



## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BRIEF YOUTH WORKER CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

*Prepared for the*  
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### Introduction

The following lessons have been compiled based on several years of experience working with local youth development intermediaries participating in the BEST network (Building Exemplary Systems for Training Youth Workers) that have partnered with community colleges to build youth worker certificate programs. These partnerships were designed to be mutually beneficial, with the intermediary expanding the scope of professional development opportunities it offers its network and the community college gaining a new pool of students, new faculty options and new community connections. Most programs begin as 12-15 hour programs (with participation in the Advancing Youth Development training typically counting as 3 course credits) and expand as demand and interest grows. Core courses typically include:

- AYD or a similar youth development course
- Foundations/history of youth work and youth services
- Group dynamics or principles of group work
- Child and adolescent development
- Family and community engagement
- Program design
- Critical issues in youth work
- Internship or practicum

At the end of this document are brief descriptions of certificate programs offered in Springfield, New York City, New Haven, Kansas City, Philadelphia, and Hampton. More detailed examples of program descriptions, course descriptions, marketing materials and sample MOUs from the above sites as well as Chicago and San Diego are available upon request.

### Getting Started

The following pre-planning activities are important for an intermediary to tackle in the early planning stages:

- Identify and document need with key stakeholders (youth workers, community college, funders, agency executives, supervisors/managers) and identify initial funding.
- Local agencies and youth workers adopt a set of core competencies.

- Gather information from the workforce (e.g. workforce survey) to document interest, identify potential barriers.
- Identify experienced local facilitators or trainers who could serve as faculty.
- Agree upon the purpose of the certificate program. The purpose will guide the content of the courses, the link to other professional development programs, and influence how the cc and its faculty engage with the students. Examples of purpose statements :
  - *The XX Youth Worker Certificate Program will give students the knowledge and skills to work with youth from an asset-based or youth development perspective.*
  - *The XX Youth Worker Certificate program will offer courses and a practicum that increase the knowledge and skills of professionals working to foster positive growth and development in young people.*

## Planning

Each intermediary that created a certificate program established a task force, subcommittee or working group to design the program, oversee implementation, and assist with resource development. The planning group should include but not be limited to staff of the intermediary responsible for the program, youth program participants, youth workers, supervisors, trainers, CBO executive directors, community college staff/faculty, accrediting body if necessary, and funders. The overall goal of the planning group is assist the intermediary in designing, implementing, evaluating, and sustaining the certificate program. Examples of specific tasks include:

- Defining and getting buy-in from providers on core competencies for the workforce.
- Identifying, in partnership with the community college, the core courses and practicum requirements by reviewing model curricula and analyzing performance data and training needs from sources such as YPQA assessments and participant evaluations from trainings.
- Becoming familiar with the policies, regulations of the community college's certificate programs and their impact on the program and potential students.
- Exploring the feasibility of credit toward an AA degree and offering course credit for AYD and YPQA training graduates (or other youth development training that is offered).
- Developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the certificate program that describes the roles and responsibilities of the intermediary and the community college.
- Fundraising for scholarships, program coordinator, marketing materials, student support services, etc. Student support varies by community, however, most students need stipends for books, transportation vouchers, child care, and tutorial services. Scholarships are essential to the success of the program. Without financial assistance, many youth workers will not be able to enroll and the community college may be reluctant to establish the certificate program.

- Thinking early on about incentives. One useful strategy in many communities has been to get agreements from employers to include language along the lines of “certification preferred” in job announcements, particularly for supervisor positions. Finding a sub-set of agencies willing to pilot a recruitment strategy linked to the certificate program is an option to consider.
- Documenting demand for the certificate as well as employers’ willingness to give hiring preferences and/or consider advancement linked to certificate.
- Establish a time table of 12-18 months to plan and launch the program.
- Identify and engage a champion for the program at the community college.
- Identify existing community college courses that can be part of the curriculum (assuming they align with core competencies).
- Consider beginning the program with minimum credit hours allowed and increase credit hours based on market demand and workforce needs.

## Marketing

Youth workers are described as a “high touch market,” suggesting that marketing efforts need to include personal contact. Fliers, brochure and informational emails are supplemental, but visiting agencies or hosting breakfast or lunch meetings are more effective strategies. The community college catalogue is a good for marketing tool to recruit students from other academic programs. For the purposes of outreach, marketing and fundraising, below are some potential benefits of certificate programs to consider:

### *Potential benefits to youth workers*

- Certificate programs offer youth workers an additional professional development resource that culminates with a recognized credential. The credential should be recognized locally and designed in such a way that it helps retain youth workers in their current positions and expand their future career opportunities.
- Youth workers seeking a college education have the possibility of applying the academic credits earned toward an associate’s degree.
- Certificate programs can define the requirements for entry level youth workers, establishing the first rung on a career ladder.
- Opportunities for classroom learning help youth workers to network, learn from peers and students from related fields, and from faculty.

### *Benefits to the intermediary*

- Expands the professional development options the intermediary is able to make available for youth workers in their network.

