RESEARCH CORNER

children and youth
dc
investment
trust corporation

Youth Worker Professional Development and Job Forecast

By

Sarah Manekin, PhD

and

Lisa Rucker

DECEMBER 19, 2013

The Issue

Every day, youth workers across the District engage with thousands of children and youth in formal and informal educational settings. These interactions can—and often do—make a profound impact in the lives of young people. They help youth develop academically, emotionally, socially and professionally and are essential to promoting holistic youth development. But what do we know about youth workers, how they are trained and what their career trajectories look like?

This research brief synthesizes and shares the latest research on who youth workers are, the kind of training and professional development they receive, and the job forecast for the field both in DC and the nation as a whole. It is intended to further an ongoing conversation around how we can better support youth development through high quality training and support for the individuals and organizations that work with children and youth.

Who is a Youth Worker?

The Next Generation Youth Work Coalition defines a youth worker as "an individual who works with and on behalf of children and youth to facilitate their personal, social, and educational development and enable them to gain a voice, influence, and place in society as they make the transition from dependence to independence."[1] While many youth workers hold positions in after-school programs, the field of youth work is far broader; it is defined less by the time and place of the work, and more by its "adherence to a coherent set of youth-centered principles."[2]

Youth workers can be found in positions ranging from entry-level direct service staff to supervisors and program managers, and can have a focus or specialty in areas ranging from sports and recreation to environmental education and vocational training skills, from foster care work and police casework to religious groups and arts education. They can work in non-prof-

1 Next Generation Youth Work Coalition (2013) Coalition Description. http://www.niost.org/pdf/Coalition%20 Description.pdf accessed December 4, 2013.
2 Pittman, K. (2004). Reflections on the road not (yet) taken: How a centralized public strategy can help youth work focus on youth. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 104: 87–99.

it community-based organizations and in government agencies and programs. Across these different sectors and specialties, youth workers engage with young people in structured, semi-structured or unstructured (outreach/street worker) settings.[3]

The Trust will issue a report on the state of DC youth workers in early 2014. The report will examine demographic characteristics and trends among youth workers in DC.

The National Landscape of Youth Worker Professional Development and Certification

For over a century, educators, researchers and philosophers have debated whether teaching is an art, a science or some combination of the two.[4] And while there are those who insist that teaching is an art, the dominant view has long been that teachers' skills improve through training. The same thinking applies to youth work. While some claim that a youth worker's effectiveness is rooted in his or her innate charisma or "street sense" and others believe that youth worker effectiveness is rooted in knowledge of theory and best practices, movements to bring together personal experience and cultivated skills and knowledge are gaining momentum in research and training.[5]

THE DEVELOPMENT OF "CORE COMPETENCIES."

Researchers and practitioners urge the development of research-based "core competencies" for youth workers for a number of different reasons. They claim these core competencies will not only improve youth worker effectiveness but will generate opportunities for professional development and advancement within the field.[6] Core competencies can also serve as a basis for training catalogues and higher education certificate and degree programs.[7] Moreover, "by articulating what effective youth work practice looks like," core competencies can help those outside the

"A YOUTH WORKER IS an individual who works with and on behalf of children and youth to facilitate their personal, social, and educational development and enable them to gain a voice, influence, and place in society as they make the transition from dependence to independence."*

* Next Generation Youth Work Coalition (2013) Coalition Description. http://www.niost.org/pdf/Coalition%20Description.pdf accessed December 4, 2013.

field "understand the unique role of youth work professionals and at the same time, the shared contributions that those working in a range of settings make to the lives of children and youth."[8]

Efforts to develop and spread a shared set of core competencies have achieved moderate success. In the early 1990s, the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research/National Training Institute for Community Youth Work at the Academy for Educational Development synthesized and codified a set of core competencies for youth workers.[9] In the early 2000s, the National Collaboration for Youth conducted a nationwide survey and literature review and developed a set of ten basic competencies; the National Building Exemplary Systems for Training Youth Workers (BEST) Initiative, which offered youth worker trainings and certifications nationwide, complemented that work. In 2008, the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice created the Child and Youth Care Certification Board to use core competencies as a baseline to offer a uniform, certification program across the country.[10]

3 Next Generation Youth Work Coalition (2013) Coalition Description. http://www.niost.org/pdf/Coalition%20Description.pdf accessed December 4, 2013.

