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CENTER FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY RESEARCH
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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUTH WORKERS: WHAT IS BEST PRACTICE?

First Year Report:
"Professional Development For Youth Workers"

Prepared for:
U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
Training, Dissemination and Technical Assistance Division
Emily Martin, Director
Lois Brown, Project Officer

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Director of Research and Planning
Center for Youth Development
and Policy Research

[redacted]
Revised: December, 1993

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The Center for Youth Development and Policy Research

In 1990, the Academy for Educational Development established the **Center for Youth Development and Policy Research** in response to a compelling need to define and promote national and community strategies for positive youth development. The chief goal of the Center is to create and advance a vision of youth development that specifies not only outcomes but strategies as well. Karen Pittman, formerly with the Children's Defense Fund, is the Center's founding director and a Senior Vice President of the Academy.

The Center seeks to direct growing concern about youth problems into a public and private commitment to youth development. Our work is characterized by distinctive activities and services which include: conducting and synthesizing youth research and policy analyses; distributing information about exemplary youth programs and policies; initiating and strengthening discussion and coalition-building among those committed to the well-being and development of youth; and providing technical assistance to organizations, governments and institutions wishing to improve their youth development efforts.

We have also undertaken a major, five-year, public education initiative. Supported by core funding from the Ford Foundation and the Lilly Endowment, **Mobilization for Youth Development** is aimed at increasing America's understanding of and investment in establishing a cohesive infrastructure of community supports for youth. The effort is intentionally complex, encouraging dialogue and debate among youth organizations and communities and planning and testing strategies to address service gaps.

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Within the Center, Shepherd Zeldin served as project director, and was responsible for ensuring that all activities were conceived and implemented in a quality manner. Suzanne Tarlov was the project coordinator, and had the difficult task of keeping the many people and tasks moving smoothly on a day-to-day basis. She also was responsible for conducting most of the data analysis, and did much of the writing for our previous project reports. Other staff within the Center and the Academy who contributed substantially over the course of the year were Ivan Charner, Elona Finklestein, Elaine Johnson, Lauren Price, Xiomara A. Sosa, Geeta Tate, and Michael Zapler.

The National Network of Runaway and Youth Services is our subcontractor to this project. Della Hughes, Executive Director of the Network, has been a partner through each step in the project. Miriam Darmstadter, Training Coordinator, contributed substantially, including management of much of the data collection, analysis of the focus groups and advisory group meetings, and preparation of a paper on principles for good training. Finally, we wish to thank the regional network members of the National Network. It was they who conducted and documented most of our interviews with youth workers.

Ron Jenkins, Senior Consultant to the Center, went well beyond the call of duty. His ideas are found throughout this report as he has been an influential advisor from the beginning of the project. Moreover, Ron coordinated the project's advisory group, and made sure that their views were fully incorporated into project planning and implementation. Gordon Bazemore, Florida Atlantic University, also contributed to this project by preparing a synthesis of available research, titled "Initial Steps and Guidelines for Curriculum Development." His ideas form the basis for many of our recommendations, and will serve as a source of guidance during Year 2 of this project.

We also thank the DeWitt Wallace - Reader's Digest Fund, and our project officer, Pam Stevens. The Fund has generously supported our ongoing collaborative work with national youth-serving organizations. Our learning from this work has informed our activities with OJJDP, and vice-versa. We look forward to continuing this process in the future.

Karen Johnson Pittman
Senior Vice President, Academy for Educational Development
Director, Center for Youth Development and Policy Research

PROJECT ADVISORY GROUP

We are fortunate to have an active advisory group to this project. All of them have volunteered their time, expertise and commitment. As the project moves into its second year, we look forward to collaborating with them to move the lessons learned from our work into national, state, and local communities.

- Luis Garden Acosta, El Puente, New York, NY
- David Bruno, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, Ypsilanti, MI
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- Kathleen Feely, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Greenwich, CT
- Tom James, New Pride, Inc., Denver, CO
- Ron Jenkins, Youth Policy Institute, Oregon City, OR
- Bob Long, Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, MI
- Tony Massengale, Public Strategies, Pasadena, CA
- James Mills, Juvenile Welfare Board, Pinellas County, FL
- James Mosier, Juvenile Court Resources, Ontario, OR
- Nervy Oliver, Ingham County Youth Center, Lansing, MI
- Ruth Rambo, United Neighborhood Houses, New York, NY
- Jack Reinholdt, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, New York, NY
- Debbie Shore, Sasha Bruce Youthwork, Washington, DC

I. INTRODUCTION

In September 1992, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) contracted with the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research (CYD) and CYD's subcontractor, The National Network of Runaway and Youth Services, Inc. (NNRYS) to conduct a project entitled "Professional Development for Youth Workers." The ultimate goal of this project is to assist OJJDP in developing and implementing community-wide systems of training to youth workers on a national basis.

Over a three-year period, CYD and NNRYS have been charged with designing, piloting, and evaluating a community-wide system of training that effectively delivers a "core" set of knowledge and skills to those who work with "high risk" youth -- that is, youth who are at risk for sustained involvement with the criminal justice system and youth who reside in disadvantaged family or community environments[1]. This training system, as envisioned by OJJDP, must be appropriate for all service providers who work with such youth, independent of the specific program or setting where the providers work.

Project Overview: Assumptions and Goals

CYD and NNRYS are particularly pleased to have been selected to conduct this project because we share with OJJDP a common set of assumptions that undergird the project:

- One of the most powerful local strategies to prevent "problem behaviors," including delinquency, among young people is to provide them with opportunities to gain the skills necessary for adulthood. This perspective emphasizes that all youth-oriented policies and programs should move from a focus on "deterrence" to one that is centered on "youth development." High-risk youth need that which is often provided to their more fortunate peers, but which is typically missing in their lives: structure, challenge, connections with adults and community, participation, responsibility, and opportunities to build a full range of competencies.

- Incorporating a youth development perspective within the activities of juvenile justice system will provide direction for the system as it changes its emphasis

[1] According to OJJDP, youth come under the "high risk" definition if they have not reached the age of 21 years and have one or more of the factors listed: 1) identified child of a substance abuser; 2) a victim of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse; 3) dropped out of school; 4) become pregnant; 5) economically disadvantaged; 6) committed a violent or delinquent act; 7) experienced mental health problems; 8) attempted suicide; 9) disabled by injuries; 10) runaways; 11) homeless; 12) throwaways; 13) street youth; and 14) youth who are or have been taken into custody by the state. It is understood that the phrases "youth from high-risk situations" and "high-risk youth" have different connotations. We use them interchangeably, but the explicit aim of this project is to change the conditions in which youth live.

from being a "revolving door" or "receptacle" for troubled youth to one that provides service based on principles of "restorative justice" and "restitution."

- Issues of youth delinquency and violence are not the sole domain of the juvenile justice and correctional system. Preventing delinquency will require leadership from OJJDP, but an effective response necessitates the active involvement of all youth-serving organizations, public and private.

- As all youth-serving organizations, including those in the juvenile justice system, shift their emphasis in policy and programming, new demands will be placed on youth workers. Hence, strengthening the professional development and training opportunities of youth workers is an essential strategy for preventing delinquency.

- Community-wide systems of training have the potential to be a potent vehicle not only for strengthening the abilities of youth workers, but also for sparking organizational collaborations.

