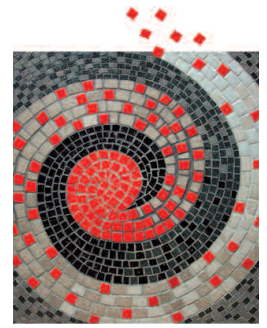


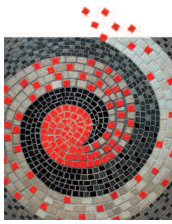
Capturing Promising Practices in
Recruitment and Retention
of Frontline Youth Workers

A Project of the National Collaboration for Youth

Table of Contents



Cornerstones for Kids Introduction	2
Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	7
Identifying Promising Practices	9
Retention Begins with Recruitment and Is Ongoing	11
Recruitment	12
<i>Provide Incentives</i>	12
<i>Capitalize on Technology</i>	13
<i>Create Specific Strategies for College-Age Workers</i>	14
<i>Reach Out for Diversity</i>	15
<i>Prepare Youth to be Youth Workers</i>	17
Retention	18
<i>Select Staff Carefully</i>	18
<i>Provide Adequate Compensation</i>	19
<i>Offer Opportunities for Advancement</i>	21
<i>Create Supportive Environments & Climates that Foster Success</i>	23
<i>Insist on Professional Development & Training</i>	24
<i>Value & Respect Youth Workers</i>	27
<i>Ensure Opportunities for Networking</i>	29
Recommendations for Improving Recruitment & Retention	31
Conclusion	33
Appendix A: The National Collaboration for Youth	34
Appendix B: Interviewees	35
Appendix C: Advisory Group	36
Appendix D: Organization Descriptions	37
Appendix E: Methodology	42
References	43



RETENTION

Maintaining a stable workforce can only come about when organizations recruit the right people for the right reasons, are clear about their expectations, and train, support, and fairly compensate their staff. Frontline staff work long hours for little pay, and many will occasionally question the value of their work.¹⁵ Because youth work is so often undervalued, respecting staff is just as important to the work as providing adequate compensation and benefits. It is equally essential to create supportive environments that include opportunities for staff to learn from each other in training, coaching and mentoring activities. All these factors are key elements in staff retention.

Select Staff Carefully

The staff, programs, and program environment need to be of the highest quality possible.

*Jody Voss
Boys & Girls Club/
Girls Inc. of
Pueblo County &
Lower Arkansas Valley*

A common and inaccurate view is that anyone can do youth work, which often leads to hiring decisions being made simply on the need for “warm bodies” to fill positions. The reality is that youth workers need to possess a broad range of knowledge and skills and to be able to apply them effectively when working with young people.¹⁶ Retaining effective staff must begin with a mutual understanding by the employer and the candidate of the skills and knowledge needed to perform the job. Retention begins with purposeful recruitment and selection.

Begin with the Interview: Many job candidates present promising applications and references. However, Boys & Girls Club/Girls Inc. of Pueblo County & Lower Arkansas Valley insists on seeing how well candidates can apply their skills to youth work. As a key part of the interview and screening process, final candidates are required to conduct a hands-on activity with program participants. Staff then ask the youth what they thought of the individual candidates and have them describe how the activity was run. The comments are recorded and used to assist in making final employment decisions. This process gives the organization a clear idea of how potential staff will perform on the job; at the same time, it provides candidates with specific information about job expectations and skills needed.



Provide Adequate Compensation

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

*Sharon Edwards
Cornerstones
for Kids*

Youth service workers have been characterized as “an extraordinarily dedicated workforce drawn to the sector by non-monetary rewards, but who are struggling to meet growing financial responsibilities with significantly lower salaries than their classmates entering other sectors.”¹⁷ Effective strategies need to compensate for the combination of heavy workloads, irregular or insufficient hours, limited access to essential resources, and low pay.¹⁸ It is not sufficient that youth workers like to do the work or are driven by a sense of mission. Just as many organizations advocate for the rights of the youth they serve, many are beginning to advocate as passionately for the rights of their frontline staff.