4 James, W. (1899). *Talks to Teachers On Psychology*.

5 Astroth, K., Garza, P., and Taylor, B. (2004). Getting down to business: Defining competencies for entry-level youth workers. *New Directions for Youth Development*, no. 104: 25–37.

6 Astroth, K., Garza, P., and Taylor, B. (2004). Getting down to business: Defining competencies for entry-level youth workers. *New Directions for Youth Development*, no. 104: 25–37.

7 Starr, B., Yohalem, N., and Gannett, E. (2009) Youth Work Core Competencies: A Review of Existing Frameworks and Purposes. http://www.niost.org/pdf/Core_Competencies_Review_October_2009.pdf

8 Starr, B., Yohalem, N., and Gannett, E. (2009). Youth Work Core Competencies: A Review of Existing Frameworks and Purposes. Next Generation Youth Work Coalition. http://www.niost.org/pdf/Core_Competencies_Review_October_2009.pdf

9 Astroth, K., Garza, P., and Taylor, B. (2004). Getting down to business: Defining competencies for entry-level youth workers. *New Directions for Youth Development*, no. 104: 25–37.

10 New England Network, 2004. For a very useful overview of comparative frameworks, see Starr, B., Yohalem, N., and Gannett, E. (2009). Youth Work Core Competencies: A

Some laud this move to standardize the field through national competencies and certifications: "Nationally accepted standards for entry-level knowledge, skills, and abilities are the first step in coming to agreement on prerequisites for entering the field, salary ranges, and career paths across agencies, settings, and systems."[11] These advocates maintain that professionalizing youth work will improve job prospects for youth workers and ensure better outcomes for youth. But others are not so sure. The New England Network for Child, Youth and Family Services points to the Forum for Youth Investment as "reluctant to advocate for a national certification given the diversity of youth work occurring across the U.S" and their concern about "limiting access to the field."[12]

STATE AND LOCAL CERTIFICATION AND CREDENTIALING EFFORTS.

While drawing on these national movements, most of the efforts to professionalize the field of youth work have taken place at the state and local level. In Indiana, for example, youth workers can work either towards a nationally recognized certification, the Child and Youth Care Professional Certification (CYCPC), or a state-level credential. The CYCPC is awarded upon passing an exam administered by the Child and Youth Care Certification Board; it does not require any college coursework, although youth workers can attend trainings that increase the likelihood that the youth worker will pass the exam.

The path toward the state-level credential is more rigorous and comprehensive. The Indiana Youth Development Credential was developed through the Indiana YouthPro Association, which is an affiliate of the National After-School Association. The credential requires successful completion of 12 credits of college course work in areas that relate to Indiana's core competencies, 45-hours of non-credit community-based training, the development of a portfolio, and the completion of two observations and one assessment.[13] Ivy Tech Community College in Indiana created its own certificate program, the Indiana Youth Development Professional Certificate, to help prepare youth workers for the Indiana Youth Development Credential.[14]

Various higher education institutions across the country have also entered the youth worker professional development landscape by offering specially designed certificates. CUNY and the Community College

---

> ### CORE COMPETENCIES FOR YOUTH WORKERS: COMMON CONTENT AREAS*
>
> > Curriculum
>
> > Environment
>
> > Child and Adolescent Development
>
> > Cross-Cultural Competence
>
> > Guidance
>
> > Connecting with Families
>
> > Connecting with Communities
>
> > Health, Safety and Nutrition
>
> > Professionalism
>
> > Professional Development
>
> > Program Management
>
> * Drawing on a comparison of fourteen different core competency frameworks, researchers identified the most common content areas. See Starr, B., Yohalem, N., and Gannett, E. (2009). Youth Work Core Competencies: A Review of Existing Frameworks and Purposes. Next Generation Youth Work Coalition http://www.niost.org/pdf/Core_Competencies_Review_October_2009.pdf

of Philadelphia, for example, offer models for a youth worker college credential. CUNY offered a 12-credit "Youth Studies Certificate" to 223 youth workers from 1999–2011, and Certificate Program for Child and Youth Workers is still being offered at CUNY's York College.[15] The Community College of Philadelphia offers a 9-credit "Youth Work Proficiency Certificate" and a 33-credit "Youth Work Academic Certificate."[16]