Building on these assertions, each year of the project has specific purposes and activities. Year 1 of the project was focused on information collection and synthesis with the aim being to articulate the parameters of "best practice" in the professional development of youth workers. Year 2 will focus on development and planning. Specifically, we will develop and test a core "youth development" training module that will be applicable to a broad spectrum of youth workers and will begin to set the stage for implementation, selecting pilot sites and seeking key endorsements. In Year 3, we will pilot and evaluate both the training module and the delivery system. Our final report will focus on strategies for institutionalizing the proven products and strategies that emerge from the project.

Year 1 Objectives

Year 1 project activities and findings are presented in this report. There were four primary objectives:

- To identify the elements of a youth development perspective that could be used as a guiding framework for staff development program

- To identify the "core competencies" of youth workers that allow staff to promote youth development

- To identify, from the perspective of youth workers, the components and qualities of effective staff development programs

- To provide recommendations that articulate the goals and objectives of effective training for youth workers

As part of Year 1, we also prepared a directory of over 90 organizations that provide staff development to youth workers across different fields and professions[2]. While this directory does not specifically address the four objectives discussed above, we see it as having important utility. In the short term, the directory will be disseminated to interested organizations as a resource in planning and implementing staff development programs. Over the longer term, as we create a "youth development" curriculum and methods for delivering the curriculum, we will seek to involve training organizations in the dissemination, or the use, of this curriculum.

Year 1 Methods

In order to meet project objectives, project staff utilized multiple methods. Through each method, we independently explored each study issue, thus allowing us to identify points of consensus and difference.

Project Advisory Group. This group consisted of professionals highly skilled in the design and delivery of systems and programs to serve high-risk youth, including those involved in the justice system. The advisory group met collectively once during Year 1. One day was devoted to group activities aimed at building consensus among the advisory group as to the needs of adolescents and the goals of staff development. The second day focused on project planning and goal-setting. Additionally, the coordinator of the advisory group, Ron Jenkins, met with each advisor (individually and in small groups) during Year 1 to continue the planning process and to provide feedback to project staff.

Interviews with Trainers. A one hour phone interview was conducted with training directors (or equivalents) from 100 organizations. Not all of these organizations provided training as their sole mission (some, for example, also provided technical assistance and/or membership services), but devoted a significant amount of time to training youth workers. In addition to outlining the goals and activities of the organizations, respondents provided their assessments of the professional needs of youth workers.

Interviews with Youth Workers. A one hour phone interview was conducted with 130 youth workers. These youth workers represented many fields, and we over-sampled to ensure that sufficient numbers served youth who were, or had been, within the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. They represented a mix of administrators, program managers, and direct-service providers. These interviews centered on identifying the professional needs of youth workers, assessing past learning experiences of the youth workers, understanding the degree of organizational support for youth workers, and articulating what learning experiences youth workers hope to have in the future.

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[2] This directory, "A Directory of Organizations That Provide Training to Youth Workers," is available from the Center, as is a companion report ("Lessons Learned from Training Organizations") that presents an analysis of the organizations and their opinions of staff development.

Focus Groups with Youth Workers. Project staff conducted ten (3 hour) focus groups, with a total participation of 70 youth workers. The youth workers were drawn from the same professions and fields as those who participated in the individual interviews. These focus groups focused directly on "youth development" issues. Staff spoke to the importance of youth development, discussed necessary developmental opportunities of youth, and sought to identify the core competencies needed by youth workers to promote youth development.

Literature and Document Review. Project staff also reviewed literature on training and staff development in order to identify the "current wisdom" of the field, but more importantly, to identify principles of exemplary practice. Staff also conducted a selected review of existing training curricula. Finally, project staff held personal interviews with staff development professionals, especially those involved in creating "community-wide" service delivery systems.

Other CYD Activities. Concurrent with this project, CYD has been involved in an ongoing initiative supported by the Dewitt-Wallace/Reader's Digest Fund. This project, concluded in collaboration with representatives from 15 national youth-serving organizations including NNRYS, seeks to complete the initial work in defining a "field" of youth development, articulating best practices in the field, and finally, to identify the types of staff development activities integral to the field. Building on the similarities between the two projects, CYD discussed findings and explicitly "tested" emerging ideas generated from the OJJDP project with persons involved in the Dewitt-Wallace/Reader's Digest collaboration, and vice-versa.

In April, two CYD staff also visited England to study their system of "youth service." This visit allowed us to put our current work into a broader perspective, and was invaluable in our consideration of the core competencies of youth workers.

As a result of these methods, project staff have collected and reviewed a large amount of data. Our previous project reports present the data collection strategies, findings, and conclusions in depth. In this report, we present overall findings by highlighting points of "triangulation." We base our conclusions and recommendations on those issues where there was strong agreement between the advisory group, the trainers, the youth workers, and existing theory and research.

II. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AS A GUIDING FRAMEWORK FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

A guiding assumption of this project is that the concept "youth development" provides a foundation from which to design effective staff development programs. But what is youth development? Building on a long history of theory and research, Karen Pittman of the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research (CYD) defines youth development as the ongoing process through which youth obtain a positive identity or sense of "psychosocial health" and the full range of personal "competencies" necessary for healthy and productive adulthood. From this perspective, the concept of youth development is firmly attached to young people themselves. They are the ones who develop desirable youth outcomes, or undesirable ("problem behaviors") outcomes. Adults, such as parents or youth workers play a key role in creating the developmental opportunities and supports that help young people to achieve desirable outcomes.

As an initial step in this project, we used different methods to specify the desirable outcomes of youth development, and further, to clearly articulate the types of opportunities and supports that young people need in order to move successfully into adulthood. These data are discussed below.

Desirable Youth Outcomes

Articulating desirable youth outcomes in concrete terms has been an ongoing priority of CYD, and we have tested our conclusions with a large and diverse group of youth workers. Indeed our conceptualization is built directly from hundreds of interviews and many focus groups. A taxonomy of outcomes is summarized in many of our publications (see Pittman, 1991). Prior to this inquiry, however, we had not explicitly tested the taxonomy with expert practitioners within the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Hence, we enlisted the advisory group to go through consensus-building activities to test the taxonomy.

To begin, the advisory group generated independent lists of desirable outcomes for "low risk" and "high-risk" youth. In the main, these two lists were remarkably similar, providing support for the view that all youth, regardless of their label, are striving to meet similar developmental goals. Next, the advisory group went through an activity aimed at identifying the priority needs and competencies of "high risk" youth. While it was recognized that establishing priorities is somewhat artificial, the belief was that we could identify some "bottom line" objectives to guide youth workers.

- The priority outcomes of youth development from the perspective of the advisory group were:
  - (1) a sense of belonging,
  - (2) a sense of safety (including sufficient shelter and food),
  - (3) a sense of identity, including sexual identity,
  - (4) the existence of positive relations with adults,
  - (5) a respect for others,

(6) the experience of fun,
(7) the acquisition of skills to be successful as adults,
(8) the ability to participate and contribute to the welfare of self, others, and community

The desirable outcomes identified by the advisory group, including these priorities, fit well within CYD's taxonomy. After considering the differences, staff refined the list (Figure 1).

Developmental Opportunities and Supports

Desirable youth outcomes define the goal of youth work (and, in our judgment, the goal of all institutions and organizations that serve youth). Youth outcomes, in and of themselves, however, do not provide an adequate guide to program planning or to the creation of strong staff development programs. For this purpose, it is also important to articulate the opportunities and supports that give youth the chance to develop desirable outcomes. (Indeed, there was consensus among the advisory group that youth in high-risk situations are at risk <u>because</u> they are not provided necessary opportunities).