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

Offer Competitive Pay: Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Cincinnati (BBBSGC) is intent on maintaining pay scales that are above the bottom of the salary scale. Because the organization works with a number of volunteers and Public Allies interns, it is not faced with a huge hiring dilemma. However, for the staff it does employ it monitors salary trends of other organizations, such as the National Association of Social Workers, and sets wages accordingly. This results in BBBSGC paying higher wages than other BBBS agencies and private nonprofit organizations and keeps the organization competitive with public sector employers.



Small local organizations that want to offer benefits for their staff should follow these guidelines:

- *Ensure that the affiliate is not responsible for member premiums or customer service.*
- *Locate a committed and creative insurance agent who can and wants to work with the youth service field and its unusual employment characteristics.*
- *Negotiate the minimum number of hours an employee may work and still be eligible for benefits (governed by law, an organization's personnel policies, and the insurance plans regulations).*
- *Negotiate the best price and services.*
- *Make sure the agent can set up (at no cost) a Section 125 account for each employer.*
- *Explore using a portion of Medicaid funds in creative ways to support affordable health insurance both for small businesses/community-based organizations and their low-wage workers. Massachusetts, California, Florida, New York City, Oregon, and some counties in Michigan are among the states/municipalities/counties that participate. Each program is different.*
- *Reference staff benefits resources, such as:*

Blaisdell Insurance

George Blaisdell 1-800-882-8535
www.blaisdellinsurance.com

This is the agency MSAC works with. Blaisdell can service most states for health insurance and all states for dental insurance. He can also offer life, disability and retirement plans, set up Section 125 accounts and connect clients to other supports to defray costs (like the Insurance Partnership).

The Insurance Partnership

Josh Tobin 1-800-399-8285
www.4ip.org

The Insurance Partnership is the public/private agency that subsidizes health insurance for small employers and their employees in Massachusetts. It may be able to connect you to a similar program in your own state.

Prioritize Benefits for

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



Offer Opportunities for Advancement

Getting youth workers started on a career ladder that includes on-going education, advancement opportunities, and professional recognition helps keep them focused on the bigger picture, which is the value of the work being done with youth.

*Kathleen Lodi
University of Nebraska –
Lincoln Cooperative Extension*

Youth workers who have opportunities for training, increased responsibility, and higher compensation are more likely to stay in their jobs longer.¹⁹ More and more organizations are getting the message.

Plan for Promotions: A key strategy at Camp Fire USA Alaska Council is promoting program aides to paid staff positions. Site directors talk with each aide about what it means to them to work at the agency. They ask, for example, whether aides see their position as a summer job or as the first step toward a possible career. Those who respond the latter are then mentored by the site director and receive specific training and planned exposure to a variety of youth work experiences. Of the agency's current 100 frontline youth workers, 10 percent were promoted from a program aide position to program staff.

Offer a Flexible Approach to Advancement: Given budget constraints, the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System has had difficulty finding qualified candidates who are willing to move to Idaho to fill positions in extension programs. As a result, the system has adopted a "grow our own" approach that allows youth workers who are interested in advancing to specialist and/or administrative roles in youth development programs to take up to three years to complete the required degree. As administrative staff get to know county youth workers, they begin to assess the young peoples' motivation and ability to become educators or specialists. Those youth workers are then sponsored in the "Learning to Lead" training program where they acquire the skills needed for advancement. Several Idaho specialists have been hired to work at the state level as an outcome of this approach.



