery. • Addresses five or more youth development outcomes in programming. • Creates activity plans and uses evaluation to improve effectiveness. |
| Promotes inclusiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates respect and commitment to ensuring inclusive and accessible experiences for youth and families. • Exhibits personal awareness of cultural and societal norms related to their own development. • Promotes understanding of commonalities and differences and their impact on individual youth within programming. |
| Encourages youth engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively consults, involves, and encourages youth to contribute to program planning and goal setting. • Creates opportunities for choice in activity, content, and process. • Gives youth regular opportunities to present to others, reflect, and give feedback. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shares program control by providing opportunities for youth to lead during sessions. |
| Connects to family and community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops regular and effective communication methods with families. • Actively engages family and community in programming and other local events. • Establishes relationships and accesses resources in the community in support of programming. |
| Attends to health and safety | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Models physical, emotional, and psychological safety. • Encourages safe behavior and practices within the program environment. • Identifies potential risks or issues that require additional support or referral. |
| Demonstrates professionalism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulates a personal vision and commitment to youth work. • Seeks on-going opportunities to learn and improve personal practice. • Thinks of youth work as a profession and acts in ethical and professional ways. |

How Can the Core Assets and Capacities Help Build the Field?

Research indicates that developing the assets and capacities of youth workers improves program quality (see, for example, Gambone et al, 2002). Combine this with research showing that high program quality has a positive effect on youth outcomes (such as Vandell et al, 2007; Pittman et al, 2003) and it is reasonable to expect that professional development for youth workers can have a positive effect on youth outcomes.

The Core Assets and Capacities for Youth Work Professionals in Minnesota can effectively guide training, education, and other work force development by

emphasizing the foundational skills and knowledge needed by different types of youth work professionals. Listed below are some examples of ideas for implementation. While the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities of youth workers within each of the eight core asset categories vary by job type, the practices are cumulative, building from volunteer to direct service to program management and, ultimately, to organizational administration.

| Ways Core Assets and Capacities Can Guide Professional Development and Field Development for Youth Work Professionals in Minnesota: Implementation Ideas | |
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| Volunteers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train in how to interact with young people based on the core assets and capacities |
| Direct-service staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Train in how to interact with young people based on the core assets and capacities</i> • Identify specific areas of need for additional education and training • Conduct regular self-checks using the core assets and capacities as a guide |
| Program Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Train in how to interact with young people based on the core assets and capacities</i> • <i>Identify specific areas of need for additional education and training</i> • <i>Conduct regular self-checks using the core assets and capacities as a guide</i> • Use as a guide for conducting regular performance reviews, goal setting conferences, and evaluations |
| Organizational Administration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Train in how to interact with young people based on the core assets and capacities</i> • <i>Identify specific areas of need for additional education and training</i> • <i>Conduct regular self-checks using the core assets and capacities as a guide</i> • <i>Use as a guide for conducting regular</i> |

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| | <p><i>performance reviews, goal setting conferences, and evaluations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use core assets and capacities framework to develop job descriptions and staff training and education plans • Articulate the ways the assets and capacities tie to core mission and vision • Commit to and implement evaluation of programs, activities and professional development undertakings |
| Public and Private Funding Organizations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement policies and practices, including professional development and evaluation, that promote and enhance professionalism in the field • Fund training and education opportunities |
| Trainings and Training Organizations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and organization training and education opportunities • Promote training and education • Seek ways to keep training and education accessible • Seeks ways to evaluate effectiveness of training and education |

Where Do We Go From Here?

A growing number of organizations and groups around the country are implementing youth development workforce enhancement initiatives, with **Next Generation Youth Work Coalition** taking the lead. Many states are building on this collaborative effort, making the individual components more applicable to their own professionals. To that end, YCC again met with key stakeholders in May 2008 to present much of the information found in this report and, more important, to gather their additional perspectives on how to best implement the Core Assets and Capacities in our support of the Youth Work Workforce. The following is a summary of those conversations:

Short-Term Strategies for Implementing Core Assets and Capacities in Support of the Youth Work Workforce:

- Place Core Assets and Capacities on common youth development websites and in other places that are accessible to large numbers of individuals and organizations and promote a common language about “what we do” and what training and resources are available from different supporters.
- Promote the value of the Core Assets and Capacities among youth work program administrators and other employers.
- Develop an on-line and/or in-person Core Assets and Capacities Basics class(es).
- Develop and offer a Train-the-Trainer package for use inside organizations.
- Create simple communication and educational resources for use by program directors and administrators.
- Differentiate career ladders between professional, craft, and vocational calling.

Long-Term Strategies for Implementing Core Assets and Capacities in Support of the Youth Work Workforce:

- Help shape additional research on what the Youth Work Workforce looks like and needs.
- Encourage organizations to infuse them into what they do.
- Identify and raise awareness of organizational incentives for their use.
- Create a central force or place to go to create a common voice and be connected to others in the field.
- Explore how to encourage organizations to comply with professional development for youth workers.

Resources and Supports Needed for Implementing Core Assets and Capacities in Support of the Youth Work Workforce:

- Coordinate efforts to gain resources to support professional development.
- An organizational toolkit for use of the Core Assets and Capacities.
- Identifying more uses of the Core Assets and Capacities across roles/job descriptions.

Key Remaining Questions

- How can we make the Core Assets and Capacities even more tangible...how can we use them in tangible ways?
- How are this and other approaches to quality and evaluation fitting together?
- What does the workforce really look like and can we actually identify it as a workforce?
- What are the potential impacts of a credentialing or certification system?
- What can organizational leaders do to help build the field?

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