Opportunities are the vehicle for youth development, and many thoughtful scholars and researchers have sought to identify the key opportunities that promote youth development[3]. To explore this issue with those who serve "high-risk" youth, project staff asked focus group participants what they believed were the most important opportunities for youth development that were provided in their programs. While there was much variation, four "opportunities" were strongly endorsed across the groups:

- (1) activities which involve youth in the planning and implementation of tasks,
  (2) activities which promote team building among young people,
  (3) activities which reflect value and respect for young people, and
  (4) adult interactions that employ a "positive" approach in terms of verbal and non-verbal communication and which focus on the strengths of youth.

This list conforms well with existing research. After integrating the views of the focus group participants with the research, project staff compiled a list of "generic inputs" opportunities that could, and in our judgment, should guide program planning across all organizations (Figure 2).

Summary

Over the past few years, scholars and practitioners have begun to articulate desirable youth outcomes. As part of this project, we tested these ideas with a range of practitioners, all of whom work with youth in high-risk situations. From this inquiry, it becomes clear that such

[3] Our work in this area has been influenced by many who seek to identify the fundamental opportunities or inputs of youth development, including Pittman and Cahill (1992), Benard (1992), Lefstein and Lipsitz (1986), Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1992), Hamilton (1992), Blyth (1990), Ferguson (1990), and Connell (1993).

FIGURE 1:
DESIRABLE YOUTH OUTCOMES

Meeting Needs	Building Competencies
Young People have basic needs critical to survival and "psychosocial health." They are a sense of:	*To succeed as adults, youth must acquire adequate attitudes, behaviors, and skills. Important "competencies" are:*
Safety Perception that one is safe, physically and psychologically; that there exists adequate "structure" in life.	**Physical Health** Evidence of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that will assure future physical well-being, such as exercise, good nutrition and effective contraceptive practices.
Self-Worth Perception that one is a "good person" who is valued by others and by self.	**Mental Health** The ability to develop and maintain a personal sense of well-being, as reflected in the ability to analyze and reflect on one's emotions and on daily events, to adapt to changing situations, and to engage in leisure and fun.
Mastery and Confidence Perception that one is accomplished, and has abilities valued by self and others; that one has some control over daily events.	**Social and Cultural** The ability to work with others, develop and sustain friendships through cooperation, empathy, negotiation, and take responsibility for one's own actions; the knowledge and motivation to respect differences among individuals of different cultural and economic backgrounds.
Autonomy/Independence Perception that one is a unique person with a history, present, and future; that one can "make it" in the world.	**Cognitive and Creative** A broad base of knowledge and an ability to appreciate and demonstrate creative expression. The ability to see different points of view, integrate ideas, and reflect. Good oral, written, problem-solving, and an ability to learn.
Closeness/Affiliation Perception that one loves, and is loved, by kin and fully appreciated by those with whom friendships are formed.	**Academic** The ability and motivation to remain and learn in school through graduation; the ability to study, write, engage in discussion, and to conduct independent study.
Self-Awareness/Spirituality Perception that one is intimately attached to larger systems; identification and affiliation with a cultural group, higher deity, or philosophy.	**Vocational** A broad understanding and awareness of life options and the steps to take in making choices. Practical organizational skills such as time management, budgeting, dealing with systems and bureaucracies.
Source: Adapted from Pittman and Wright (1991)	

FIGURE 2:
DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORTS

Desirable youth outcomes are promoted by organizations and youth workers when young people are provided with ongoing:

Opportunities for "positive adult relations"

- high expectations and clear standards
- monitoring through "non-intrusive" strategies
- authoritative supervision
- respect, caring, and friendship
- quality assistance, including instruction and training

Opportunities for "positive peer relations"

- fun and friendship
- taking multiple roles and responsibilities
- cooperative learning
- group discovery and problem-solving
- community involvement
- interacting with diverse persons
- involvement in social networks

Opportunities for youth "engagement and empowerment"

- voice in program planning and implementation
- choice in level of participation/involvement
- relevancy to daily and future life
- continuity of experience and incremental challenge
- reflection

Access to learning in a variety of "content" areas

- health, leisure, academics, vocational, social, cultural

youth have the same needs and face the same developmental challenges as other youth. The major difference is that such youth do not have the same quality of supports and opportunities afforded to other youth. Youth workers are in a position to provide many of these supports and opportunities, and to play a broader role in helping to shift the attitudes and practices of other practitioners.

Articulating desirable youth outcomes and developmental opportunities is an essential first step to creating strong staff development programs. Outcomes identify the ultimate goal of youth work -- the task at hand is to ensure that all youth achieve these outcomes. Opportunities identify building blocks of youth development -- the task at hand is to ensure that youth workers provide all youth with such opportunities.

III. PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES, KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF YOUTH WORKERS

In the previous section, we have sought to integrate existing research and expert opinion to establish a framework for considering the goals of youth work, and hence, the goals of staff development programs. In this section, we seek to provide some of the "details" of this framework. To do so, we begin by providing information from the voices of those in the field -- youth workers and professional staff trainers. Through personal interviews and focus groups we gained their opinions on three fundamental questions:

(1) How do youth workers and trainers describe the professional needs of youth workers?

(2) To what extent do these professionals identify "youth development" as a foundation for practice and staff development?

(3) What are the "core competencies" that define exemplary youth workers?

Differences Among Youth Workers. After data was collected, it was coded and entered into SPSS for analysis. While our main focus was to identify themes across all youth workers, we did conduct analyses to test for differences among certain variables. For data from personal interviews, we first examined if there were differences by gender, race, ethnicity, and age of youth worker. Then, we tested for differences by position within the organization (e.g., administrator, program manager, direct-service) and years of experience. For the focus groups, we intentionally recruited different types of staff -- three were conducted with administrators and program managers, three were held with direct service providers, and four were conducted with a mix of youth workers. Analysis examined if there were different patterns among the different groups.

Overall, there were very few differences. That is, all workers, regardless of their background or position, had similar views as to the professional needs of youth workers, the importance of youth development, and the core competencies of youth workers. This is not to say that all workers have the same opinions. In the next section of the report, for example, some

differences were apparent. For the findings below, however, we are confident that they adequately reflect the views of the all youth workers in our sample.

Personal Interviews with Youth Workers

We asked youth workers a series of questions aimed at understanding how they perceive their professional needs. One question was "What are the two skills, attitudes, or philosophies that you hold that allow you to be a good youth worker?" Youth workers were least likely to identify skills, instead they emphasized their personal attitudes or beliefs. Responses fell into three broad categories.

- Positive Orientation Toward Youth. Almost all youth workers stressed their basic orientation toward young people. Specifically, 47 percent attributed their effectiveness to their respect and appreciation for youth. Others (41 percent) cited their ability to be flexible, open-minded, and non-judgmental in their interactions with youth.

- Communication Skills. Many (37 percent) youth workers stressed their ability to communicate. This went beyond verbal communication. It was often reported that the most important skill was the ability to "read" and respond appropriately to the non-verbal communication of young people.

- Crisis Intervention/Clinical Skills. Reflecting that youth often experience turmoil, other workers (25 percent) reported their intervention skills, most typically their ability to do effective counseling, crisis management, and conflict resolution.

When youth workers were asked, What is the one thing that you would like to improve about yourself so that you could be a better worker in your organization?" many responses were similar to the ones above. However, it became clear that youth workers wanted more than "knowledge" or "program skills" -- indeed, 40 percent reported that most wanted to improve their effectiveness within organizations and communities.

