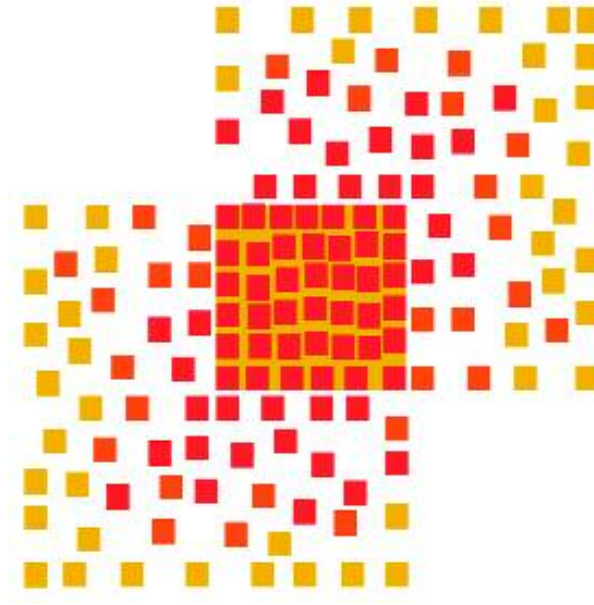


# Is There Common Ground?



An Exploratory Study  
of the Interests and Needs  
of Community-Based  
and Faith-Based Youth Workers





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Prepared by



with contributions from the American Camp Association



With generous support from The Lilly Endowment, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana • 2007



**T**his publication was made possible with the generous support of Lilly Endowment Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana. Particular thanks to Willis Bright and Christopher Coble for encouragement and guidance in exploring these issues—and for being colleagues and co-learners with us in the process.

None of this would have been possible without eager and gracious participation in this exploratory project by so many people—those who completed surveys, participated in focus groups, and participated in other conversations along the way. Special thanks to the leaders who gathered with us in April 2007 to discuss this report and shape implications for the field. (Information about them is included in Appendix D.)

Several colleagues in our organizations were particularly useful in the development of this report. At the National Collaboration for Youth, thanks to Shawn Newton for her magical design work. At Search Institute, thanks to Kathy Fraher for assistance with data analysis on this report and Kay Hong for editorial help and collegial encouragement. At American Camp Association, thanks to the camp directors who took the time to share their perspectives with us.

This report focuses on finding common ground and building new relationships. We have appreciated the opportunity to do that with each other throughout this process.

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### An Exploratory Study of the Interests and Needs of Community-Based and Faith-Based Youth Workers

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**Y**outh workers in both community-based and faith-based settings are entrusted to focus on young people’s successful development by addressing their gifts, needs, strengths and challenges. Yes, youth workers in each setting approach these issues from somewhat different vantage points, but their shared commitment to young people provides fertile common ground for strengthening their capacity to make a real difference in the lives of the young people in our communities, states, nation, and world.

*Is There Common Ground?* explores both the challenges and the benefits of finding this fertile common ground between community-based and faith-based youth workers. What emerges from information gathered from a series of focus groups, two Web-based surveys of youth workers, and a two-day consultation of national thought leaders is a remarkable degree of alignment around many youth work priorities as well as exceptions that leave room for unique accents and learning across differences.

By examining faith-based and community-based youth workers perspective side by side, some core questions about where there might be shared and divergent interest, needs, and priorities for professional development merge. It also surfaces priorities and needs of youth workers in the field based on the National Collaboration for Youth approved core competencies for front-line youth workers (plus two additions on religious diversity and spiritual development).

Faith-based and community-based youth workers see eye to eye on many of the competencies. This commonality appears to hold true across a variety of settings as well as when we compare directors of both religiously affiliated and secular camps. This finding suggests that, at least in the area of competencies, there is significant common ground across sectors and settings. At the same time there are important differences. The greatest is on “helping young people develop spiritually.” In both surveys this competency that had been added to the list had the widest gap (62-63 points) between the two groups of youth workers.

Knowing priorities is an important starting point for finding common ground. It also helps to frame potential training and professional development that might most engage yourh workers in educational opportunities.

### Highest levels in learning opportunities

- Involving and empowering youth
- Interacting with and relating to youth in ways that support asset building
- Developing positive relationships and communicating with youth
- Caring for, involving and working with families and communities

Faith-based youth workers were more interested than community-based workers in professional development in the area of spiritual development—mirroring how they rate the importance of this added competency.

What role does spiritual development (and moral development) play in thinking about and building bridges between community-and-faith-based youth workers? Though the survey or focus groups only brought up spiritual development, the national thought-leaders began speaking of both moral and spiritual development together and a recommendation was made to focus on developing a framework that could be used to think about both of these as we proceed to find common ground. In the process of different organizations working in this area, a shared understanding of spiritual and moral development may help increase the interest in and comfort with the issue among community-based and faith-based youth workers.

To say that youth workers are interested in cross-sector learning opportunities does not imply that they do not also see significant challenges and barriers.

### Summary of Obstacles in Finding Common Ground

- Exclusiveness, proselytizing, and dogmatism
- Perceived differing goals and training
- Fear of judgment
- Discomfort with religious/spiritual issues
- Legal issues
- Lack of mutual respect
- Too little time
- Different languages (definitions)

Although there are significant and important challenges in finding common ground, the opportunities are just as significant—particularly given that most youth workers say they would value cross-sector learning opportunities.

### Summary of Benefits

- Enrich the lives of youth
- Tap into the unique strengths within each sector
- Increase opportunities through shared learning and resources
- Develop a community-wide approach

Even with the challenges and relative lack of knowledge about what models may already exist, participants in this work expressed widespread interest in building bridges to provide professional development opportunities across sectors. The recommendations are relevant for a range of audiences. Whether you work on the local level and can begin the dialogue and work across faith-based and community-youth organizations; as a local intermediary who wants to begin to work across the organizations; as a national organization that wants to begin to look at the broader picture of the workforce; or a funder who sees the need and opportunity to increase this work across these two important sectors that work with youth, there is work that is recommended and can be done.

Thread throughout all of the recommendations is the focus on and engagement of young people. This was repeated over and over throughout the collection of recommendations. It is through this focus and engagement that there may truly be a place to find common ground. Youth workers also recommend that further discovery on the existing models and networks already doing some of this work is an instrumental first step.

## Summary of Recommendations

### Work Locally

- Build relationships and communicate openly
- Create places and spaces
- Work for shared understanding and goals
- Share knowledge and opportunities

### Create a Framework for Moral and Spiritual Development:

- Determine how moral and ethical development relate to spiritual and religious development
- Support youth workers to be better prepared with each other and with young people
- Find shared meaning through narratives

### Integrate the Discussion about Qualifications and Preparation:

- Create definitions, common language, and understanding together;
- Define successful work with youth;
- Deepen the work on core competencies
- Understand more about professional development
- Create credentials, certificates and degrees together

### Conduct Additional Research:

- Learn more about youth workers
- Explore the relevance of contexts, particularly nature

### Develop Practical Tools:

- Create a tool kit
- Develop the needed materials
- Recommend a beginning bibliography

The exploratory work begins to lay out an agenda for dialogues and action aimed at strengthening youth work practice in both community-based and faith-based settings. It is only a start like the greeting and introductions in a long, significant working relationship. There is energy, enthusiasm and much work to do to build these bridges. All of us together can make the difference. Join in being catalytic in finding common ground.





**T**wo groups of youth workers—community-based and faith-based—appear to operate in parallel universes. Both groups play significant roles in young people’s lives, but they generally have distinct professional development systems and opportunities, distinct peer networks, distinct credentialing and accountability systems, and, perhaps, distinct priorities and frameworks for their work.

At the same time, both groups of youth workers struggle with some of the same issues: retention through middle and high school; reaching marginalized youth; and attending to young people in ways that help them grow holistically. They also share professional concerns around inadequate support systems; inconsistent professional development opportunities; and needing clearer standards for effectiveness. Both groups can benefit from training, mentoring, peer support, and other methods of developing their skills as youth workers.

Perhaps they could learn together—and from each other.

On the other hand, there are reasons for caution or skepticism. Aren’t the goals, priorities, language, approaches, and training really quite different? How could you overcome barriers such as a lack of mutual respect, dogmatism, exclusiveness, and judgmentalism? Aren’t there legal issues (separation of church and state) that make keeping an arm’s distance necessary?

In 2006, with support from Lilly Endowment Inc., the National Collaboration for Youth and Search Institute began exploring these possibilities and challenges, asking questions such as:

- Can faith-based and community-based youth organizations find common ground in how they might prepare staff and volunteers to most effectively work with youth?
- What are the priorities, core competencies, and professional development interests and needs of both groups of youth workers? Where are they similar and different?

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY . . . ?

### YOUTH WORKERS

Adults who work directly with young people in non-formal settings. They may be professionals or volunteers.

### COMMUNITY-BASED YOUTH WORKERS

People who work with youth in organizations in communities (independent as well as affiliates of national organizations) that do not have a religious charter.

### FAITH-BASED YOUTH WORKERS

Youth workers who work with youth in organizations that are religiously affiliated, including congregations (churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, etc.), para-church or para-congregation organizations, or faith-based social service organizations.

- What role does spiritual development play in the overall holistic development of youth?
- Are these groups of youth workers interested in finding common ground? What are any critical barriers that may interfere with building bridges? What do they see as the advantages?
- If there is interest, what might be done to facilitate mutual support and enhanced opportunities and systems for improving youth workers' competencies and effectiveness?