- Serves as a bridge to the community college system, bringing new resources to youth workers.
- Creates new career roles and pathways for youth workers as adjunct faculty, student advisors, and practicum supervisors.
- Promotes youth work as a career and increases the likelihood that the community college will institutionalize the program.
- Strengthens/establishes linkages to the workforce development field/sector.
- Can serve to expand the intermediary's work and role.

#### *Benefits to the community college*

- Creates new opportunities to fulfill the community college's mission of serving as a resource for workforce development needs in their community and or region.
- Gains a new pool of students, new faculty options, and new community connections.
- Opens up the possibility of new AA students.

### Key Challenges

*Affordability, access, and student support.* While most youth workers recognize and desire more professional development opportunities, certificate programs must be designed to address several realities: limited personal resources to cover full program costs, conflicts between class scheduling and work, location of classes and transportation issues, lack of familiarity with higher education policies and procedures, and gaps in basic study and writing skills. These barriers should be anticipated and addressed ahead of time.

Intermediaries with successful certificate programs have put in place strategies to address these challenges and often these are addressed in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the community college. MOUs can include guidelines concerning class scheduling, scholarship opportunities, location of classes, and student support services that will be offered by the community college/and or the intermediary. The MOU should also describe any articulation agreement that gives credit for participation in AYD or other community-based trainings, and for credit toward an AA degree.

Some intermediaries have offered "bridge services" designed to prepare students for college. Services can include classes on note taking, using the library, conducting online research, orientation to the community college, time management, classroom protocol, and basic skills tutoring. Hosting high profile recognition activities for scholarship students and connecting them as a cohort for peer support and learning have also been effective strategies in many communities.

*Buy in and support from employers.* Similar to youth workers, most employers recognize the value of academic learning opportunities, but have limited funds available to assist with the costs of the program and to offer incentives for completion of the certificate. The extent to which this challenge can be mitigated is determined by the intermediary's ability to engage the funding community to support scholarships and encourage agencies to use any available professional development to create the kind of staffing flexibility needed for youth workers to participate.

*Support from funders.* Prior to securing support for scholarships for youth workers to participate, initial funding to explore the feasibility of the certificate program is important, in order to staff necessary data collection activities, meetings with the community college, outreach to employers and youth workers, etc.

## Other Challenges and Tips

- Challenge: Getting courses and faculty approved.  
Tip: Start early, engage faculty in the planning and as participants in training. Look for creative ways to familiarize community college faculty with the youth-serving sector, youth and youth workers. Ask your champion at the community college to advocate and help navigate the system.
- Challenge: Course scheduling, accessible course locations.  
Tip: Consider offering courses at centrally located youth-serving agencies.
- Challenge: Meeting the community college's enrollment requirements.  
Tip: Negotiate in the MOU for a start-up period with temporarily lower requirements.
- Challenge: Costs to manage the scholarship program.  
Tip: Include in the MOU a designation of some percentage of scholarship funds to cover intermediary's staff time to manage scholarship recruitment, selection, monitoring. Often the funds are awarded to the community college to cover tuition but the intermediary's cost to recruit students, and manage the selection process, and follow-up are not covered.
- Challenge: The intermediary often knows higher education system, but the higher education system often has very little awareness of the youth development field or what the intermediary does.  
Tip: Invite community college representative to serve as a board member of the intermediary.

## Program Examples

### Kansas City

In 1996, YouthNet formed a partnership with Metropolitan Community Colleges. Currently, two different certificates that lead to an Associate of Arts degree with an emphasis in Human Services are available to Kansas City youth workers. The Youth Development Worker Certificate is a 12 college credit hour certificate awarded by the Human Services department. The Youth Work Certificate, awarded by Metropolitan Community Colleges, is a 33 college credit hour certificate which builds upon the 12 credit hour certificate and incorporates an additional 21 credit hours of general education classes. YouthNet staff teach the two dedicated youth work classes. The first class is the 3 credit hour *Youth Development Seminar*, taught in a weekend format (Friday evening, all day on Saturday, and Sunday afternoon) two times per year. The second class, *Principles of Youth Work*, is a semester long class offered every spring semester. YouthNet offers scholarships to cover the cost of tuition, books and fees for both certificates so that any youth worker and/or prospective youth worker can have the opportunity to take the classes.

#### Youth Development Worker Certificate Courses

- Introduction to Human Services (3 credits)
- Introduction to Practicum (1 credit)
- Practicum I (3 credits)
- Colloquia I (1 credit)
- Principles in Youth Work (3 credits)
- Youth Development Seminar (1 credit)

#### Youth Work Certificate Courses

- Prior 12 credit hours plus the following:
- Computers and Information Technology (3 credits), **or**
- Introduction to Microcomputer Applications (3 credits)
- Composition and Reading I (3 credits)
- General Psychology (3 credits)
- Sociology (3 credits)
- Fundamentals of Speech (3 credits)
- Intro to American Politics (3 credits)
- Adolescent Psychology (3 credits)

### New York City

Around 1999, the New York City BEST lead organization - the Youth Development Institute - formed a partnership with City University of New York (CUNY). This partnership formed as a result of an initial pilot that incorporated a college bridge class allowing youth workers to take courses at the college. CUNY offers two 12-college credit Youth Studies Certificates and both embed theoretical principles and practical applications. Courses in the certificate program at CUNY Technical College focus more on the human services profession and may be taken concurrently. Courses in the certificate program at CUNY Lehman College focus more on youth practice and are structured sequentially, as a part of a four-course curriculum.