The following is a summary of what it costs to implement the career ladder program at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln:

Internships

- **\$4,800 per student, per summer**
- **(\$10/hour, no benefits or travel)**

For-Credit Courses

- **Resident tuition - \$199.50/credit hour**
- **Up to 15 credits annually per employee - total cost up to \$3,000**

In-Depth Training – 3 to 5 days

- **Program Materials/Fees - \$200 per person**
- **Instructor Fees - \$3,500 (up to 25 students in class)**
- **Depending upon topic and instructor, these sessions could be taken for college credit**
- **Cost of lost work time would vary by employee**

Monthly, Interactive Web-based programming

- **WebEx (or other educational system) - \$250/hour**
- **Instructor Fees - \$100/hour**
- **Cost of lost work time would vary by employee**

Create Incentives and Support for

Promotion: The University of Nebraska, Lincoln Extension, offers a summer internship program for college juniors and seniors interested in careers within the 4-H system. In this first step on a career ladder, the students begin work as extension assistants—entry-level positions in the system requiring a bachelor’s degree—and are eligible for free tuition credit at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. They pay only \$1 per credit for up to 15 credits per year. This incentive is offered to encourage students to work towards a master’s degree and eventually move into positions as 4-H educators. Typically, the assistants work hours are kept flexible to accommodate their class schedules, and advisors work closely with them to design appropriate academic programs. In addition, the campus Extension Coordinator and a mentor in the county office provide the students with career counseling and help them adapt to the challenges of working with youth. Every effort is made to provide participants with the best educational and skill-building experiences by placing them in county offices that most closely match their interests.



Create Supportive Environments and Climates that Foster Success

Most people want to be part of something worthwhile and will become more involved when they feel they are key players in that effort.

Don Scott

Methodist Children's Home

Research on employee-organization relationships suggests that individuals will be more satisfied, will perform better, and will stay on the job longer when their personal attributes and the work environment are congruent.²⁰ Creating a supportive and inclusive work environment promotes a sense of connectedness among the staff that is critical to effective job performance and commitment to the organization.

Be Flexible: Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Cincinnati (BBBSGC) staff are able to work outside of the office by coordinating their desired schedules with a central administrator. Staff are accountable for quantifying their workload. This flexibility in scheduling is a way that BBBSGC attempts to create an environment that minimizes the stress of the long and irregular hours that are often a hallmark of youth work.

Balance Work and Life Responsibilities: Since irregular work schedules are a fact of life in youth programs, Boys & Girls Club/Girls Inc. of Pueblo County & Lower Arkansas Valley also believes that flexibility is needed to ensure that individuals stay within a reasonable work week. Any extenuating circumstances that might affect job performance and program implementation (e.g., irregular schedules that occur due to training, floods, or community events) are taken into consideration when planning work schedules and responsibilities. The organization believes it is important to be aware of the demands on staff and provide support to avoid overextension and burn-out. For example, staff members are offered time off to attend their children's school functions, as well as flexible work schedules after the birth of a child and other pressing family circumstances. Since finding child care can sometimes be a problem, staff may bring their children to work, including babies, during non-program hours with the



approval of their direct supervisor. Administration grants paid bonus days and often consolidates them around major holidays so that staff can enjoy holiday celebrations with their families.

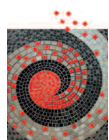
Insist on Professional Development & Training

All staff are on a developmental path during their time with the agency. If we are able to invest heavily in their development, we enable them to perform more effectively with youth.

*Colleen Carroll,
Camp Fire USA
Alaska Council*

There is a strong consensus that staff training and professional development are crucial to the success of out-of-school-time youth development programs.²¹ Staff are more motivated to seek additional training if they are able to see some personal benefit as a result of that investment of time and effort—which again points to the need for organizations to budget for the provision of professional development opportunities.²²

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



Place a Value on Education and Training: Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara offers training within the organization, but staff are also encouraged to seek outside education and training opportunities. Each staff member is invited to submit a request to those administering the agency's education/training budget, with approval made on a case-by-case basis. Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara also offers a pay rate increase based on completion of training or education (e.g., completion of college units, obtaining a college degree, CPR certification, completion of specific Girls Inc. program training).