- Self-Awareness Skills. While youth workers need to develop positive attitudes towards youth, many workers stressed that to do so, they need to gain self-awareness. Responses centered around the need to understand where one "fits" within the organization and the field of youth work, the ability to question one's own assumptions and to learn from others (including youth), and the ability to engage in stress management to avoid burnout.

- Youth Development Skills. To improve their efficacy, many workers stressed their desire for basic information on the needs of youth and on strategies to meet those needs. Other frequent responses included the ability to motivate and empower youth, and respond to diversity.

- Clinical Skills. Other workers wanted to develop clinical skills, most typically the ability to provide "treatment" services to youth and their families, including practical "prevention" strategies.

- Administrative/Organizational Skills. The most frequent response was that the workers wished to enhance their organizational skills. Included were the ability to manage a program, an agency or staff, and the ability to improve their time management and supervisory skills.

- Community Advocacy/Networking Skills. Other youth workers stressed the desire to become more skilled "in the community." Responses centered around the ability to advocate, network with other community organizations, and build community coalitions.

Interviews with Staff Trainers

Project staff also interviewed trainers to document their views on the issue of professional needs of youth workers. Specifically, as part of the survey of training organizations, we queried their representatives as to "What are the two most pressing professional needs of youth workers?" Responses fell neatly into five categories:

- "Youth Development" Strategies. The highest percentage (41 percent) of trainers believed that youth workers need a practical understanding of how to promote youth development. Frequent responses included strategies to encourage youth participation and empowerment, strategies to develop positive relations with youth, and communication skills when working with youth. Other trainers stressed the need to learn strategies of primary prevention.

- Clinical Skills. Noting that many youth workers served youth with significant behavioral and emotional difficulties, many trainers (30 percent) believed that youth workers needed additional knowledge to address these situations, such as information on the causes of deviant behavior and knowledge about crisis management and counseling.

- Practical Strategies for Intervening in Larger Environments. Many (26 percent) trainers reported that youth workers need the knowledge and skills to work in larger environments, such as families, communities, and public systems. To that end, youth workers need to be to be an effective advocate for youth, able to interact effectively to support families, and to cooperate and plan with other service providers. Other trainers stressed the need to effectively address systemic issues in communities and public systems.
- Organizational Skills. Many (22 percent) trainers reported that youth workers required organizational skills to help their agencies as a whole adapt and respond

to the needs of youth. Organizational skills included program planning and evaluation, supervision, and teamwork. Others focused on the ability to help the organization respond to issues of diversity.

- Knowledge of Adolescent Development. Many (18 percent) of the trainers stated that a knowledge of adolescent development (e.g., stages and processes of development, sexuality, role of family) provided the foundation for effective youth work.

Focus Groups with Youth Workers

Our third method of data collection was through focus groups. We explicitly asked youth workers "What are the qualities that you need in order to promote positive youth development among those with whom you work?"

- Develop Positive Personal Attributes. A plurality (31 percent) felt that attitudes such as patience, flexibility, belief in the potential of youth, and genuine caring and respect were the competencies most needed for good youth work.

- Help Youth Respond to Stress. Intervention skills were cited by many youth workers (26 percent), with conflict resolution and counseling being the most frequent responses.

- Practice Youth Development. Others (24 percent) referred to of specific skills to practice "youth development." Examples included knowing how to create a safe and supportive environment, how to empower youth to make their own decisions and take responsibility, and how to create a sense of belonging and membership among youth.

The remaining responses covered a range of competencies, with no clear patterns emerging. It is important to note focus group participants were not asked about organizational and community skills. This was frustrating to many -- indeed, like their peers who had personal interviews, and like the staff trainers, the focus groups stressed that these skills may ultimately be of equal or greater importance to "program skills."

Core Competencies of Exemplary Youth Workers

As mandated by OJJDP, the next task was to synthesize the above information to create a list of core competencies that would ultimately serve as the foundation for developing a "youth development" curriculum for youth workers.

This synthesis is a difficult task. We started by listing the full array of personal attributes, knowledge, skills and abilities collected during the study. Even the most condensed list was over six pages! Essentially, youth workers needed to be extraordinary people. While we

believe this to be true, project staff felt that additional work was necessary to establish priorities for staff development. We felt that the list needed to be reviewed and critiqued by a broader audience.

Fortunately, this work dovetailed with our ongoing project with the Dewitt Wallace - Reader's Digest Fund (Stronger Staff/Stronger Youth: From Inquiry to Action). As part of this inquiry, CYD staff reviewed taxonomies of core competencies prepared by over 15 national youth-serving organizations. On the basis of this review, our taxonomy was refined. Finally, representatives of the organizations critiqued the taxonomy, and another draft was prepared.

Throughout this process, it became apparent that positive personal attributes were a necessary, but not necessarily sufficient, component of exemplary youth work. Moreover, it became apparent that specific knowledge and skills take on relevancy only when they can be effectively applied through work. Hence, we choose to define core competencies as "demonstrated capacities" or abilities. That is, one has achieved a certain core competency when that competency is demonstrated over a sustained period of time. From our review, we identified four areas of core competencies. Core competencies in each area are seen in Figure 3.

1. Positive Attitudes Towards Self as a Youth Worker and Towards Youth, Families, and Communities as Partners

2. Youth Workers as Resources to Youth

3. Youth Workers as Resources to Organizations

4. Youth Workers as Resources to Communities

Summary

Analyses converge to describe the fundamental professional needs of youth workers, many of which center on the knowledge and program application of youth development concepts. These attributes collectively seem to describe the "prerequisites" that allow a youth worker to be a positive agent of youth development. This is not enough, however. Specific intervention skills, such as those that help youth through crisis or conflict situations, also seem essential to exemplary youth work. Moreover, youth workers need the capacity to work effectively with their colleagues, families, and with community residents and service providers to create healthy settings outside of the program that benefit youth.

We propose a taxonomy of ten core competencies. Within each of these core competencies, there exists a mix of attitudes, wisdom, knowledge, and skill that allow a youth worker to be a resource to youth, organizations and communities. As the OJJDP project moves into its second year, this taxonomy will orient our work, and we expect that it will be further modified and improved.

FIGURE 3:
CORE COMPETENCIES OF YOUTH WORKERS

The demonstrated capacities, listed below, provide a structure for identifying the personal attributes, knowledge and skills that define exemplary youth workers.

AREA 1: POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS SELF AS A YOUTH WORKER AND TOWARDS YOUTH, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES AS PARTNERS

Demonstrate Awareness of Self as a Youth Development Worker

(1) ability to articulate a personal "vision" of youth development work, and to express his/her current and potential contributions to that vision; (2) ability to be reflective and express opinions, to evaluate self and seek feedback from colleagues, parents, and youth, and to assess his/her role he/she might be seen by others

Demonstrate Caring for Youth and Families.

(1) concern about the well-being of others, interest in feelings and experiences of others, support of the self-esteem of others, enjoyment of being with youth, (2) belief in the potential and empowerment of all youth and family members, and the ability to identify positive possibilities amid difficult situations, (3) ability to actively engage family members in program and community initiatives, and to provide support to parents and guardians as they nurture the development of young people in their care.

Demonstrate Respect for Diversity and Differences Among Youth, Families, and Communities.

(1) awareness of commonalities and differences among youth of diverse backgrounds (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, class) and appreciation of those of differing talents, sexual orientations and faith, (2) willingness to search for and retain information about families and communities with cultural and economic backgrounds different from ones own, (3) ability to build on diversity among individuals to strengthen organizations and communities

FIGURE 3:
CORE COMPETENCIES OF YOUTH WORKERS
(continued)

AREA 2: YOUTH WORKERS AS RESOURCES TO YOUTH

Demonstrate Understanding of Youth Development and of Specific Youth.