*Is There Common Ground?* explores these questions, building on a series of focus groups, two Web-based surveys of youth workers, and a two-day consultation of national thought leaders. (Figure 1 describes these activities.) What emerges across these learning projects is a remarkable degree of alignment around many youth work priorities of both community-based and faith-based youth workers—with important exceptions that leave room for unique accents and learning across differences. And though there is widespread interest in collaborative learning across sectors, there are also significant barriers, ranging from priorities for youth workers and, most significantly, mistrust and misunderstanding across the sectors.

Despite the challenges, the interests, benefits, and opportunities that emerged through this process merit full exploration. This publication seeks to unpack what we heard and learned, setting the stage for further dialogue, research, experimentation, and action. Our hope is that it will:

- Open up a new conversation among leaders in youth development, religious youth work, and related fields about a possible opportunity and resource that may not have been previously considered;
- Help to guide coalitions, partnerships, professional development providers, scholars, and researchers as they set their agendas and design portions of their work; and
- Encourage strategic leaders, funders, and policy makers to consider these opportunities and challenges as they set priorities and directions.

Thus, *Is There Common Ground?* seeks to bring together in conversation and action people from many different places and perspectives that touch the lives of young people. It is designed for senior leaders, policy makers, program planners, and staff development providers in national, regional, and local youth organizations, networks, and denominations; professors and students in youth development, youth ministry, and related fields; and other thought leaders and advocates in both community-based and faith-based organizations and networks.

The publication is organized as follows:

- **Youth Worker Preparation**—We look at how youth workers are currently prepared in both sectors as well as in camp settings (including camps that are religiously affiliated and secular). We focus here on the core competencies of youth workers, what they emphasize and where they see needs for ongoing professional growth and development. This section builds on the National Collaboration for Youth's approved framework of core Youth Development Worker Competencies (Appendix B). By examining the perspectives of community-based youth workers and faith-based youth workers side by side, we begin to

address some of the core questions about where there might be shared and divergent interests, needs, and priorities for professional development. This section includes a wide variety of information for people engaged in youth worker training and development in both community- and faith-based organizations. It also provides a helpful starting point for those engaged in youth worker preparation to gain perspective on the priorities and needs of youth workers in the field. Youth work practitioners will find it helpful to examine their own experiences, priorities, and competencies in light of the experiences of other youth workers who participated in this project.

- **Seeking Common Ground**—Even though youth workers may have overlapping priorities and needs, is there any interest in or benefit to building connections across sectors—particularly given some of the barriers? Building on survey data, focus group data, and findings from the national consultation of thought leaders, this section explores whether there is potential in building connections, highlighting the opportunities as well as the challenges or concerns of seeking common ground. This section is particularly relevant for scholars and executive leaders who set organizational direction. It also can stimulate a new set of conversations within and across faith-based and community-based settings about what each is doing to strengthen communities with and for young people.
- **Recommendations for Moving Forward**—Though the challenges in seeking common ground are real, the findings point toward significant opportunities and ideas to strengthen connections across sectors. This publication concludes by suggesting strategies and priorities for moving forward, based on the combined findings from the focus groups, survey, and convening. Recommendations include national agenda items as well as strategies to work across organizations locally. The focus remains on young people and how to tap into potential opportunities to do a better job of building highly skilled staff and volunteers to work with them. The recommendations have implications for youth worker preparation and development, community coalitions working with youth, funders that seek to support youth work in faith-based and/or community-based settings, and national religious and secular organizations that prepare, develop, and support youth workers.

Youth workers in both community-based and faith-based settings are all entrusted to focus on young people’s successful development by addressing their gifts, needs, strengths, and challenges. Yes, youth workers in each setting approach these issues from somewhat different vantage points, but their shared commitment to young people provides fertile common ground for strengthening their capacity to make a real difference in the lives of the young people of our communities, states, nation, and world.

## FIGURE 2 Overview of Project Activities

**Survey of youth workers**— The broadest information base for much of this report is data from an online survey that was conducted between November 20, 2006, and January 9, 2007, through [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). Overall, 1,322 people participated in the survey. This report focuses on results from the total sample and from those from local youth development organizations (n=569) (“community-based youth workers”) and those working in either a congregation or other faith-based or parachurch organization (n=404) (“faith-based youth workers”). Thirty youth workers in the total sample indicated that they worked in both sectors, and 313 indicated that they work in public institutions, such as public schools. These latter two groups are included in data on the total sample, but are not reported separately in this report. *Though fairly large and unique, the sample is a convenience sample and should not be interpreted as nationally representative.*

The online survey that was conducted can be found in Appendix A. Detailed information on the sample as well as additional findings are provided in Appendix C.

**Survey of camp directors**— One of the challenges in the broad survey of youth workers (described above) is that the sample is from a very broad array of settings (congregations, youth recreation programs, mentoring programs, social service agencies, after-school programs, and more). That diversity limits the value of comparison, since there are so many variables that could be influencing findings. Thus, the camp community, through the involvement of the American Camp Association, provided insightful data using a survey of camp directors (n=305) who represented both community-based (or secular) camps (n=214) and faith-based (or religiously affiliated) camps (n=89). The camp directors completed an online survey between April and May 2007 through [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). Highlights of the camp director survey and comparisons with the youth worker survey are provided throughout this report.

A summary of the camp study findings is provided in Appendix D.

**Focus groups**— We conducted a series of seven focus groups in four cities: New Orleans, Indianapolis, Minneapolis, and Tucson. Most of the groups were a mix of faith-based and community-based workers. Most groups included three to six participants.

More information on the focus groups is provided in Appendix E.

**National consultation of thought leaders**— Finally, the information gathered above formed the basis for a two-day dialogue among two dozen national leaders in April 2007 in Indianapolis, Indiana. The faith-based and community-based sectors were equally represented at the consultation offering a spectrum of perspectives throughout the gathering. Through panelists, small group dialogues, and other discussions, these national leaders helped to frame the issues and recommend possibilities for future action.

An overview of the consultation and identification of all the consultation participants is provided in Appendix F.



# Youth Worker Preparation: Priorities and Opportunities for Cross-Sector Learning

**M**any conversations are under way about youth worker preparation and support across the country and in different settings. These conversations need to involve front-line youth workers, young people themselves, national leaders, researchers, and policy makers. Critical questions include:

- Who are today's youth workers? What kinds of young people do they work with? Do they include people in all sectors, in both formal and informal roles and in a wide variety of roles and relationships with young people?
- What do youth workers need to know and do to maximize outcomes for young people?
- What do we actually know about who does youth work? What do they do? What makes them stay?
- What systems are needed to equip and sustain youth workers, whether professional or volunteer?

This project does not attempt to answer these questions. Rather, it seeks to add another layer to the conversation: Today's youth worker preparation and support systems are largely parallel tracks. For the most part, faith-based youth workers turn to faith-based systems for preparation, credentialing, and ongoing professional development and networking. Community-based youth workers do the same in their parallel systems. The question to be asked is whether these systems are serving the best interest of young people by operating along parallel tracks or are there opportunities for and benefits to finding or creating intentional links between these two worlds?

Do community- and faith-based youth workers have shared professional interests or goals? Do they need the same kinds of skills or competencies? If so, then there may be common ground for professional development in addressing skills or competencies that are essential for each group.

As a starting point, we utilized the Youth Development Worker Competencies, which are approved by the National Collaboration for Youth (Appendix B). This framework identifies ten skills that leaders in national youth-serving systems (including some faith-based national organizations) see as essential for effective frontline youth work. (For a complete list of the 50 National Collaboration for Youth members go to: <http://www.nydic.org/nydic/about/members.htm>).

For the youth worker surveys (one with a broad sample of youth workers; one with camp directors), we developed a set of simple questions that focused on each of these youth worker competencies. In addition, we added two other potential competencies.<sup>1</sup> One focuses on

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<sup>1</sup> The following additional items were added to the competencies in the camp study: “enhancing youth’s moral and character development,” “providing youth with experiences that are novel, stimulating, and challenging,” “teaching youth about healthy life choices,” “helping youth to develop environmental awareness,” “providing a mechanism for youth and adult partnerships and shared decision-making,” and “passing down your traditions and stories.”

“respecting and honoring religious diversity” and the other focuses on “helping young people develop spiritually.” Respondents were asked to assess the level of importance for each competency in their work (“not important,” “somewhat important,” “very important,” or “essential”). Then they were asked to indicate their level of interest in training, resource, and/or educational opportunities to build their competencies—or if they “already feel prepared” in the area.

## Similar Emphases in Each Sector

All groups of youth workers strongly endorsed at least half of the original competencies as “essential” and the rest were also broadly supported (Figure 2).

- Two-thirds of youth workers surveyed indicated that 5 of the original 10 competencies were “essential,” and about half believe the other 5 were “essential.” Almost none of those surveyed indicated that any of the original 10 competencies was “not important.”
- The community-based and faith-based youth workers were roughly equal in their level of affirming 6 of the 10 original competencies.
- All groups of youth workers (community-based, faith-based, and camp directors) were almost unanimous in endorsing developing positive relationships and communicating with youth as “essential.” All groups also endorsed being positive role models and involving/empowering youth as “essential.”
- Only 2 in 5 (38%) of both samples indicated that “respecting and honoring religious diversity” is an essential competency in their work with youth. Similarly, 47% of religiously affiliated camps and 42% of secular camps identified that “respecting and honoring religious diversity” is an essential competency in their work.