The cost to send six individuals from Idaho to the Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship (YDPA) national training was \$5,000, and was paid for by a grant received by the University. Following the YDPA national training, the Idaho team held an in-state training for \$2,500. The cost of regular interaction between mentors and apprentices for the two years of the project was just under \$3,000. Thus, the total cost to initiate the YDPA program in Idaho was \$10,500. The organization now has a roster of trained mentors and can replicate the program for six individuals at a cost of \$5,000. (All figures are approximate.)

Offer Certification Opportunities: Westside YMCA offers courses, training, and certifications that staff are required to earn in order to work with youth. As part of a career development training program, part-time staff have the opportunity to accumulate credits towards, for example, a YMCA Director Certification. Westside YMCA believes in taking an individualized approach to staff management. Its substantial investment in training and career development has helped several staff members transition from part-time to full-time positions.

Link Concrete Competencies to Career Development

Plans: Idaho 4-H is a part of the National 4-H Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship Certificate Program (YDPA). Funded by the Department of Labor, YDPA is a structured apprenticeship program that includes precise definitions of required competencies and instruction, and on-the-job training for youth practitioners who wish to develop those competencies. The fact that the DOL has created the certificate program and recognized youth development work for the first time has been an important stride for the recognition of youth development as a credible career. In the program, early career youth workers are paired with experienced 4-H educators who act as their mentors. Face-to-face meetings are conducted once a month, supplemented by frequent phone conversations. Participants also attend training sessions with other mentoring pairs. As a result of such networking and the self-confidence it generates, many youth workers have chosen to stay in Idaho.



***Apprentices
working with
mentors gain
self-confidence
and greater
ability to do
their jobs,
particularly
in the area of
leadership
and seeing the
larger picture
of youth
development.***

*Barbara Abo
Idaho YDPA Mentor*

Link to Community Resources: The YMCA of Greater Seattle believes that youth service organizations should network and collaborate with each other to provide training and specialized services. The YMCA, in collaboration with other youth serving agencies, offers training and seminars for youth workers and teachers from other area organizations. These training events include service learning symposiums, forums for youth workers, and involvement in specialized collaborations around youth employment, tutoring, and working with girls. Participating staff are able to build a professional network and feel the broader, cumulative impact that their chosen profession is having on the community's young people.

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

The YMCA of Greater Kansas City also believes that informal mentoring among staff boosts retention rates. The agency makes a wide variety of program resources available in the main office so that staff have access to the tools they need to be effective and



successful in their work. When staff members access the agency's resource room, they can share ideas, problem-solve, and network with others. Learning from each other in an informal, non-threatening setting facilitates the development of relationships among co-workers, a sense of connectedness within the organization, and ultimately increases job satisfaction and staff retention.²³

Value & Respect Youth Workers

By setting our own expectations high and valuing ourselves and what we do professionally we can raise the image of the youth service profession within our communities.

*Monica Spear
Girls Inc.
of Greater Santa Barbara*

Youth workers' sense that their work is of little value and lacks respect has been shown to contribute to job dissatisfaction and high turnover.²⁴ It is important to recognize and express appreciation for youth workers' efforts as a way not only of improving morale but of enhancing the image of youth work among staff as well as within the community.

Acknowledge Staff: Like many youth organizations, Camp Fire USA Alaska Council holds a recognition banquet annually to promote staff cohesiveness and acknowledge accomplishments. In the past, however, many new staff failed to attend this event because they had not yet connected with other staff, especially those outside their specific work area. A "first year connection" is now facilitated through the organization of several community events during the year. All staff—whether new or experienced—have the opportunity to serve on the planning committees and to attend the events with their families. Through participation at these functions, staff connect with others from outside of their specific work groups and increase their sense of belonging in the organization.