No matter the mix of credentials, credits and certifications, advocates of youth worker professionalization agree "that education should be meaningfully linked to professional growth opportunities; otherwise, there is no financial incentive for these workers, already paid poorly, to seek more education."[17] Other researchers concur that "Increasing the availability of higher education courses is only the first step… The next step is to develop a comprehensive career ladder or lattice and a system that offers youth development workers the opportunity to take advantage of their educational experiences in subsequent positions."[18]

Review of Existing Frameworks and Purposes. Next Generation Youth Work Coalition http://www.niost.org/pdf/Core_Competencies_Review_October_2009.pdf

11 Johnson, E., Rothstein, F., and Gajdosik, J. (2004). The intermediary role in youth worker professional development: Successes and Challenges. *New Directions for Youth Development*, no. 104

12 Wisman, M. "Youth Work Practice: A Status Report on Professionalization and Expert Opinion about the Future of the Field." New England Network for Child, Youth and Family Services, 2011.

13 http://www.indianayouthpro.org/steps.htm

14 http://www.indianayouthpro.org/trainings.htm

15 Shockley, C. and Thompson, A. (2012). Youth workers in college: A replicable model for professional development. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34:735–739; http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/hhs/ysc.html and http://www.york.cuny.edu/old-bulletin/certificate-program-child-and-youth-workers-certificate-program both accessed December 2 2013.

16 http://ccp.edu/college-catalog/degree-and-certificate-programs/proficiency-certificates/youth-work-proficiency and http://ccp.edu/college-catalog/degree-and-certificate-programs/academic-certificates/youth-work-academic both accessed December 2 2013.

17 Wisman, M. "Youth Work Practice: A Status Report on Professionalization and Expert Opinion about the Future of the Field." New England Network for Child, Youth and Family Services, 2011.

18 Borden, L., Craig D., and Villarruel, F. (2004). Professionalizing Youth Development: The Role of Higher Education. *New Directions for Youth Development*, no. 104:75–85.

Youth Worker Job Forecast

Focusing on six broad occupational categories in which youth workers are found, this job forecast provides an overview of median pay (2010), entry-level education requirements, and expected employment growth both at the national level and for Washington, DC in particular.