Thus, *faith-based and community-based youth workers see eye to eye on many of the competencies.* This commonality appears to hold true across a variety of settings as well as when we compare directors of both religiously affiliated and secular camps. This finding suggests that, at least in the area of competencies, there is significant common ground across sectors and settings.

## ADDITIONAL CAMP INSIGHTS

Several other competencies were added in the camp director survey to the 10 core competencies for youth development professionals. Some highlights:

“Enhancing youths’ moral and character development” was widely endorsed, with 64% of secular directors and 69% of religiously affiliated directors identifying the competency as essential.

Although nearly one-third of the total camp sample felt that “providing a mechanism for youth and adult partnerships and shared decision-making” was an essential competency, there was a 19% gap between secular (35%) and religiously affiliated (16%) camp directors.

(For more information, see Appendix S.)

## Different Emphases in Each Sector

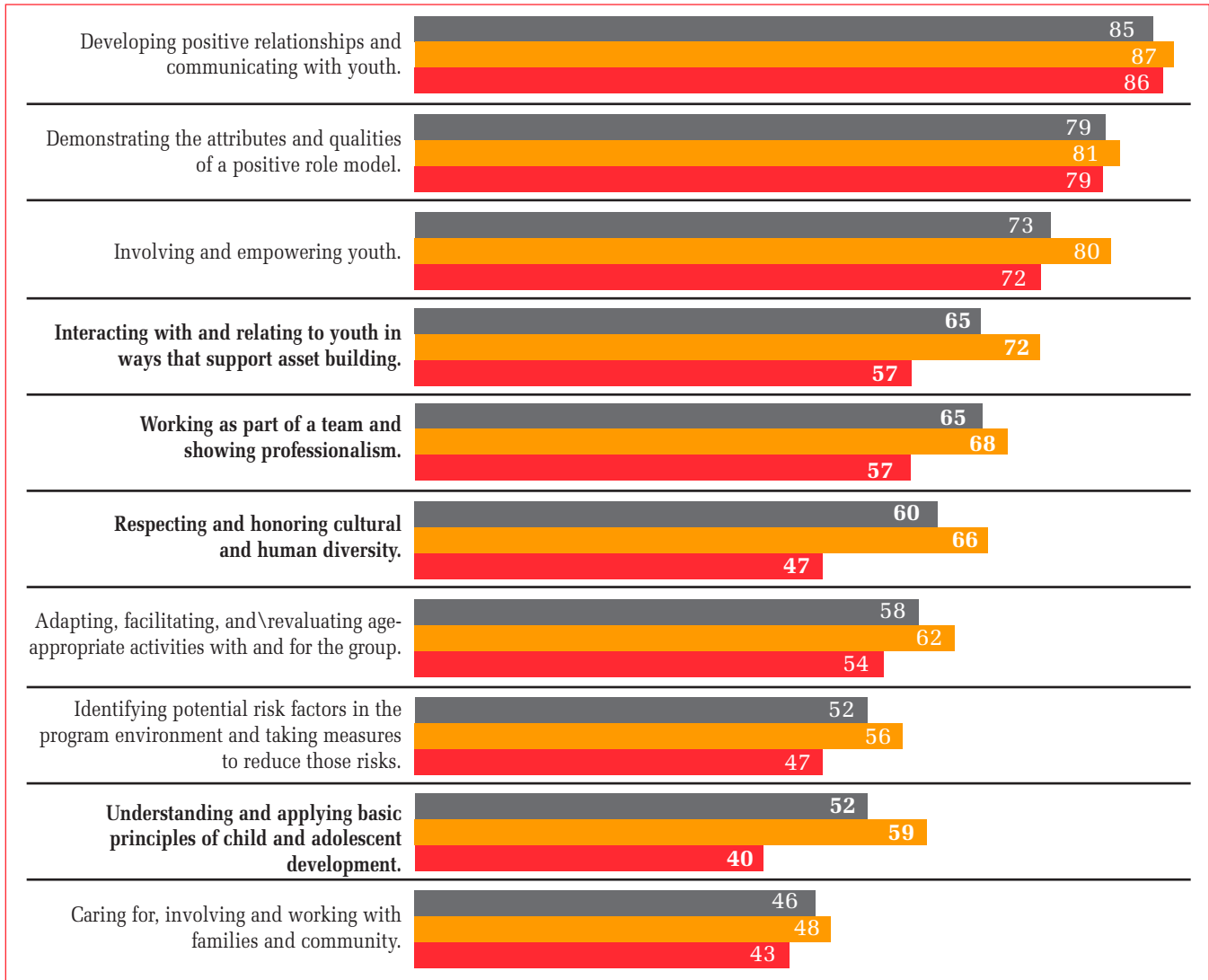
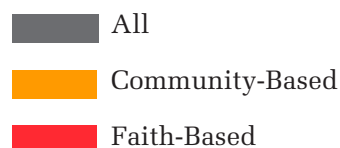
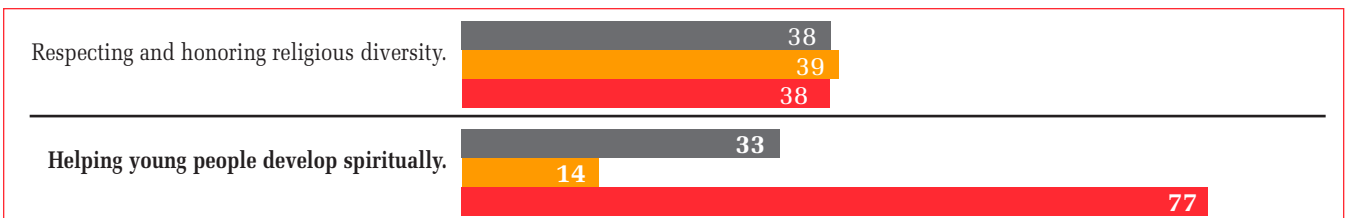
At the same time, there are important differences between groups. The greatest is on “helping young people develop spiritually.” Only 14% of community-based youth workers said this was “essential” to their work, compared to 77% of faith-based youth workers (a 63-point gap). The camp survey also found a similar gap. Twenty-three percent of secular directors and 85% of religiously affiliated directors (a 62-point gap) felt that this was an essential competency. Thus, faith-based youth workers are more than five times as likely as community-based workers to say that cultivating spiritual development is an essential part of their work with youth.

In addition to the difference in emphasis on spiritual development, faith-based workers in the broader survey were at least 10% *less likely* to say that 4 of the original 10 competencies are “essential”:

- Understanding and applying principles of child and adolescent development (20-point gap)
- Respecting and honoring cultural and human diversity (19-point gap)
- Interacting with and relating to youth in ways that support asset building (15-point gap)
- Working as part of a team and showing professionalism (11-point gap)

**FIGURE 2****Essential Competencies for Youth Workers by Sector**

Percent of respondents in the youth worker survey who say each theme is “essential” to their work. **(Boldface indicates items for which the difference between community- and faith-based workers is 10 percentage points or greater.)**

**ADDED COMPETENCIES**

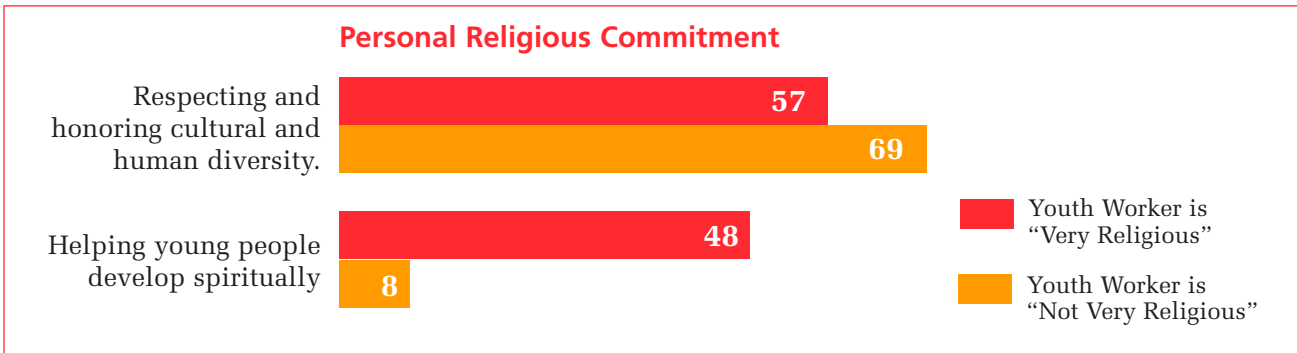


## Other Patterns and Differences

Beyond just comparing community- and faith-based youth workers, it is helpful to examine other characteristics of the sample to see where there might be other meaningful differences in support for the competencies. Do younger or older youth workers see them differently? What about urban or suburban or rural? And does the personal religious commitment of the youth worker affect how he or she views the competencies? Here's what we found:

### Personal Religious Commitment

Given the focus on cross-sector perspectives, it is also important to examine whether youth workers' religious commitments (in both sectors) play a role in the priorities that youth workers place on the various competencies. When we analyzed data on the basis of youth workers' self-reported levels of religious commitment ("How active or devout are you in your own religious beliefs, participation, and practices?"), relatively few differences emerged. There were, however, two notable exceptions:



The camp sample showed greater differences on several competencies than did the larger sample when viewed from the camp directors' personal religious commitment. "not very religious" camp directors were more likely than "very religious" directors to identify these competencies as essential:

- Understanding child-adolescent development
- Adapting, facilitating, and evaluating age-appropriate activities
- Identifying-reducing risk factors
- Providing challenging activities

On the other hand, "very religious" camp directors were more likely than their "not very religious" counterparts to rate the following competencies as essential:

- Developing positive relationships
- Helping young people develop spiritually

Thus, across sectors, youth workers who are most committed to a religious tradition are much more likely to endorse “helping young people develop spiritually” as an essential part of their work with youth, but are somewhat less likely to endorse “respecting and honoring cultural and human diversity”—though, it is important to note that a majority of religiously devout youth workers still see this competency as “essential.”