Value Staff and the Work They Do: Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara strives to maintain a work environment that is supportive and challenging—one in which staff not only work well together, but also have fun together. Administrators believe it is essential to



communicate to staff that they are making a difference in the community. Events such as staff appreciation dinners and awards programs promote solid collaborative relationships and build a more cohesive work environment. In addition, social events for staff and their families are held several times throughout the year. The agency also believes it is important to communicate to the community the value of the work being done with youth and to show how it contributes to the future welfare of the Santa Barbara area and society in general.

Engage Staff as Active Participants in Decision-Making: At Methodist Children's Home in Waco, Texas, successful retention of high quality direct care staff is in part the result of the organization's commitment to emphasizing individual strengths while promoting teamwork and a stimulating work environment. The core model used at Methodist Children's Home emphasizes the strengths of both staff and youth. Young people are viewed as active participants and "partners" in planning, decision-making, and program evaluation. As a result, the general mind-set within the facility is one of joint involvement and responsibility.

Partly as a result of this equitable approach, the organization has experienced an improved staff retention rate over the past four years, with many individuals planning to work at the organization until retirement. Likewise, youth display more enthusiasm for program participation, and problem behavior has decreased dramatically.



Ensure Opportunities for Networking

Instead of competing with each other, individuals from different organizations come together to share practices and challenges and to collaborate so they will not have to reinvent the wheel. It helps me and others to share techniques, strategies, standards, and competencies. It improves practice and promotes meaningful relationships.

*Vanessa Varko
Talking Circles Facilitator*



Professional development is not an isolated activity but is nested within the larger workforce system.²⁵ Youth workers need opportunities to network both inside and outside the organizations where they are employed if they are to learn from one another and improve their practice skills.

Foster Peer-to-Peer Learning: Ensuring that youth workers feel supported within the larger organization is a key piece in the YMCA of Greater Seattle retention strategy. At times direct care staff working within a branch feel isolated from others. It is crucial for them to stay in touch with their peers and to know that they have someone advocating for them on a broader level. The agency has developed a number of tools that help youth workers feel supported, including monthly electronic newsletters and e-mail connections among staff. Monthly training, strategizing sessions, and peer network meetings provide staff an opportunity to hear updates about what others are doing, discuss day-to-day youth work challenges, and get to know each other better. Inter-branch collaboration on programs such as YMCA's Earth Service Corps, Girls of Promise, and Youth and Government further facilitates the building of a sense of community within the organization.

Network and Communicate within the Organization: Boys & Girls Club/Girls Inc. of Pueblo County & Lower Arkansas Valley provides staff with training and peer networking opportunities, various forums for communication, and participation in the management of the organization's affairs. All staff are encouraged to comment, contribute and participate in the direction of the corporation. Corporate meetings, which begin with a potluck meal, promote goodwill among the staff, encourage staff empowerment, and inform staff about corporate activities. Agenda items

include an “Open Forum” that encourages staff members to share mission-specific ideas and developments; monthly in-service sessions that provide training on new or updated issues; a “Bonus Board” recognizing exceptional staff members; and “Share a Story”—an activity that allows staff members to share an amusing or heartfelt moment with the youth the program serves. Program centers are required to include these same agenda items at their weekly staff meetings. In commenting on these activities, staff members appreciate the opportunity to get to know their co-workers better, perform more effectively as a result of receiving clear and complete communication, and feel empowered by having an opportunity to offer direction for the corporation.

Network Across Organizations: Leadership & Renewal Outfitters offers a year-long Journey Fellowship program for experienced youth workers who are interested in renewing themselves personally and professionally. As with the Explorers program, twenty-five applicants (called “Trailblazers”) are chosen to participate each year. The focus of the retreats is on individual renewal and reflection, but being part of the group builds a networking and supportive community. The purpose of the Trailblazers program is to promote individual rejuvenation to help participants reconnect with their motivations for working in the youth service field, and to create a framework for improving participants’ work performance while sustaining themselves in the process. Participants also learn how they can go back and help others reconnect and renew themselves.