EXPECTED EMPLOYMENT GROWTH FROM 2010 TO 2020[19]
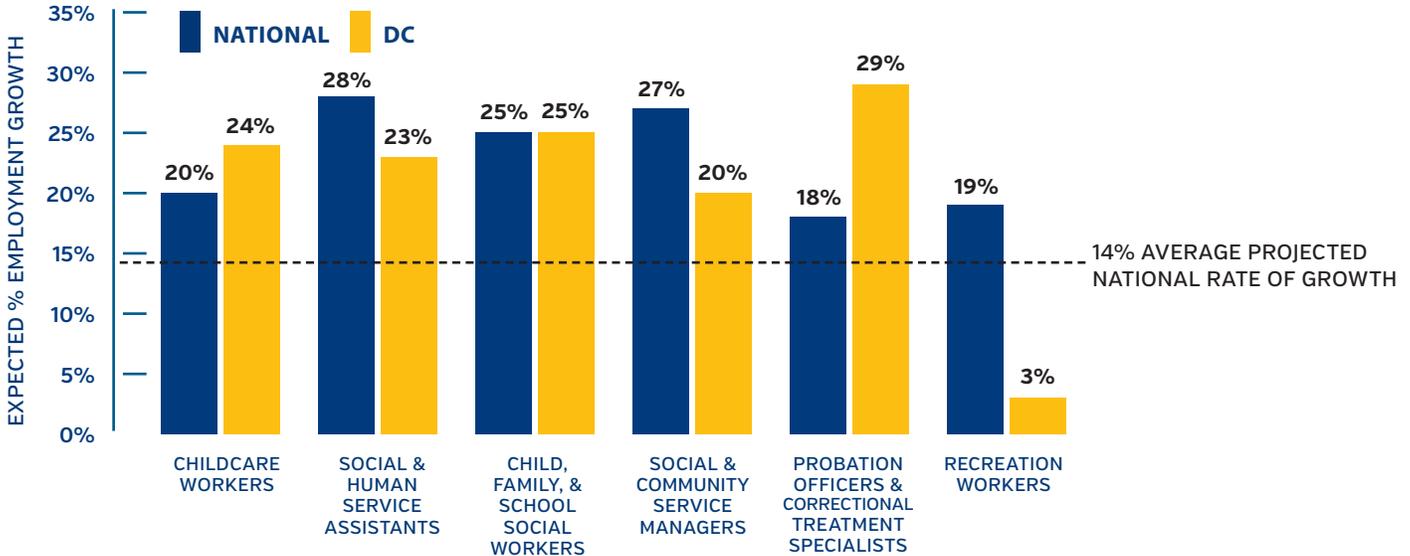
This sampling of occupations show that employment in youth worker occupations is growing faster than the national average (national rate of growth is 14%). Looking at the same sampling of occupations in the District of Columbia reveals that employment in youth worker occupations is growing at comparable rates as the growth nationally in most occupations.
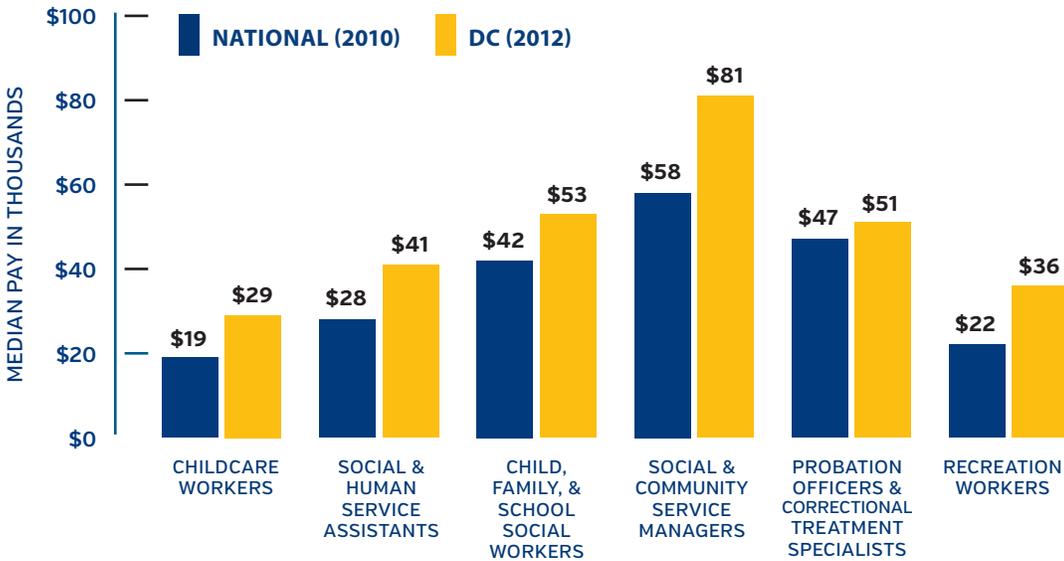
ENTRY LEVEL OF EDUCATION[20]

	NATIONAL/DC
Childcare Workers	High School Diploma
Social & Human Service Assistants	High School Diploma
Child, Family, & School Social Workers	Bachelor's Degree
Social & Community Service Managers	Bachelor's Degree
Probation Officers & Correctional Treatment Specialists	Bachelor's Degree
Recreation Workers	Bachelor's Degree

19 Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, *2012–13 Edition*, Childcare Workers, on the Internet at http://www.bls.gov/ooh/personal-care-and-service/childcare-workers.htm (visited *December 02, 2013*). The same search was performed for each occupational category listed. Data for occupations in DC was found at the Department of Labor's ONET My Next Move Career Information page. For an example, please see, http://www.careerinfonet.org/occ_rep.asp?optstatus=011000000&soc-code=399032&id=1&nodeid=2&stfips=11&search=Go Again, the same search was performed for each occupational category listed.

20 Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, *2012–13 Edition*, Childcare Workers, on the Internet at http://www.bls.gov/ooh/personal-care-and-service/childcare-workers.htm (visited *December 02, 2013*). The same search was performed for each occupational category listed. Data for occupations in DC was found at the Department of Labor's ONET My Next Move Career Information page. For an example, please see, http://www.careerinfonet.org/occ_rep.asp?optstatus=011000000&soc-code=399032&id=1&nodeid=2&stfips=11&search=Go Again, the same search was performed for each occupational category listed.