## Age

At some level, all ages of youth workers endorsed the 10 original competencies. However, 5 of the 10 original competencies were more likely to be endorsed as “essential” by older youth workers. (None of the competencies were more likely to be seen as essential by younger workers than older workers.) Comparing twenty- to twenty-nine-year-old youth workers with those aged fifty to fifty-nine years, we found that older youth workers were more likely to endorse these competencies as essential:

- Understanding and applying basic principles of child and adolescent development (61% vs. 40%, a 21-point gap)
- Working as part of a team and showing professionalism (74% vs. 55%, a 19-point gap)
- Interacting with and relating to youth in ways that support asset building (72 % vs. 58%, a 14-point gap)
- Respecting and honoring cultural and human diversity (66% vs. 52%, a 14-point gap)
- Adapting, facilitating, and evaluating age-appropriate activities with and for the group (68% vs. 56%, a 12-point gap)

The camp sample showed similar age-related patterns, but in slightly different areas. A comparison of twenty- to twenty-nine-year-olds and fifty- to fifty-nine-year-olds showed that the older directors placed more importance on:

- Adapting, facilitating, and evaluating age-appropriate activities
- Respecting religious diversity
- Enhancing moral and character development<sup>2</sup>

However, 77% of young directors viewed involving and empowering youth as “essential” compared to 60% of older directors (a 17-point gap).

Though we do not have data that explains the greater emphasis on many competencies, some may reflect differences in roles and perspectives, with older youth workers likely to have moved into leadership roles within their organizations. These areas may suggest opportunities for cross-age collaborative learning between seasoned and newer youth workers.

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2 This competency was added to the camp director survey; it was not part of the youth worker survey.

## Gender

There were potentially important differences between men and women in how they view several of the competencies. In all but one case (spiritual development) women were more likely to view each of the following competencies as “essential” to their work with youth:

- Respecting and honoring cultural and human diversity (64% females vs. 46% males, an 18-point gap)
- Adapting, facilitating, and evaluating age appropriate activities with and for the group (63% females vs. 50% males, a 13-point gap)
- Interacting with and relating to youth in ways that support asset building (70% females vs. 58% males, a 12-point gap)
- Identifying potential risk factors in the program environment and taking measures to reduce those risks (56% females vs. 45% males, an 11-point gap)
- Involving and empowering youth (77% females vs. 67% males, a 10-point gap)

As said above, spiritual development was the one instance where men were more like than women to view the competency as “essential” to their work:

- Helping young people develop spiritually (30% female vs. 42% male, a 12-point gap, *with males being higher*)

## Location

For most of the competencies, youth workers’ perspectives were fairly consistent across geographic settings (urban, suburban, rural/small town/reservation, and regional/national/ international). However, the youth workers working in urban areas were more likely than those in small towns to say that respecting and honoring cultural and human diversity was “essential” (66% urban vs. 53% rural/small towns).

Those who work in suburban settings were more likely than other groups to indicate that helping young people develop spiritually was “essential” (50% for suburban youth workers compared to 28% for both those who work in urban and rural/small town areas). This finding may reflect, in part, that the faith-based youth workers in this sample were more likely than community-based youth workers to work in suburban settings.

## ADDITIONAL CAMP INSIGHTS

Even more differences by gender were evident in the camp director survey. The following list shows ten essential competencies that were rated higher (>10-point gap) by women when compared to men:

- Developing relationships
- Respecting cultural/human diversity
- Respecting religious diversity
- Empowering youth
- Working with families
- Teamwork-professionalism
- Asset building
- Providing challenging activities\*
- Developing environmental behaviors\*
- Shared decision-making\*

Consistent with the broader survey of youth workers, the only essential competency rated higher by male than female camp workers was to help young people develop spiritually.

\* These competencies were added to the camp director survey.

## Interest in Ongoing Learning and Development

Knowing priorities is an important starting point for finding common ground as well as distinctions. However, if the focus is on training and professional development, it's also important to understand the areas where youth workers might be most interested in educational opportunities. Where might there be common interests that could be addressed in cross-sector learning?

Survey participants were asked how much they would be interested in training, resources, and/or educational opportunities related to each of the 12 competencies (including the two added items on religious diversity and spiritual development). We found that, *with a few exceptions, youth workers in both sectors were equally interested in training and professional development on specific competencies.*

Figure 3 shows the percentages of youth workers (total sample as well as each sector) who said that they were “very interested” in training, resources, and/or educational opportunities related to each of the competencies. Here are the highlights:

- The highest levels of interest in learning opportunities were *youth involvement/empowerment* and *asset-building approaches to working with youth*. About 3 in 5 youth workers in the total sample said they were “very interested” in opportunities to learn more about these topics. About half of the youth workers surveyed are also “very interested” in the next six competencies (Figure 3).
- Fewer than half of the youth workers surveyed indicated being “very interested” in the remaining four competency areas, including the two items that were added to the original set of 10 competencies (Figure 3).
- Levels of interest among community-based and faith-based youth workers in ongoing learning and development were comparable (less than 10 points difference) on seven of the 12 areas highlighted.

However:

Community-based youth workers were more likely than faith-based youth workers to be interested in professional development related to asset building, relationships with youth, cultural and human diversity, and working as part of a team.

Faith-based youth workers were more interested than community-based workers in professional development in the area of spiritual development.

### ADDITIONAL CAMP INSIGHTS

The highest levels of interest in learning opportunities for camp directors were in *youth involvement/empowerment (69%)* and *moral/character development\** (67%).

The areas of least interest were in *passing down traditions\** (31%) and *respecting religious diversity (41%)*.

However, when viewed from the perspective of secular and religious camps, several differences (>10 points) in training interest emerged. More directors in secular camps than in religious camps wanted training in *respecting cultural and human diversity (55% vs. 38%)* and *asset building (67% vs. 48%)*. More directors in religious camps wanted training in *helping youth develop spiritually (66%)* than did those in secular camps (47%).

\*These competencies were added to the camp director survey.

**FIGURE 3****Interest in Professional Development on Youth Worker Competencies**

<i>Percentages of respondents who would be “very interested” in training, resource, and/or educational opportunities in the following areas.</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Community-Based</i>	<i>Faith-Based</i>
Involving and empowering youth.	65	67	63
Interacting with and relating to youth in ways that support asset building.	60	63	53
Developing positive relationships and communicating with youth.	56	62	50
Caring for, involving and working with families and community.	56	56	57
Adapting, facilitating, and evaluating age-appropriate activities.	54	57	50
Identifying potential risk factors in the program environment and taking measures to reduce those risks.	52	55	51
Respecting and honoring cultural and human diversity.	49	55	42
Understanding and applying basic principles of child and adolescent development.	46	48	47
Working as part of a team and showing professionalism.	39	42	32
Demonstrating the attributes and qualities of a positive role model.	39	43	35
<b>ADDED COMPETENCIES</b>			
Helping young people develop spiritually.	37	31	56
Respecting and honoring religious diversity.	35	38	39

*(Shaded areas indicate items for which the difference between community- and faith-based workers is 10% or greater.)*

## Already Feel Prepared

One factor that may reduce interest in additional training and development opportunities is that people already feel prepared in a given area. Therefore, when asked about their interests in ongoing development, youth workers were given the option of indicating that they “already feel prepared.” Figure 4 summarizes these responses. Several notable findings include:

- No more than 2 out of 5 of the youth workers surveyed indicated that they “already feel prepared” in any of the areas examined. (This finding should not be over-interpreted; youth workers may desire additional training and development while already being effective in working in that particular area.)
- Youth workers surveyed were *most likely* to “already feel prepared” to be role models and to work as part of a team.
- The two areas where youth workers were *least likely* to say they were “already prepared” related to caring for, involving and working with families and community (18%), and helping young people develop spiritually (14%).

In general, youth workers in both sectors said they “already feel prepared” at similar levels. The only area of substantial difference between faith-based and community-based youth workers related to spiritual development. Faith-based youth workers surveyed were almost three times as likely as community-based youth workers to indicate that they “already feel prepared” (27% vs. 8%).

There were relatively few differences by gender or age (shown in Appendix C) in the proportions of youth workers who indicated that they already feel prepared for each of the competencies.

### ADDITIONAL CAMP INSIGHTS

The majority of camp directors did not feel particularly prepared in most of the competency areas. The areas that had at least 20% of the directors indicating they felt prepared were:

- Teamwork-professionalism (29%)
- Being a positive role model (27%)
- Identifying-reducing risk factors (27%)
- Passing down traditions\* (23%)

The directors were least likely to say they are already prepared in the following areas:

- Empowering youth (11%)
- Asset building (11%)
- Helping young people develop spiritually (11%)
- Adult-youth shared decision-making\* (10%)
- Working with families and communities (7%)

\* These competencies were added to the camp director survey.