#### Youth Studies Certificate (CUNY)

- Introduction to Human Services (3 credits)
- Health Issues of Children and Adolescents (3 credits)
- Group Dynamics (3 credits)
- Field Practicum (3 credits)

#### Youth Studies Certificate Program (Lehman)

- Theory of Youth Practice
- Adolescent Development from a Multicultural Perspective
- Group Leadership and Recreation
- Field Practice

## Hampton

In 1999, Alternatives formed a partnership with Thomas Nelson Community College (TNCC). Together, TNCC and Alternatives developed a Career Studies Certificate in Youth Development. The 30 college credit certificate, which is awarded by TNCC's Department of Business, Public Services, and Social Sciences, includes human service-related classes as the basis of its curriculum, i.e., counseling, developmental psychology, and sociology.

Alternatives has a commitment to ensuring that classes properly embed youth development principles and theories, so many of the classes, including the AYD course, are taught by Alternatives staff and other adjunct professors with youth development backgrounds.

### Career Studies Certificate Courses

- Creativity and Youth Engagement (3 credits)
- Advancing Youth Development (2 credits)
- Orientation to the college (1 credit)
- Basic Counseling Skills I (3 credits)
- Community Resources and Services (3 credits)
- Group Dynamics I (3 credits)
- Helping Across Cultures (3 credits)
- Sociology of the Family (3 credits)
- Coordinated Internship in Human Services (2 credits)
- Productive Problem Solving (3 credits)
- Adolescent Psychology (3 credits)
- Creativity as a Personal Insight Tool (1 credit)

## Springfield

In 2002, Springfield BEST formed a partnership with Springfield College, Springfield Technical Community College, and Holyoke Community College and are currently working to establish partnerships with other colleges throughout western and central Massachusetts. Together, Springfield BEST and Springfield College developed a Bachelor's degree program in Youth Development. The required courses emphasize material covered in sessions of the *Advancing Youth Development* course. The program also incorporates opportunities for students to become engaged with local youth development programs so that theoretical principles can translate into practical learning experiences. There is also opportunity for students to tailor elective classes to emphasize Human Services Administration. The *Introduction to Youth Development* course is offered at Springfield College currently and will begin at Springfield Technical Community College in summer 2003.

### BA in Youth Development (Springfield College)

- All sessions from AYD
- Human Development
- Introduction to Psychology
- Social Research and Program Evaluation
- Introduction to Sociology
- Supervised Practicum in a Youth Serving-Serving Organization
- Senior Project in Youth Development
- Seven electives

## Philadelphia

In 1999, staff from the collaborating lead organizations of Philadelphia BEST (Children, Youth and Family Council) and (the Greater Philadelphia Federation of Settlements), in partnership with Philadelphia Community College and its faculty - with funding from the William Penn Foundation - worked together to develop the Youth Work Certificate Program. This program is comprised of 32 credits for individuals considering a career working with youth as well as experienced youth workers looking to increase their skills. It requires a 12-hour per week supervised field placement at a youth-serving agency for 12 weeks (current youth workers can use their workplace). The Youth Work Certificate Program Coordinator, who is also an AYD facilitator and works closely with the BEST lead organizations, manages this certificate program and serves as a critical liaison between the community college and the BEST staff.

### Youth Work Certificate Program Courses

- Foundations of Youth Work
- Family and Community Engagement
- Critical Issues in Youth Work
- Practicum in Youth Work
- English Composition I
- English Composition II
- Intermediate Algebra
- Introduction to Computer Use
- Choice of 3 Human Services/Social Services Courses

## New Haven

Since 2001, New Haven BEST has offered its 30-hour Youth Worker Certificate through Gateway Community College. Lead AYD facilitators deliver the Youth Worker Seminar course. With the logo, "Developing People who Develop Youth," this certificate program is geared toward current and potential youth workers. It includes both classroom and field experience.

### Youth Worker Certificate Program Courses

- Composition (3 credits)
- Fundamentals of Communication (3 credits)
- Introduction to Human Services (3 credits)
- Public Health Issues in Alcohol and Drug Abuse (3 credits)
- H.S. Field Experience I (3 credits)
- H.S. Field Experience II (3 credits)
- Group Dynamics (3 credits)
- Introduction to Sociology (3 credits)
- Computer Literacy (3 credits)
- One Restricted Elective (3 credits)
- Youth Worker Seminar (3 credits)