MEDIAN PAY[21]

MEDIAN PAY IN THOUSANDS

■ **NATIONAL (2010)** ■ **DC (2012)**

Occupation	National (2010)	DC (2012)
CHILDCARE WORKERS	$19	$29
SOCIAL & HUMAN SERVICE ASSISTANTS	$28	$41
CHILD, FAMILY, & SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS	$42	$53
SOCIAL & COMMUNITY SERVICE MANAGERS	$58	$81
PROBATION OFFICERS & CORRECTIONAL TREATMENT SPECIALISTS	$47	$51
RECREATION WORKERS	$22	$36

Median salaries in DC are all significantly higher than the national median, most likely due to the higher cost of living in the District of Columbia. Even so, the data reveals that the majority of youth worker fields that require higher entry-level education standards (child, family and school social workers; social and community service managers; and probation officers and correctional treatment specialists) result in higher median pay. This suggests that higher education makes it possible to both stay in the field of youth work and earn a higher salary.

21 Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, *2012–13 Edition*, Childcare Workers, on the Internet at http://www.bls.gov/ooh/personal-care-and-service/childcare-workers.htm (visited *December 02, 2013*). The same search was performed for each occupational category listed. Data for occupations in DC was found at the Department of Labor's ONET My Next Move Career Information page. For an example, please see, http://www.careerinfonet.org/occ_rep.asp?optstatus=011000000&soc-code=399032&id=1&nodeid=2&stfips=11&search=Go Again, the same search was performed for each occupational category listed.

What you can do

PRACTICE

> Youth workers can attend trainings that teach, supplement and reinforce core competencies and encourage staff and colleagues to participate.

> Youth workers can cultivate networks for peer learning and engage in opportunities to discuss new knowledge within and across organizational settings.[22]

> Those in supervisory or executive roles should make youth worker professional development a condition for employment, retention and advancement.[23]

POLICY

> Advocates can push for broadly recognized credentials and the creation of professional ladders (including pay increases and promotion) tied to those credentials.

> Policymakers can provide funding through tuition and scholarships to allow youth workers to gain additional knowledge and skills without the financial burden that otherwise would have presented a major barrier.[24]

PHILANTHROPY

> Funders should provide grant support for professional development of youth workers within non-profit organizations.

> Funders should encourage salary growth and professional ladders among youth workers.

RESEARCH

> While research has documented that professional development improves youth worker practice, more research is needed in "determining the relationship between improvements in youth worker practice and improvements in youth experiences and outcomes."[25]

> More research is also needed to understand the relationship between youth worker professional development and organizational and agency infrastructure, including policies, priorities, culture and budgets.[26] For example, on-site studies of organizations and agencies could provide additional insight into how the training of youth workers affects organizational culture and practice.[27]

> Researchers can also pursue more qualitative understandings of how youth workers experience certificate and/or credential programs, including what they perceive as the benefits of these programs and the barriers to completing them.

> Longitudinal studies of those who complete and fail to complete these programs can also provide richer understanding of their long-term value both to an individual's career path and to the organizations where those individuals work.

22 Johnson, E., Rothstein, F., and Gajdosik, J. (2004). The intermediary role in youth worker professional development: Successes and Challenges. *New Directions for Youth Development*, no. 104

23 Johnson, E., Rothstein, F., and Gajdosik, J. (2004). The intermediary role in youth worker professional development: Successes and Challenges. *New Directions for Youth Development*, no. 104

24 Thompson, A. and Shockley, C. (2013). Developing Youth Workers: Career Ladders for Sector Stability *Children and Youth Services Review* 35: 447–452

25 Johnson, E., Rothstein, F., and Gajdosik, J. (2004). The intermediary role in youth worker professional development: Successes and Challenges. *New Directions for Youth Development*, no. 104

26 Johnson, E., Rothstein, F., and Gajdosik, J. (2004). The intermediary role in youth worker professional development: Successes and Challenges. *New Directions for Youth Development*, no. 104

27 Thompson, A. and Shockley, C. (2013). Developing Youth Workers: Career Ladders for Sector Stability *Children and Youth Services Review* 35: 447–452