**FIGURE 4**  
**Areas Where Youth Workers Say They “Already Feel Prepared”**

<i>Percentages of respondents in the youth worker survey who said they “already feel prepared,” when asked about interest in professional development in the following areas</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Community-Based</i>	<i>Faith-Based</i>
Demonstrating the attributes and qualities of a positive role model.	40	39	41
Working as part of a team and showing professionalism.	36	36	38
Developing positive relationships and communicating with youth.	28	24	32
Understanding and applying basic principles of child and adolescent development.	25	24	22
Involving and empowering youth.	23	24	22
Respecting and honoring cultural and human diversity.	22	21	20
Interacting with and relating to youth in ways that support asset building.	21	22	20
Respecting and honoring religious diversity.	21	17	23
Identifying potential risk factors in the program environment and taking measures to reduce those risks.	20	22	17
Adapting, facilitating, and evaluating age-appropriate activities with and for the group.	20	19	22
Caring for, involving and working with families and community.	18	19	14
Helping young people develop spiritually.	14	8	27

*(Shaded areas indicate the item for which the difference between community- and faith-based workers is 10% or greater.)*

## Readiness for Competency-Focused Learning

The above three perspectives on the competencies (how important; interest in training; and existing preparation) are all important factors in setting priorities for professional development opportunities for youth workers, with each touching on a different part of what might motivate youth workers to actually seek and participate in learning opportunities. (We have not factored in other critical variables, such as the cost and quality of available learning opportunities or the levels of institutional support that allows, encourages, or mandates training participation.) Any single perspective (such as how important a competency is perceived) is helpful, but inadequate on its own.

Using the data we have available, we created a simple formula to estimate “readiness for learning”—knowing that other factors also play a role in readiness. First we calculated the “felt need” by subtracting those who say they “already feel prepared” from those who said the competency is “essential.” Then we averaged the “felt need” with the level of interest (“very interested”) to reach a score for “readiness for learning.” Though the specific numbers are not meaningful in themselves, they suggest a priority ranking for professional development across the competencies.

For the total sample, the areas with the highest overall readiness for learning are:

- Involving and empowering youth
- Developing positive relationships and communicating with youth
- Interacting with and relating to youth in ways that support asset building

For the total sample, the areas with lowest overall readiness for learning are the two competencies that were added:

- Helping young people develop spiritually
- Respecting and honoring religious diversity

Using this calculation, some of the competency areas that are viewed as most “essential” remain areas where there may be a high readiness for learning—including the top three areas of readiness. But it is important also to note that some competency areas become more or less important when these multiple perspectives are combined.

For example, 4 out of 5 youth workers indicated being a positive role model is seen as “essential,” making it the second the

### ADDITIONAL CAMP INSIGHTS

For the camp sample, the areas with the highest overall readiness for learning were:

- Developing positive relationships and communicating with youth.
- Involving and empowering youth.
- Enhancing youths’ moral and character development\*

The areas with the lowest overall readiness for learning were:

- Helping youth to develop environmental awareness and an ability to demonstrate environmentally friendly behaviors.\*
- Providing a mechanism for youth and adult partnerships and shared decision-making.\*
- Passing down traditions and stories.\*

\* Items added to the camp survey.



most important competency in the overall sample. However, it’s also the area where youth workers are most likely to be “already prepared,” and their interest in more professional development is lower. Thus, this competency falls to eighth place in terms of overall readiness for additional professional development. On the other hand, the competency on caring for, involving and working with families and community ranked as the lowest priority among the original 10 competencies in terms of whether it is “essential” to youth work. However, relatively few youth workers already feel prepared in this area (1 in 5), and many are interested in learning more. So the family and community competency rises from tenth to seventh place in the overall ranking of readiness for learning.

## Similarities and Differences across Sectors

Using this “readiness for learning” calculation, we see more clearly **potential readiness for professional development** within each sector and across each sector. How similar and different are youth workers in the two sectors when all these pieces come together?

Figure 5 summarizes the calculations of readiness for learning for the total sample as well as each of the two sectors. (The detailed calculations for the broad youth worker survey are included in Appendix C. Findings from the camp directors survey are included in Appendix D.) Some of the highlights are as follows:

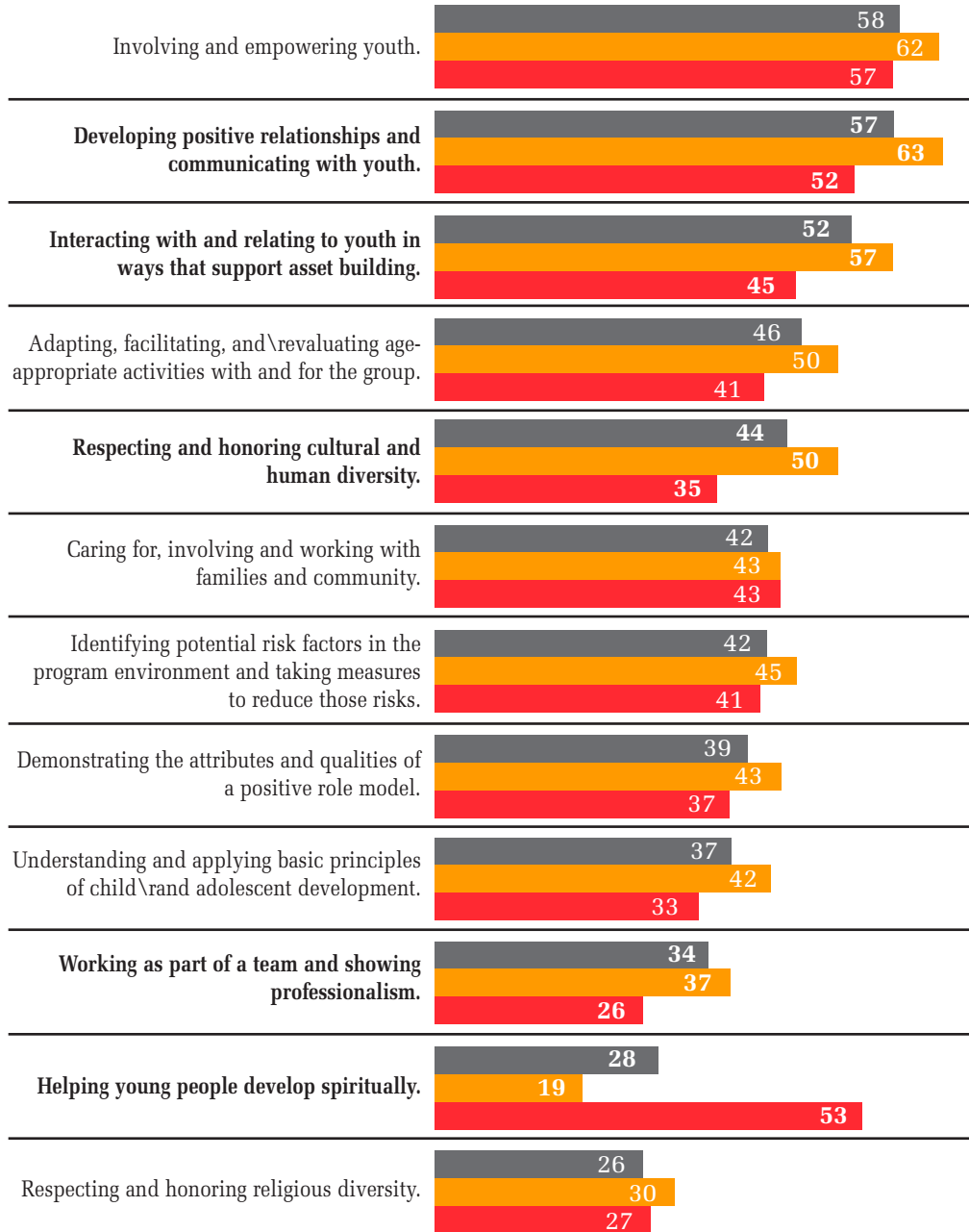
- Here are **the top five areas of readiness** for professional development in each sector:

<i>Community-Based Youth Workers</i>	<i>Faith-Based Youth Workers</i>
1. Developing positive relationships and communicating with youth.	1. Involving and empowering youth.
2. Involving and empowering youth.	2. Helping young people develop spiritually.
3. Interacting with and relating to youth in ways that support asset building.	3. Developing positive relationships and communicating with youth.
4. Adapting, facilitating, and evaluating age appropriate activities with and for the group.	4. Interacting with and relating to youth in ways that support asset building.
5. Respecting and honoring cultural and human diversity.	5. Caring for, involving and working with families and community.

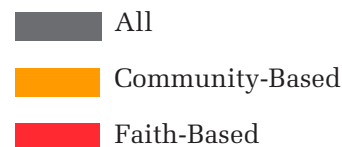
- The level of readiness for professional development is fairly strong and consistent across sectors on empowering youth, positive relationships, and asset building (though faith-based workers are somewhat less “ready” for professional development related to positive relationships and asset building).

**FIGURE 5****Readiness\* for Professional Development Across Sectors**

(Items in bold have a gap of greater than 10 points between community- and faith-based workers.)



\* Readiness is the average percentage of “Felt Need” and “Very Interested.”



- Overall, the level of readiness for professional development is consistent across sectors (less than 10 percentage points difference) on seven of the twelve competencies. The competencies with meaningful gaps (10 points or greater) are:

Helping young people develop spiritually (34-point gap)

Respecting and honoring cultural and human diversity (15-point gap)

Interacting with and relating to youth in ways that support asset building (12-point gap)

Developing positive relationships and communicating with youth (11-point gap)

Working as a team and showing professionalism (11-point gap)

If the “readiness for learning” calculation approximates opportunities for strengthening the capacity of youth workers, there are clear areas of potential cross-sector training. As a starting point, both groups of youth workers see high priorities around building relationships, empowering youth, and asset building.

