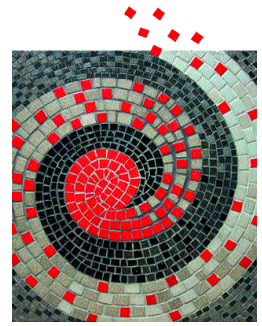


Build Formal and Informal Mentor Systems



Kristina Prather

YMCA of Greater Kansas City

“Youth workers

need to be

treated like

professionals.

If they aren’t

treated like

professionals,

they won’t

act like

professionals.”

HIGH-QUALITY MENTORS

New direct care staff at the YMCA of Greater Kansas City attend initial orientation and training sessions that give them the information needed to begin their roles as youth workers. The YMCA builds on this initial information and skill development by pairing new staff in a mentoring relationship with more experienced staff to provide additional support, deepen learning and skill development, and facilitate a sense of connectedness. Supervisors recommend staff they believe would be good mentors based on experience, qualifications, leadership, and job performance. Mentors work closely with the new staff members’ supervisors to ensure continuity and clear communication so that new staff learn what they need to know to be effective in their jobs. Guidelines have been developed to facilitate the mentors’ coaching of the new staff member. These guidelines specify that the pair spend between one and two hours per week for eleven weeks going through the employee handbook and YMCA policies, and discuss general employee issues. While some of these sessions could be done by phone, it is recommended that the two meet in person to minimize the potential for the new staff member to feel isolated and to build an ongoing relationship between the two individuals. After completing the eleven week prescribed course of materials, the mentor continues to provide support and ongoing communication with the new staff member throughout the first year of employment.

The YMCA of Greater Kansas City attributes the improvement in their retention rates to an increase in training, resources, and staff

support. In addition to the formal mentoring program they have implemented, they believe that the informal mentoring that takes place among staff is an important factor in retention as well. A wide variety of resources are 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 are using the resource room they have an opportunity to do a lot of idea sharing, problem-solving, and networking with each other. 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 can ultimately increase job satisfaction and staff retention.

INTERNSHIPS

The YMCA of Greater Kansas City works with local high schools to provide opportunities for students to meet their internship requirements. Students are hired as part-time assistants for a one year work study program. As assistants, they help with program planning and implementation but do not work with youth without supervision. Each quarter, students are reviewed by staff and asked to complete a review of the organization. This review process helps the students learn better program leadership skills and helps the YMCA make improvements to the work and learning experience. The work study program provides students an opportunity to discover first hand what a career in youth work would be like. As a result of this program, many students make the decision to work for the YMCA of Greater Kansas City after graduating from high school.

The YMCA of Greater Kansas City serves 3,500 children (ages 6 weeks to 12 years old) in early learning centers, and before and after school, half day kindergarten extension, and summer camp programs. They employ 279 full-time and 125 part-time in order to maintain state licensing adult to child ratios, which are at least a 1:15. Staff ethnicity is as follows: 81% white (non-Hispanic/Latino), 15% African-American, 2% Hispanic/Latino, and 2% Asian-American. Flexible work hours are offered as much as possible to accommodate students' class schedule and other staff needs. The YMCA of Greater Kansas City believes that it is important to provide staff the training and materials needed to promote the professional image of youth work. For this reason, they hire from within whenever possible because of the training they provide their staff and the level of trust that has developed between the staff and the organization.

