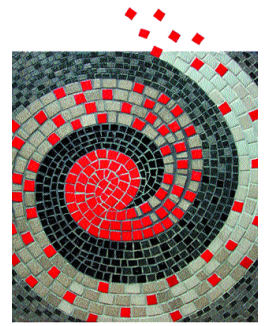


# *Build a Professional Network*

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YMCA of Greater Seattle



## ***“Building networks***

***with other youth***

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## **PROVIDE NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES**

Ensuring that youth workers feel supported within the larger organization is a key piece in the YMCA retention strategy. Often direct care staff working within a branch are somewhat isolated from others, so it is crucial for them to feel that they have a peer network and someone advocating for them on a broader level. The YMCA has developed a number of tools that help youth workers feel supported, including monthly electronic newsletters and email connections between staff. Monthly training and strategizing meetings, 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. Collaboration between branches on programs such as YMCA Earth Service Corps, Girls of Promise, Youth and Government and others also facilitates the building of a sense of “community” within the organization.

## **LINK COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

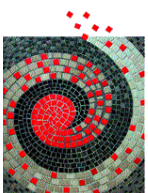
Rather than youth organizations competing with each other, the YMCA of Greater Seattle feels that youth service organizations should network and collaborate with each other to provide training and specialized services. The YMCA, in collaboration with other youth serving agencies, offers training and seminars

in the community for youth workers from other area organizations, school teachers, and others who work directly with youth. Bi-annual service learning symposiums that provide training to agencies engaging youth volunteers or “service learners”, Youth Worker Forums, and participation in specialized collaborations around youth employment, tutoring, working with girls, and other coalitions provide critical skills to youth workers. Additionally, 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.

## **PARTNER WITH COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

The YMCA of Greater Seattle has found building strong relationships with local colleges and universities to be a very successful strategy for recruiting frontline youth workers. At the University of Washington, for example, the YMCA teen leadership director teaches seminars on positive youth development and practical youth development skills. As a part of the seminar, students work in YMCA programs to gain practical experiences similar to the seminar topics. Participating in seminars taught by experienced youth workers can help students figure out their “next step” by giving them new ideas about what they could do professionally after graduation. The success of this approach is evident by the numbers of students who decide to continue volunteering for the YMCA after their seminar requirements have been met.

Partnering with local colleges and universities also gives the YMCA a chance to recruit volunteers through on campus service centers, clubs, fraternities, and sororities. Recruiting volunteers presents some challenges since students may be hesitant or unable to commit to a long term position. The YMCA has been most successful when engaging volunteers in a short term commitment by emphasizing the possibility that students may be able to receive credit for their volunteer service. The YMCA feels that having clear, manageable tasks and providing good training are essential to increasing students’ interest in becoming full-time youth workers. More often than not, students decide to continue volunteering for the YMCA long after their credit requirements have been met, and some eventually become full-time staff.



***YMCA of Greater Seattle*** serves 17,000 youth (ages 12–18 years of age) in 15 branches, 3 camps and dozens of program sites across the county in which Seattle, Washington is located. Known as a leader in the youth work field in that area, the organization is extremely attractive to qualified youth workers seeking employment. They are also a large enough organization to be able to provide good benefits, decent pay, and excellent training opportunities. If staff stay in their positions for a minimum of three years, they feel they have been successful in attaining their goal of meeting participant needs, and ensuring stability and consistency in the YMCA programs.