Another possibility is to identify those areas where one group or the other, on average, has more experience or sees as a higher priority and then encourage dialogue across sectors so that each can learn from the other. For example, what would happen if community-based youth workers introduced faith-based youth workers to some of the principles and practices of dealing with human diversity among young people, then the faith-based workers shared their knowledge and experience related to spiritual development? Such an approach would likely be riskier and would require a strong foundation of relationship and trust across sectors to be effective. One can imagine, however, the creativity interplay of these two issues offering stimulating learning for both groups of youth workers.

## Preparing Youth Workers Together: Experience in the Field

The findings from the survey make a theoretical case that community- and faith-based youth workers do share a common base of interest and need related to professional development. But do these shared (and somewhat superficial) indicators translate into potential for on-the-ground training and professional development, or do youth workers approach these topics so differently that shared events (or even shared curricula) are impractical?

At the national consultation, Elaine Johnson of the National Training Institute for Community Youth Work (NTI) at the Academy for Educational Development described her organization’s youth development training curriculum<sup>3</sup>, which is delivered in a neighborhood or community context. The training focuses on community-level workers and includes a mixture of organizations—including both faith-based and community-based organizations—in most events. In her experience, the training effectively works across sectors and, in fact, stimulates important connections among youth workers at the community or neighborhood level.

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3 AED/Center for Youth Development and Policy Research and the National Network for Youth (1995), *Advancing Youth Development: A Curriculum for Training Youth Workers*. Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development. For information, visit <http://nti.aed.org/Curriculum.html>.

Building on that point, Tom East of the Center for Ministry Development suggested that an important framing issue for this dialogue is “to broaden the imagination of youth workers” (in both sectors) to include the web of relationships that are integral to their work and to the lives of young people. This includes colleagues, community partners, families, and the broader community. As long as youth workers view their role as only involving themselves and the youth in their program, it is difficult for them to see the value (or the essential need) for professional development and sharing with others.

Similarly, the consultation and survey findings noted the need for a focus on caring for and including families and community building as a core element. It is important, leaders affirmed, to understand how community and culture facilitate a young person’s development, and also

work to strengthen the community on behalf of (and with) young people. When they see the power of community and the potential for change, they are more likely to align themselves with other youth workers who share that commitment to youth in the community.

## Diversifying Approaches to Youth Worker Preparation

Consistent with the broader definition of professional development to include more than training events, the national consultation participants provided input to how resources and other educational opportunities could be provided. Some possibilities include:

- Provide space for reflective conversation on being a youth worker. This requires developing expectations, structures, and supervisory systems that encourage doing this reflection. Current systems make this kind of reflection difficult, since youth workers are often accountable for running a plethora of activities that leave little time for anything else.
- Develop models (within and across sectors) of youth worker mentoring or apprenticeships. Adapt the idea of a teaching “hospital” to a teaching congregation or teaching community organization.
- Create and sustain coaching models that build relationships between seasoned and inexperienced youth workers.
- Work in higher education to support youth work as a legitimate and respected profession and vocation. In the process, equip these youth workers with the skills they need to be positive change agents in their organizations and communities—not just leaders who know

### SURVEY PARTICIPANT INSIGHTS

“Many of the effective tools and strategies for youth work are not specific to a certain setting, but are very adaptable principles which could be used in various places, with various groups. It seems wise to collaborate and bring the best minds together to share their successes and the things they have learned from their less positive experiences.”

— Faith-Based Youth Worker

“[An advantage to cross-sector learning includes] awareness of each other’s strength in areas where your organization is lacking. . . . We can’t all be the best in every area of need, so why not refer?”

— Faith-Based Youth Worker

how to relate with youth (which is key), but also leaders who can help to affect the systems that affect young people.

- Create learning opportunities that are appropriate for volunteers who are critical to many youth development settings, both community-based and faith-based.

## What Role Does Spiritual Development Play?

The “elephant in the room” in thinking about building bridges between community- and faith-based youth workers is the issue of spiritual development. It’s the lowest priority for community-based youth workers and among the highest priorities for faith-based youth workers. It’s clear that “spiritual development” is a critical point of difference between faith-based and community-based youth workers. As such, the issue generated conversation among the leaders gathered at the national consultation. It was also a point of conversation during the focus groups.

The online survey of youth workers did not examine spiritual development in any depth (thus we don’t know what these youth workers mean when they ranked it as “essential” or not). However, the focus groups gave participants an opportunity to indicate how they think about and define spiritual development, with people each having an opportunity to write down and share their own definition. The most frequent themes included the following:

- Spiritual development is building a personal relationship or connection with a higher power or God.
- Spiritual development is learning and the development of life skills.
- Spiritual development is a life-long process.

Other comments on spiritual development included:

- Spiritual development can take place in activities outside of religion.
- Spiritual development is the adoption of a religious doctrine and/or developing faith.
- Spiritual development is a connection with others and the universe.

Many in the camp community feel that the camp experience is an important environment for spiritual growth because of the nature-based context of many camps. Understanding how camp directors defined spiritual development was crucial to establishing a context for their answers. In the camping survey, camp directors were asked to define the term “spiritual development.” Their responses were highly consistent with the themes identified above, with the following additions:

- Christian evangelism/education with a focus on the Bible.
- Importance of connecting through nature and the natural world.
- Moral and character development tied to values and ethics.

Focus group participants were also asked to articulate how they understand the place of spiritual development in their own work with youth. The main themes included:

- As a youth worker, I serve as a guide to help young people create their own definition of spiritual development and spirituality.
- I incorporate spirituality in youth work.
- I am a role model to youth by trying to live a life that is an example of spirituality.
- My spirituality serves as a personal motivator when working with youth.

It is not clear the extent to which this range of understandings shaped the responses to the online survey. It may be, for example, that asking about spiritual development without any context, definition, or depth led many youth workers to respond to the items with an assumption that religious and spiritual development are somewhat synonymous. Hence, when faith-based youth workers indicated that spiritual development is a high priority, they likely thought in terms of their own tradition's approach to spirituality (or, more likely, faith formation or education), and community-based youth workers presumed it wasn't part of their responsibility.

However, there are models where dimensions of spiritual development have been successfully addressed in cross-sector contexts and spiritual development has long been a part of the definition of youth development. For example, Elaine Johnson from the National Training Institute for Community Work at the Academy for Educational Development described how her organization's *Advancing Youth Development* curriculum addresses three themes that are, from her perspective, part of spiritual development:

- *Connectedness*: Are young people aware of how their actions bring about consequences for others? Do they care about other people's well-being?
- *Compassion*: How do young people learn to care for others without a direct benefit to themselves?
- *Abundance*: How do youth workers help young people understand that they can share out of their abundance, knowing that there is a place for them in the world?

This is just one example of how the issue of spiritual development has been negotiated within a community context for youth development. In addition, the New England Network for Child, Youth & Family Services has done extensive work in listening to the spiritual perspectives and needs of vulnerable youth, then encouraging secular youth-serving agencies to address these questions more intentionally.<sup>4</sup> Extensive work is also under way by Search Institute to deepen a shared understanding of spiritual development that resonates across communities and cultures, which will likely establish a platform for deeper analysis and dialogue.<sup>5</sup> But when thought leaders discussed spiritual development they wanted it to go hand in hand with people considering the role of moral development with young people. In the process of different organizations working in this area, a shared understanding of spiritual and moral development may help increase the interest in and comfort with the issue among community-based youth workers and also help faith-based workers see the issue in a broader context.

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4 For information on this work, visit [www.nenetwork.org/initiatives/youth-spirit.html](http://www.nenetwork.org/initiatives/youth-spirit.html).

5 For information on this work, visit [www.spiritualdevelopmentcenter.org](http://www.spiritualdevelopmentcenter.org).



## Seeking Common Ground: Interests, Challenges, and Opportunities for Professional Development across Sectors

**A**lthough there are important differences between community-based and faith-based youth work, it is clear from the data on the core competencies of youth development professionals that there is, in fact, common ground. Both sectors of youth workers—including the sampled camp directors—see many of the same competencies as essential, and there are clearly topic areas where their readiness for professional development around particular competencies is high. For example, the three highest shared areas of readiness (described earlier in the section of this report on Youth Worker Preparation: Priorities and Opportunities for Cross-Sector Learning) could provide a focus for professional development that meets top needs in both sectors:

- Developing positive relationships and communicating with youth;
- Involving and empowering youth; and
- Interacting with and relating to youth in ways that support asset building.

We should not, however, leap to the conclusion that, if both groups see a competency as essential and both want growth opportunities related to that competency, then joint opportunities make sense and would be valued. After all, these topics may already be addressed through training, tools, resources, and other professional development systems in both sectors. The ability to do work across these two sectors is more than just a shared interest. Some questions that are raised include:

- In the minds of youth workers, would cross-sector training, professional development, and other support, resources, and structures add any unique value to their work?
- Are both sectors really interested enough in doing this work together?

Are the barriers too high to justify the effort it would take to break out of each sector's institutional comfort zone, language, jargon, and boundaries?

The online survey explored this issue through a single forced-choice question to gauge interest. Then youth workers were asked open-ended questions about what they saw as the advantages and challenges of cross-sector opportunities. Finally, they were asked to indicate places where they have seen cross-sector professional development in action. In addition, at the national consultation, participants were asked to identify the challenges as well as the opportunities. What emerges is fairly strong interest in cross-sector professional development between all groups of youth workers—with some important caveats and obstacles to address.