(1) ability to articulate relevant theory and research regarding: youths' physical, emotional, social, and cognitive processes; peer group relations and sexuality; risk and protective factors of youth development, (2) ability to observe and talk with youth to assess individual needs, interests, fears, and competencies and to do so with an appreciation of organization, and community context

Demonstrate Capacity to Sustain Relations that Facilitate Youth Empowerment.

(1) ability to challenge values and attitudes of youth in a supportive manner; affirm and validate youth's feelings and ideas; nurture and confirm learning, (2) ability to articulate and maintain appropriate "boundaries" with youth (e.g., roles, responsibilities, relationships, confidentiality), (3) ability to actively and continuously consult youth; involve youth and have them contribute to programs and other conditions which affect their lives

Demonstrate Capacity to Develop Peer Group Cohesion and Collaborative Participation

(1) ability to articulate basic principles of group work and facilitation, cooperative learning, conflict resolution, and behavior management, (2) ability to initiate, enable, and sustain group interactions and relationships through the completion of an ongoing activity or project

FIGURE 3:
CORE COMPETENCIES OF YOUTH WORKERS
(Continued)

AREA 3: YOUTH WORKERS AS RESOURCES TO ORGANIZATIONS

Demonstrate Capacity to Plan and Implement Events Consistent with Needs of Youth and In Context of Available Resources

(1) ability to establish priorities in relation to organizational mission; plan and use existing resources to create a social environment of membership, altruism, participation, and challenge, (2) ability to articulate "best practices" principles from a youth development perspective, and apply these principles to the design, implementation, and evaluation of organizational programs and practices

Demonstrate Capacity to Be a Colleague to Staff and Volunteers in the Organization

(1) ability to be accountable, through work in teams and in isolation; recognize and act on need for own support; to accept and delegate responsibility, (2) ability to engage colleagues for the purpose of reconciling diverse opinions and to handle differences between own values and those of others; to make appropriate challenges to stereotyping and discrimination in the work place

AREA 4: YOUTH WORKERS AS RESOURCES TO COMMUNITIES

Demonstrate Capacity to Work with Community Leaders, Groups and Citizens on Behalf of Youth

(1) ability to articulate strategies of community consensus-building, mobilization, and advocacy; (2) ability to facilitate and enable groups through the process of identifying community needs and determining appropriate responses, (3) ability to assist groups in affirmatively responding to structural inequality and community factors that diminish opportunities for youth development

Demonstrate Capacity to Collaborate with Other Community Agencies and Youth-Serving Organizations

(1) awareness of the array, mission, and referral processes of community agencies and organizations that serve youth and families, (2) demonstrated ability to conduct community assessments, and identify under-utilized resources, (3) demonstrated ability to initiate, create, and sustain collaborative relations with other organizations, and develop concrete strategies that benefit both organizations and youth

IV. KEY COMPONENTS OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Clearly, core competencies can be gained in a variety of ways. One way is life experience, which is often what attracts people to fields such as youth work. Core competencies can be gained in other ways, and collectively, form a list of components that make up different staff development programs:

- formal education, continuing education
- on-the-job experience and practice, field placements and internships
- on-site supervision
- on-site training, including staffings and other strategies to convey information and ideas
- off-site training and seminars

To begin to identify how these different experiences contribute to the acquisition of core competencies, we asked a series of questions to workers through personal interviews and focus groups. Their answers were coded and analyzed as discussed previously. In a similar fashion, we tested for differences among staff to see if different types of staff had different opinions as to how youth workers gain core competencies. Once again, there were few differences, but those which exist are important and are highlighted in this section.

Strategies to Gain Core Competencies

To begin to understand the key components of staff development, we asked a series of questions to youth workers during their personal interviews. We asked them to rate identified types of staff development according to "How important it is to your becoming an effective youth worker?" Three of the categories were viewed as important or very important by fully 75 percent of the respondents: on-the-job experiences, on-site supervision/training, and life experience. In contrast, internships/field placements, off-site training, and formal education were seen as being less powerful contributions to youth workers' knowledge and skill base. This is not to say, however, that these forms of staff development were typically viewed as unimportant (Table 1).

Table 1

Key Past Experiences of Youth Workers

How important has each been to your learning to be an effective youth worker?

Learning Mode	Not Important	Somewhat Infrequent	Important	Very Important
on-the-job experience	0%	5%	18%	77%
on-site supervision/training	7%	20%	25%	48%
life experience	3%	19%	34%	44%
internships/placements	18%	19%	33%	30%
off-site training	9%	46%	30%	15%
formal education	24%	47%	19%	10%

The next question posed to the youth workers forced them to choose the single category that most contributed to their effectiveness. A similar pattern emerged, with on-the-job, life, and supervisory experiences being perceived as most important (Table 2).

Table 2

Most Important Past Experiences of Youth Workers

What contributed the most to your learning to be an effective youth worker?

on-the-job experiences	50%
life experience	23%
on-site supervision/training	17%
internships/field placements	5%
off-site training	4%
formal education	1%

From these two questions, it is apparent that youth workers perceive that they learn best through experience. This experience can, and does, occur in many ways -- through daily life experiences outside the job, through interacting directly with youth, and through dialogue with supervisors and co-workers.

The relative lack of importance placed on other forms of staff development are open to interpretation. For example, it is likely that few youth workers have had the opportunity to engage in internships or field placements, and hence few are able to judge their importance favorably. Age may also be an explanatory factor -- 66 percent of our sample was over 30 years

of age and it may be that lessons learned through formal education or internships are distant and rudimentary compared to more recent experiences.

Importance of Training and Self-Directed Learning. The relatively low overall assessments of off-site training is important to consider, especially since this form of formal training is often equated with staff development or is seen as a primary vehicle of staff development. One question from our interview sheds some light on the issue. After the youth worker had identified the competency that they most wanted to acquire to be a "better" youth worker, project staff asked "what form of staff development would be most useful in terms of making these improvements?" Training was the most common response, reported by 50 percent of the participants (Table 3).

These data suggest that youth workers desire formal training most frequently when they can, or are given the opportunity, to express their professional needs. Further, it is clear that youth workers wish to be empowered. As seen in Table 3, youth workers desire the opportunity to be actively engaged in structuring their own learning. Many report that, given the opportunity, they would make improvements through site visits and through self-instructional materials.

Table 3

Most Desired Future Staff Development Experience

Which form of staff development would be most useful to you, in terms of making these improvements?	
Training	50%
Site Visits	44%
Self-Instruction Materials	31%
Supervision	26%
Formal Education	24%
More Direct Service Work Experience	16%
Internships/Field Placements	9%

Importance of Supervision. The importance of supervision is best illustrated in data from the focus groups. In these discussions, high quality supervision to complement on-the-job experiences was frequently mentioned as a necessary factor in becoming an effective youth worker. Supervision was seen as important because it can be available on a continuing basis. It allows the youth worker to process on-the-job experiences with someone who is familiar with specific youth and the organization. Other youth workers noted that supervision allows feedback on specific experiences which can then be generalized to new situations. The youth worker can apply this feedback and guidance immediately, and has an opportunity to follow-up with the

supervisor to gain clarity, continue processing, and receive reinforcement of learnings and experiences.

Organizational Support for Staff Development

As it currently stands, supervision and training remain the dominant forms of formal staff development within organizations. In order to gain insight into the extent to which organizations support these types of staff development, we asked youth workers to address this issue during their personal interviews. Additionally, focus group participants were asked to provide their assessments of organizational support.

To examine supervision issues, respondents answered the question, "To what extent does your organization actively support the development and maintenance of strong supervisor/direct line worker relationships?" Responses were mixed. While 44 percent felt that supervisory relationships were "strongly" supported, 38 percent reported "moderate" support and 18 percent report "weak" or "no" support (Table 4).

Differences were found among staff when experience and tenure are factored in. The longer staff have worked with youth, have been in their current position, or have longevity within the organization, the more likely they are to perceive organizational support as strong. For example, only 32 percent of those with less than three years in the organization perceived they were strongly supported, compared to about 50 percent for those with more tenure.

It appears that these less experienced (or, less "seasoned") youth workers need more assistance than their supervisors perceive, or are asking for a greater degree of validation and attention. This was further suggested in response to an open-ended question where direct line workers were asked what they wished their supervisors would do better in terms of supporting them. There was a consistent theme that their supervisors failed to acknowledge the demands of working the "front lines" (e.g., "supervisor needs to understand the realities of what we do," "supervisor should try to do my job for a day," and "supervisor needs to remember what it was like to be a direct service worker.").

Table 4
Organizational Support for Supervision

To what degree does your organization actively support the development and maintenance of strong supervisory/direct line worker relationships (by years with the organization)?

Degree of support	< 3 yrs.	3-5 yrs.	5+ yrs.	All Workers
strong support	32%	47%	53%	44%
moderate support	51%	47%	24%	38%
weak support	15%	7%	24%	17%
no support	2%	0	0%	1%

Table 5

Organizational Support for Training

To what degree does your organization value training as a from of staff development (By staff rank)

Degree of support	Administrator	Manager	Direct Service	All Workers
strong support	72%	42%	48%	55%
moderate support	28%	45%	44%	39%
weak support	0	11%	8%	6%
no support	0	3%	0	1%

It was somewhat surprising that, relative to support for supervisory relations, youth workers reported that the organization placed a high degree of value on training as a form of professional development. As seen in Table 5, for example, 55 percent of the workers reported strong support for training, while only 7 percent reported weak or no support. Rank is a mediating factor. It is not too surprising that the senior administrators felt that the organization valued training more than managers or direct service providers.

The focus groups provided a less structured forum to speak about organizational support for staff development. Staff stressed that organizational support is essential for any staff development program to be effective. Budget constraints were often cited as a significant barrier to formal training. While this has truth to it, the focus group participants stressed that organizational support could be demonstrated in less costly ways such as improving supervision, establishing

staff mentoring and teamwork programs, or facilitating site visits. Some participants were concerned with a "sink or swim" attitude in their organizations where the responsibility falls to individual staff to identify their own needs and search out ways to prepare themselves.

Dissemination of Information Among Staff

It is, of course, impossible for all staff to be directly involved in all types of necessary staff development activities. Valuable information and insight might be lost if staff who attend seminars, workshops and the like do not have the opportunity to communicate and reflect on their learnings with co-workers. Hence, another form of organizational support for staff development is the implementation of strategies to disseminate learnings among staff.

During interviews, we asked staff how learnings were disseminated within their organization, and whether these strategies were effective. Overall, information is typically exchanged formally through staff meetings or through supervision, but in almost half the cases the exchange is informal and not planned. For example, 15 percent reported that information dissemination does not occur in their organization (Table 6). While about 53 percent of the youth workers find their organizational strategies to be effective, 45 percent report that information is rarely transferred or not transferred consistently (Table 7).

Interpretation of these findings is open. For those who do not disseminate information, it is possible that they do not know the best ways to do it, or they may think that the information is not relevant to other staff. Alternatively, it may be that organizations do not have adequate structures in place to share information, or that these structures are underutilized.

Table 6

Strategies of Information Dissemination

How do staff in your organization that attend training communicate their learnings to others in the organization?	
Meetings	42%
Informal Sharing	18%
In-service/supervision	11%
Distribute materials	8%
Doesn't Happen	15%

Table 7

Effectiveness of Information Dissemination

How well do you think learnings from training events get passed from staff who attended to staff who were not present?	
No strong opinion	2%
Information rarely transferred	14%
Not transferred consistently	31%
Adequate transfer	39%
Very Good Transfer	14%

Summary

A good staff development program has multiple, and ideally, interactive components. Clearly, one becomes an exemplary youth worker through life experience, and through direct experiences with youth both outside and within programs. Supervision is important, as it helps youth workers create meaning and structure as they reflect on their experiences. Training can also be a key component of a staff development program. Its usefulness is likely to be enhanced when youth workers have the opportunity to identify specific professional needs and then receive appropriate training.

Organizational support is a key element of staff development programs. While about half of the youth workers interviewed felt that there was organizational support for forming good supervisory relations and for offering training, about half did not. In general, those workers with less tenure and rank in the organization felt less supported. Clearly, this pattern of results indicates the need for greater organizational attention to these issues as a strategy for program improvement[4].

In a similar vein, greater attention needs to be focused on dissemination of information among staff. In many organizations, formal structures do not exist, and overall, many youth workers believe that existing strategies are not working. Implementing strategies for information dissemination, and learning how to transfer information and insight from formal training remains a challenge to organizations.

[4] There were also gender differences on some questions. For example, men felt that life experience was most important to their learning, while women were more likely to identify supervision and on-the-job experience. Women were less likely to perceive organizational support for training, and were less likely to believe that information was adequately disseminated among staff. As with the differences by tenure and rank, gender differences need to be considered when planning staff development programs.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS: TOWARDS EXEMPLARY STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Guiding Principles for Creating Staff Development Programs

Based on this inquiry (as well as on literature reviews), we offer six guiding principles to orient development of staff development programs. We offer these principles to the field, and equally important, these recommendations offer direction to OJJDP and others involved in this project, as we move into the second and third years of the initiative.

- Articulation of a Clear Vision to Guide Staff Development
- Staff Development as a Strategy of Program Improvement
- Making Staff Development Central to Organizational Mission
- Staff Development as a Tool for Organizational Improvement
- Staff Development as a Vehicle to Build the Capacity of Communities
- Utilizing the Full Range of Staff Development Activities Available to Organizations

Articulation of a Clear Vision to Guide Staff Development. One premise of our inquiry is that the best place to begin to develop objectives for staff development is through a definition of youth development. Once healthy and competent youth are identified as the goal of youth work, it then becomes possible to identify common performance objectives for youth workers. It is these performance objectives, or core competencies, that establish a foundation for developing a training curriculum and other staff development activities. Further, it is these core competencies that organizations will ultimately "train to" and which will ultimately form a standard for youth worker and organizational accountability.

As discussed above, we have identified four areas of core competencies that will guide our future inquiry, and within these areas are ten capacities that define exemplary youth workers. Our conclusion is that these competencies are both "core" and "generic" -- they are essential for all youth workers independent of their place of employment, and should be the basis for staff development.

At the same time, there might be additional competencies, specific to certain types of organizations or programs that are equally important. These competencies have not yet been articulated, and a main objective of Year 2 will be to determine if additional competencies needed by workers within the juvenile justice system and others who serve youth in high-risk situations. Nonetheless, we pursue this search with one important caveat -- regardless of what we or others express, it is recommended that each organization strive to ensure a common consensus among its own workers -- to articulate a clear vision -- as to the core competencies of youth workers. It is only through this process that organizations and youth workers will develop to their fullest potential.