## Interest in Cross-Sector Learning Opportunities

**“Ultimately, we are all working to better the lives of youth. We have limited resources, so the more we work together, the further we can go.”**

– Faith-Based Youth Worker

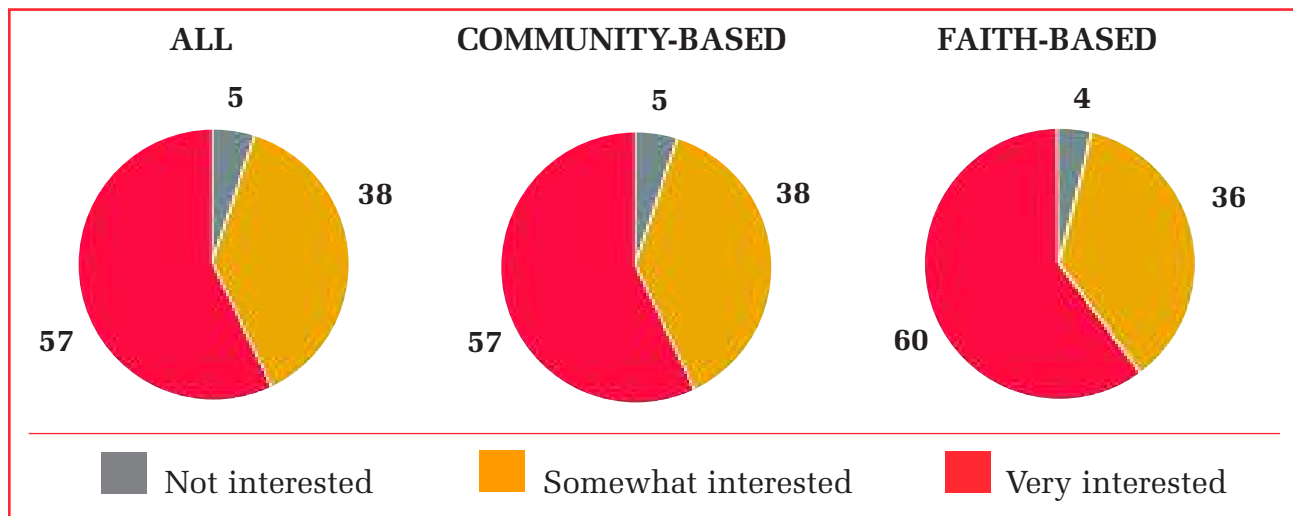
More than half of those participating in the youth worker survey said that they would be “very interested” in cross-sector training (Figure 6), with most of the rest being “somewhat interested.” Only a small percentage of youth workers in either group indicated that they were “not very” interested in such opportunities. This interest is remarkably consistent between community- and faith-based workers. It is also consistent for both female and male youth worker and for youth workers of all ages.<sup>6</sup> Quotes from some of the youth worker survey participants surface some of the reasons for their interest:

- *“I think it would have a somewhat enriching effect [to] build networks of opportunities. At minimum, the youth workers would hopefully come to a fuller knowledge and respect of each other and their work and ways of working.”* –Faith-Based Youth Worker
- *“We all have a lot to learn from people in related but different fields, because our colleagues in different areas approach similar problems to ours in their own unique ways that can, in turn, help us see our problems in a fresh way.”* –Community-Based Youth Worker

**FIGURE 6**

### Interest in Cross-Sector Learning Opportunities by Sector

If training, resources, or other professional development opportunities were offered that intentionally included both community-based and faith-based youth workers, how interested would you be in participating?



<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, among the camp directors surveyed, only 41% indicated being very interested in cross-sector learning opportunities, compared to 57% of youth workers in the general survey. Only 13% of camp directors said they were “not interested.”



## Differences in Interest in Cross-Sector Opportunities

Though interest in cross-sector learning opportunities is widespread, it is helpful to delve a bit deeper to see if there are other subtexts to be considered.

- Does interest in cross-sector training reflect a general greater interest in training and development?
- Do only those community-based youth workers who are themselves personally religious want to collaborate across sectors, or do even those who are not personally religious see value in cross-sector learning?
- Are faith-based youth workers from different religious traditions equally interested in collaborating for learning with community-based youth workers?

Additional analyses shed light on these questions:

- **Overall interest in training**– The interest in cross-sector training may reflect a general interest in *any* training and development. In this survey, youth workers who were most interested in cross-sector training tended to also be those who were most interested in training in each of the competencies. Indeed, those youth workers who indicated that they were “very interested” in cross-sector training were more likely also to say that they were “very interested” in training in all twelve of the competency areas examined (shown in Appendix C). Thus, *those youth workers surveyed who were most likely to value any training or development opportunities were also those who were most likely to value cross-sector opportunities.*
- **Religious commitment**– Among the community-based youth workers surveyed, those who were personally more religious (“very” active or devout) were somewhat more likely to be interested in this kind of joint professional development than those who indicated that they were not religious (Figure 7). However, a majority of both actively religious and those who were not religious or were “not very” active (all working in community-based settings) said they would be very interested in such opportunities. Thus, *one could conclude that the desire to connect across sectors is not driven merely by one’s own religious commitment, but is more related to the youth worker’s sense of what will be important and engaging in their own professional development.*
- **Religious affiliation**– When we looked within the faith-based sample, the vast majority described themselves as “very religious.” Hence, level of religious commitment isn’t a meaningful marker within this sample. However, given the growing plurality of America’s religious community (and concerns within some communities about intergroup relationships), it is useful to examine data through the lens of religious affiliation. (There was not enough diversity in the community-based sample to do a similar analysis in that group.)

Among faith-based youth workers, Christian youth workers were almost twice as likely as Jewish youth workers to be very interested in this kind of collaborative training. (The sample did not include enough youth workers from other traditions to do meaningful

analyses.) It is not that the Jewish youth workers surveyed were more likely to be “not interested,” but were most likely to be “somewhat interested,” reflecting what may be a level of caution about the prospect.

On the surface, this difference is surprising, particularly given the deep engagement of the Jewish community in social justice issues as well as interfaith efforts. And though the difference may simply be a result of a small sample size (there are only 68 Jewish respondents within the faith-based sample), it may also point to a critical challenge that has surfaced anecdotally in interfaith youth work. This finding may reflect some hesitation among Jewish youth workers (and, in fact, youth workers who are from other minority religious traditions or are not religious) to engage in more events and opportunities where the predominant frameworks, language, and approaches are Christian, while often overlooking the diversity within the religious sector and the broader community. We saw this dynamic manifested in focus groups where a church and Christian context were presumed—even when Jewish youth workers were in the group. Hence, our preliminary interpretation is that this difference underscores a compelling need to address and build comfort and competence for inter-religious engagement as well as cross-sector engagement so that all religious groups can participate fully and comfortably.

*“It only takes one Buddhist in the school for the people in Waco, Texas, to realize not everyone goes to church on Sunday morning ... Faith formation now is going to take place in the context of and relationship with people of other faiths. . . . You can have profound difference in theologies but you can work together, relate in some kind of enriching and positive way.” – Interfaith Youth Worker*

Finally, it is worth noting that we are not, in this preliminary study, able to distinguish the participating youth workers by their philosophical or theological orientation toward other religious traditions. For example, are those who are more exclusive in their understanding of faith within different religious traditions less likely to support cross-sector learning?

**FIGURE 7**  
**Interest in Cross-Sector Learning by Religious Differences**

<i>Interest in cross-sector professional development</i>	<b>a. Community-Based Workers</b>		<b>b. Faith-Based Workers</b>	
	<b>“Not Very” Active</b>	<b>“Very” Active</b>	<b>Christian</b>	<b>Jewish</b>
Not very interested	8%	4%	2%	8%
Somewhat interested	39%	31%	30%	57%
Very interested	54%	64%	68%	36%

*(Shaded areas indicate the item for which the difference between community- and faith-based workers is 10% or greater.)*

These additional analyses confirm that the interest in cross-sector learning is widespread, and the interest goes beyond individual youth workers' personal religious commitments. It appears that many youth workers see such cross-sector cooperation as an important part of their work with youth. However, it is also important to address the growing diversity of the faith communities, and, in the process, establish expectations for appropriate inter-religious relationships and dialogue. In addition, the differences by religious affiliation need to be examined more deeply and broadly to determine whether other differences (such as theological orientation) would also be an important distinguishing variable for whether faith-based youth workers see value in cross-sector learning.

## Challenges in Finding Common Ground

To say that youth workers are interested in cross-sector learning opportunities does not imply that they do not also see significant challenges or barriers. Respondents to the two online surveys, focus group members, and national thought leaders identified a number of challenges one might encounter in cross-sector professional development opportunities.

### Exclusiveness, Proselytizing, and Dogmatism

*“The key issue would be establishing a training session where all persons of faith could feel like they are respected and acknowledged as well as establishing such a session as a safe place for collaboration and learning—not for proselytizing.”*

– Community-Based Youth Worker

Focus group members, survey respondents, and national thought leaders suggested that a key obstacle could be organizations being strident about their own perspective and not being open-minded. This was mentioned most frequently regarding faith-based youth workers, who are viewed as recognizing only one belief system and expecting to be able to proselytize.

### Perceived Differing Goals and Training

*“The greatest obstacle I see is the perception, whether accurate or not, that faith-based workers have their own agendas and that community-based workers lack a strong moral base. [This should be recognized] in order for the two groups to establish common ground.”* – Camp Director

Many people mentioned that an obstacle or challenge would be the differing goals, missions, values, agendas, and belief systems of the two types of organizations. Though they may actually be different, one challenge that was mentioned was there really was lack of knowledge of missions, goals, assets/resources, staffing and what hinders us from working together. It was proposed that if we could hold our gaze long enough to understand our differences, we may actually find common ground.