Staff Development as a Strategy of Program Improvement. It is further recommended that staff development programs be designed to improve the capacity of workers to implement services in a way that fully incorporates a youth development framework. Our position is that a youth development framework offers a strong foundation for understanding best program practice, and this view was supported by youth workers and trainers involved in this project. Hence, understanding and applying a youth development framework must be a key element of staff development programs. Again, a caveat is important. The application of a youth development framework will vary somewhat from program to program. It is crucial that one objective of staff development must be for all workers, including administrators, to form a common consensus of best practice within their organization, and as part of Year 2 of this project, we will test strategies to accomplish this objective with workers in the field of juvenile justice, as well as other workers who serve young people in high-risk settings.

Unless there is sound agreement on content of training, or more specifically on best practice, policy makers and program managers are susceptible to being sold on trendy fad training techniques with little relevance to the performance objectives that staff development is meant to influence. This view leaves much room for significant variation in the methodology of staff development activities. Indeed, focusing on the desired performance of youth workers in effect helps to integrate contextual, and content issues and should provide the basis for decision making in each of these areas.

Making Staff Development Central to Organizational Mission. Staff development is a means to an end, with the end being healthy and competent youth. Properly viewed, staff development is best conceived as a specific tool that may serve a useful purpose in a larger policy reform intervention, or set of activities aimed at improving the performance and efficacy of a project, programs, or institution.

To serve this purpose, staff development activities must be consistent in philosophy and practice with that of the organization. It does little good, for example, to prepare youth workers to empower young people if the organization does not value or support practices based on this principle. Similarly, if the organization views its mission solely to control young people, staff development efforts aimed at promoting youth development will be of limited effectiveness. As repeatedly stressed by youth workers, it is recommended that explicit organizational buy-in for the purposes of staff development serve as a fundamental goal and precondition for effective staff development programs, and that this common understanding be achieved through discussion among staff at all levels of the organization.

Staff Development as a Tool for Organizational Improvement. It is important to recognize that the environment of youth services (including juvenile justice) is one in which neither practice nor performance objectives are fixed. Instead, they are emerging as organizations move from deficit-driven models of practice to those that emphasize youth development. This shift in orientation will require consistent shifts in organizational functioning and in the quality of service provided. It is recommended, therefore, that staff development also be used as an explicit process through which workers help to build their organizational capacity and define

interventions. Staff development does not currently serve this purpose in many organizations. At a minimum level of criteria, individual workers are engaged in certain staff development activities, but there is insufficient dissemination or discussion of new learnings. Moreover, we heard of few efforts where staff development brought workers together with the aim to fundamentally strengthen the principles or practices of the organization. Consequently, a key potential mechanism for strengthening organizations is lost.

Staff Development as a Vehicle to Build the Capacity of Communities. With the recognition that youth development occurs across all settings and the awareness that a single program or organization can not remedy all of the adverse conditions facing youth, youth workers are increasingly asked to act within the broader community. To do so requires additional knowledge and skills. As indicated in this inquiry, for example, youth workers must learn the cultures and norms of different areas and peoples, and be able to function effectively within them. They must be able to assess community needs, and then facilitate and enable public and private coalitions to address these needs.

Additionally, youth workers are increasingly asked to create collaborative partnerships with other service organizations. Youth workers must develop the capacity to look beyond their own programs, and to articulate rationales and strategies for collaboration. Hence, it is recommended that staff development programs be fully utilized as a vehicle to prepare youth workers and organizations to affirmatively build the capacity of communities.

As history has shown, developing partnerships is easier said than done. Issues of budget, regulations, and shared staff are obstacles to overcome. In this project, we will start at the beginning. Assuming that improving the capacity of communities begins, in large part, with increasing the familiarity and improving the relationships among key stakeholders, we will study other initiatives to investigate how inter-organizational training programs can begin the process of capacity-building. As we prepare and test our curriculum, we will build on explicit strategies to gain interorganizational participation, and one area of content covered will address issues of community capacity-building.

Utilizing the Full Range of Staff Development Activities Available to Organizations. Staff development is often equated with staff training. Through this inquiry, however, it becomes clear that other types of staff development are of equal importance, and in some situations, more important than formal training. Many youth workers believe they develop core competencies best through on-the-job experience. Others stress the importance of complementing this experience with strong supervision and through the opportunity to have "case conferences" or "team meetings" with colleagues. Others learn through observation and discussion, such as that afforded through internships and site visits to other programs. This is not to say that training is unimportant as witnessed throughout this inquiry. However, it does lead to the recommendation that training be viewed as an important strategy of staff development, but that other forms, such as supervision, receive similar attention.

It is not known what types of staff development contribute most to the acquisition of specific core competencies, yet it is likely that the different types, when complementary, are all needed to assist youth workers in their own developmental processes. Similarly, it is possible that different workers strengthen certain competencies in different ways based on their experiences and formal education. As part of Year 2 of this project, we will focus attention on this issue. Additionally, the subsequent training curriculum will be designed to encourage organizations to take full advantage of the various forms of staff development that are available.

Guiding Principles of Effective Training

The curriculum and training design developed during Year 2 will be grounded in a youth development framework and will emphasize the application of this framework to program design, best practice, organizational priorities, and community collaboration. That is, it will aim to help youth workers develop "core competencies."

Our products will be developed and tested not only with curriculum experts but also in direct collaboration with youth workers themselves and with our advisory group. It is evident that perhaps the worst mistake we, or others, could make would be to become locked in a rigid curriculum and training protocol. While we seek to produce a methodology that offers concrete and useful information and which offers legitimate opportunities for problem solving, the ultimate goal will be to help organizations set in motion self-directed processes resulting in greater supports for youth development.

What are the principles that will guide our curriculum development? Based on the lessons learned already in our inquiry, and through selected reviews of relevant research, we will work to ensure that the following is incorporated into our training approach.

Content of Training

- Direct Application: Training is oriented toward the core competencies of youth workers in a context that explicitly focuses on the "live" work and challenges facing youth workers. There is a fusion between the distinct boundaries of "training," "direct service," and "administration."

- The Cutting Edge and Personal Challenge: Information discussed should reflect the "best" current thinking, with research, theory, and examples to support such thinking. All persons should be challenged to respond to such ideas and required to make sense of them for themselves.

- Group Dynamics: Interactions in training groups mirror those within organizations. There are structured opportunities to reflect on group processes and to discuss relationships. Divergent viewpoints and conflicts are addressed openly, as are issues of power, race, and gender within the group.

Context of Training

- Reality-Based: Training is not viewed as a "cure all" for any issue. Barriers to good practice -- on the individual, program, organization and community level -- are acknowledged. Training responds to these barriers so not to be "out of context."

- Inclusively: All persons apply knowledge and generate answers together. No "trainer" is presumed, though consultants or designated persons can take the role of facilitator. All staff and all youth are included in the ongoing training process though not necessarily at the same time. Where numbers prohibit full participation, full representation is achieved.

- Inter-Organizational Participation: Individual learning and organizational collaboration can be facilitated when representatives of different organizations engage in joint training. Such interactions are not always appropriate, but are necessary at a minimum when the training focuses on community-level issues.

Process of Training

- Continuity: "One-shot training" is avoided. The curriculum must be presented over time, with each component of training building on the previous one. Workers continuously follow a cycle of "learning," "practicing," and "reflecting."

- Structure and Contracting: Training follows "operational rules" agreed to by all participants. All persons state what they hope to achieve from the training. It is the responsibility of each individual, with group support, to accomplish personal objectives.

- Learning Styles and Modalities: Individuals learn in different ways. Training should engage participants' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor processes, to build on all capacities for an individual to learn.

- Diverse Learning Opportunities: Emphasis is placed on participants' direct experiences as the vehicle for gaining knowledge and skills. There is a mix between instruction, problem-solving, values clarification, and task exercises.

Summary

The goal of staff development is ultimately to help organizations and youth workers promote youth development. As such, a fundamental objective must be to provide youth workers with the ability to be resources to youth. Yet youth workers and youth exist in larger contexts that have a strong influence on the youth worker's ability to effectively serve young people. Hence, youth workers must also develop the capacity to be a resource to the organization and

community. These multiple aims provide a framework for developing exemplary staff development programs. To achieve them, organizations must explicitly support each of the aims -- a focus on only one is insufficient and, in some situations, can be highly detrimental. It is important therefore that organizations fully utilize and strengthen the different staff development strategies at their disposal.

Staff development must be a long-term investment strategy for an organization. As part of our Year 2 activities, we will develop a curriculum and training design to help organizations begin this process. This curriculum and training design will not, of course, take youth workers and organizations throughout the whole process. Our aim is more modest, but not less important. Specifically, we will develop an approach, one that can be replicated by others, which will give organizations the necessary knowledge and skills to begin their long-term investment and which will offer concrete strategies for continuing this work.

A quick perusal of these guiding principles reveals our belief that the same approaches that are effective in efforts to develop competent youth apply equally well to the development of competent staff. Generally speaking, if we believe that youth become healthy and competent by being allowed to practice being competent in roles that encourage and support this behavior, we should assume that the same is true for workers. If we believe that youth develop through the opportunities to be active in problem-solving roles, then we should assume that adult learners desire and can profit from similar experiences. In Year 2, as we develop a curriculum guide and protocols, this simple awareness, and the content underneath it, will orient our work.

VI. GOALS FOR YEARS TWO AND THREE OF THE PROJECT

Based on our Year 1 inquiry, two basic conclusions can be drawn. First, there is a strong need for youth workers to have an earlier and deeper knowledge of adolescent development, youth problems, and effective ways to assist youth (both directly and indirectly) in their overall growth and development. A youth development perspective, one that focuses on the desirable outcomes of youth and youth worker competencies needed to promote such outcomes, seems to provide a strong basis for integrating information to be presented as a foundation for staff development programs. Second, it is clear that there is a need for this content to be delivered in a way that maximizes face-to-face interaction, practical application, and feedback and to be delivered with the full blessing of the employing organization so that lessons learned can be applied and sustained.

Our Year 2 work is focused on development and planning. Specifically, we will develop and test a core "youth development" training module that will be applicable to a broad spectrum of youth workers. Further, in collaboration with the advisory group, we will begin to set the stage for implementation, selecting pilot settings and seeking key endorsements. In Year 3, we will pilot and evaluate both the training modules and the delivery system. Throughout both years, there will be significant efforts to solicit input and buy-in from organizations whose financial, administrative, or technical support is key to the overall goal of improving the professional development opportunities of community-based youth workers. Our final report, therefore, will

focus on strategies for taking to scale the curriculum products and implementation strategies that will emerge from the project.

Curriculum and Training Specifications

A major task for Year Two is the development of a curriculum, appropriate for people who work with youth in high-risk situations. Implementation, testing, and evaluation of the curriculum is one project strategy towards the institutionalization of a youth development philosophy in youth work generally, and in the justice system, specifically. Concurrently, project staff will be identifying and convening constituencies who may, in the future, wish to use the curriculum as part of local and national initiatives.

Goal/Purpose: The goal of the curriculum is to strengthen the competencies of youth workers. Through diverse learning experiences, participants will (1) gain a strong knowledge of youth development, (2) acquire the interest, attitudes, values, and skills essential to effectively work with young people consistent with this knowledge, and (3) have the opportunity to apply their learnings to specific conditions and challenges existing in their own organizations and programs.

Philosophy/Guiding Framework: All training activities will center on participants' gaining a full understanding of a "youth development" framework, and its implications for guiding service delivery. This framework provides a structure for thinking about how youth develop desired personal attributes and competencies, and it identifies the key intervention "components" that facilitate such development. The curriculum will be oriented towards the practical application of concepts. This means that the curriculum will provide ample opportunity to apply their learnings to their own program issues, and to problem-solve with others in the training session.

Content: In developing the curriculum, the key question is: What is it that youth workers most need to know, and be able do, in order to be a resource to young people? The content ultimately included in the curriculum will be that which responds to this question. Specifically, the curriculum will provide youth workers with a strong knowledge of youth development, the opportunity to acquire the personal competencies needed to promote youth development, and the opportunity to identify and practice strategies to apply this information to strengthening services for youth.

The content of the curriculum -- both that presented by facilitators and that offered through supplemental readings -- will presented in the context of a "field of youth development." It is important for participants to recognize that they are part of a field larger than their particular organization or professional affiliation.

This content will be presented and discussed in context of participants' organizations, communities, and existing political realities (e.g., social/economic climate in which youth grow up). The curriculum will highlight the interactive influences between youth workers and their organizations and communities. However, the specific competencies needed by youth workers to reach their fullest potential as resources to organizations and communities will not be a

specific content area of this curriculum. For example, the curriculum will not directly address issues of supervision, budgeting, or community development strategies.

Target Audience: The curriculum will be appropriate for those from organizations, public and private, that serve youth in high-risk situations. While the curriculum will be appropriate to diverse youth workers, it will be designed and tested to ensure application to those working with youth in community settings with young people involved or at-risk of entering the justice system. The training will be most productive when participants come from organizations within a given community, though it will be applicable when participants come from a larger geographic area.

The curriculum will be appropriate for direct service workers and supervisors, as it is assumed that both types of staff can benefit from the content and application of a youth development framework. At the same time, it is recognized that direct service workers and supervisors have different responsibilities and perhaps different organizational priorities. In response to the key question, "what can staff do differently as a result of their training experience," for example, direct service and supervisors might respond differently. The curriculum will be developed so that staff can build, and reflect, on these differences.

Time to Deliver Curriculum: It is expected that 25 to 30 hours will be required to deliver the curriculum. This training will be offered in three different sessions, over an as-of-yet undetermined period of time.

Delivery Method: The curriculum will be delivered at the local level, employing direct (face-to-face) training methods. (While strategies such as distance learning and interactive video could have a role in the future, our belief is that personal engagement and the process of learning by doing directly with colleagues is the most productive way of teaching youth development and its application). Hence, the curriculum will be delivered through short lectures and case studies, with ample time allowed for group discussion and problem-solving.

Critical to the success of the curriculum, however, will be the opportunities for self-directed learning (e.g., readings, discussion guides to engage colleagues) in between the different components of the training and after the whole curriculum has been delivered. It will be a clear expectation that participants take their learning back to their organization, and materials will be developed to help them do so.

Organizational Commitment: The curriculum will be most effective when organizations make explicit commitments (1) to support their attending workers, and (2) to using the curriculum and training as a "jumping off" point for organizational reflection and change. It is expected that each organization will send at least two persons from their organization. Each organization will have to commit to providing these staff persons with time to attend all training sessions. It is hoped that each organization will make additional commitments depending on their time and resources, especially in terms of ensuring ongoing support for those staff who have been part of the training.