#### SUMMARY OF OBSTACLES IN FINDING COMMON GROUND

- Exclusiveness, proselytizing, and dogmatism
- Perceived differing goals and training
- Fear of judgment
- Discomfort with religious/spiritual issues
- Legal issues
- Lack of mutual respect
- Too little time
- Different languages

## Fear of Judgment

*“We need to be careful to encompass faith in such a way that everyone is welcome and no one feels left out or wrong in their belief.” – Survey Participant*

Youth workers in both sectors point toward fear of judgment from many places—harassment, political correctness, hostility, stereotyping, aggressive challenges to perspectives—as obstacles that keep them apart. Community-based youth workers indicated concerns that faith-based youth workers could be judgmental of youth and families who do not live within the moral constructs of a particular faith, and thus would be less open to allowing anyone to participate. A number of focus group participants indicated that they had felt ostracized by faith-based organizations.

## Lack of Mutual Respect

In a related theme, there is a sense within both sectors of polarization, alienation, and mutual prejudice. On each side, there is a lack of understanding of each other’s values and backgrounds. Each sector may have a tendency to devalue the other’s work. In addition, there seems to be a lack of understanding of what work can be done collectively that can not be done separately.

## Discomfort with Religious/Spiritual Issues

*“The challenge would be to remove all aspects of religion/faith from the training. I’m willing to learn alongside anybody who is interested in the same topic, but I’m not willing to have their religious views or perspectives imposed on me or my work.”*  
– Youth Worker

Community-based youth workers are less comfortable with the language of spirituality and religion—which is the primary language utilized by many faith-based youth workers. Some focus group participants indicate that religious and spiritual concepts could be intimidating to them.

## Legal Issues

A number of survey respondents noted legal issues or the need to separate church and state as a key obstacle or challenge. A community-based youth worker sees this challenge: “We operate pretty strictly with the ‘church and state’ thing around here – but that doesn’t preclude being trained together. I think you would just have to be sensitive to how you worded the training...My town board might be less apt to allow me to attend something billed for ‘faith leaders,’ for instance.”

## Too Little Time and Resources

*“[It] takes time, costs money, it is only one of a million other things we have to do.”*  
– Youth Worker

One issue that emerged was the fact that youth workers had no additional time to focus on trying to work across these two sectors. Already over-extended with multiple priorities, many mentioned that neither the time nor level of priority in their work would enable them to do this work with those from the other sector.

## Different Languages and Guiding Approaches

Respondents indicated that currently there is no language that avoids division and brings people to the table. There would need to be careful and clear definitions of the words and concepts agreed upon by both groups. In addition, people would need to be mindful of using words that have judgmental or negative connotations, like “brainwashing,” “agenda,” “secular,” “saved,” and so on.

## Benefit and Opportunities of Finding Common Ground

*“To use training in the broad sense to organize, inspire, and equip a large number of loosely connected adults who are youth workers to tap an even larger number of youth into their power for them to go on and write a major chapter of American history.”*

– National Thought Leader

Although there are significant and important challenges in finding common ground, the opportunities are just as significant—particularly given that most youth workers say they would value cross-sector learning opportunities. Among the respondents to the two online surveys, the participants in the focus groups, and the thought leaders, there was a widespread sense of readiness to tackle the difficult challenges and seek innovative ways to finding common ground.

Through the process, we have asked people to reflect on the benefits and opportunities they see in finding common ground for professional development between faith-based and community-based youth workers.

## Enrich the Lives of Youth

For many participants in this project, the bottom line for collaboration is improved work with young people. People commented on the opportunity to better serve youth holistically and across the community. Some participants’ perspectives:

- *“Whether it be faith-based or community-based, people who work with kids all have the same passion in mind. We all need to work together for the betterment of our youth. And working together we have a better chance in reaching out and helping our youth!”*
- *“We all work in isolation from one another. Knowledge of resources would enable us to provide the highest quality of care to our youth.”*
- *“The more resources, assets, and perspectives that we all . . . can bring to the table, the more likely we are able to offer rich programs that resonate with youth and allow us to meet our ultimate objective of supporting the developmental needs of youth as they transition from adolescence to adulthood.”*
- *“There is a desperate need to collaborate in the urban setting. We are missing significant segments of youths’ lives due to our “silo” mentality and unwillingness to network with each other. There would be the opportunity to share resources and eliminate doubling in some areas.”*

## Tap into the Unique Strengths within Each Sector

Focus group participants and thought leaders in the national consultation consistently emphasized that both groups of youth workers want what is best for all youth and have much to teach the other. Focus group participants suggested that each sector has unique strengths that could be shared with the other sector through cross-sector learning opportunities between community-based and faith-based youth workers. This may be a very simplistic list, but it provides another area that could be pursued for a better understanding of what unique strengths each sector could offer. Here are some examples of what they saw:

<i>What faith-based organizations offer</i>	<i>What community-based organizations offer</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discipline and structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skilled in time management and organization</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A realization of a bigger mission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The credibility of research and research-based explorations</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The idea of a systematic approach to producing adherents – systematic teaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development workshops, classes and learning opportunities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address the spiritual and the needs of the whole person.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth workers can bring a lot more of themselves into the situation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience in using community resources</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An understanding of spirituality and a belief system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-based orgs have a larger reach in a community</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobilizing volunteers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training of volunteers</li> </ul>

## Increase Opportunities through Shared Learning and Resources

*“There are so many resources in both community and faith-based groups. Sharing should mean that all would have access to more opportunity, therefore being more enriched.”*  
 – Youth Worker

Learning information, sharing resources, learning about each other, and broadening diversity were among the major advantages of shared professional development between community- and faith-based youth workers. *“To ignore collaboration and sharing with this group seems close-minded,”* said one camp director.

*“It would help these youth workers form networks that might not have been formed otherwise. I think our society really separates out the spiritual and the secular to the point that the community organizations don’t necessarily see the faith-based workers as a resource and partner. I think both can learn from each other and can support each other’s work.” –Youth Worker*

## **Developing a Community-Wide Approach**

*“If change is going to happen in our communities, it has to be a joint effort. If we are all working separately to achieve peace in our world-communities, then we are not using our resources wisely and, in turn, separating the community even more.” –Youth Worker*

As in the above example, some respondents spoke about how the connections between faith-based and community-based youth organizations provide an opportunity to develop a more systemic, community-wide approach to working with youth. Two youth worker responded:

*“It is a systemic approach that works. You cannot truly separate faith from community: faith is an integral part of every community, and attempts to segregate faith from community are futile.” –Youth Worker*

*“We already see the advantages,” said a faith-based worker who has been involved in cross-sector collaboration. “At a base level, the networking of the two is invaluable for fundraising, community spirit, and to give the youth an idea how life works.”  
–Youth Worker*



# Recommendations for Moving Forward

***“We should all be asking: ‘How can we all work together to achieve the common good?’”***

— Faith-Based Youth Worker

**E**ven with the challenges and the relative lack of knowledge about what models may already exist, participants in this work expressed widespread interest in building bridges to provide professional development opportunities across sectors. The recommendations are relevant for a range of audiences. Whether you work on the local level and can begin the dialogue and work across faith-based and community youth organizations; as a local intermediary want to begin to work across the organizations; as a national organization that wants to begin to look at the broader picture of the workforce; or a funder who sees the need and opportunity to increase this work across these two important sectors that work with youth there is work that is recommended and can be done.

When asked for their recommendations and hopes for the future, participants in the surveys, focus groups and national convening articulated a range of ideas. Throughout these recommendations you will find overlap with:

- The need to increase the dialogue and work on the local level;
- to take action and to increase our knowledge;
- to define and develop our language and share stories for common understanding of the work; and
- to create environments built on trust and communication.

## Focus on—and Engage—Young People

***“Set aside personal agendas and focus on youth.”*** – Survey Respondent

It almost goes without saying that all youth workers care about youth. However, as we focus attention on developing strong systems to support youth workers, people can easily get caught up in the systems and fear of the unknown and forget the ultimate goal: positive outcomes for our children and youth.

A consistent theme we heard throughout this process is that the best place to begin finding common ground is to focus on young people and their capacities, hopes, realities, challenges, and dreams. Understanding the needs of young people and how we might best meet these needs is certainly a reason for trying to work together instead of in silos in order to do this work most effectively.

As we already know, further dialogue about effective youth work must include more front-line youth workers as well as young people’s own perspectives and voices. The work ahead will only be effective when both groups are directly involved in the conversation and implementation of finding common ground and laying out an agenda for youth worker preparation and support. Only bringing all the stakeholders together will make this a movement with momentum and power.



## Begin or Expand Work Locally

*“I do think we need more research, but I think we can learn and act at the same time. By acting and learning together, we can learn a lot.”*

– Community-Based Youth Worker

*“I hope that we can create a model for collaboration and dialog that would help other groups do the same thing.”* – Survey Respondent

Think about the work collectively as working for youth as a part of the same community. Youth are at the synagogue, mosque, temple and church while they are also at the local Y’s, Boys and Girls Clubs, Parks and Rec programs, 4-H and Scouts. Begin thinking about working together, often for the same population while learning more about the youth being served and expanding those numbers together. The real challenges and potential will only become evident when activity happens on the ground among youth workers from different backgrounds and sectors. Only then will we be able to make the following observations:

- Which of the potential benefits emerge as key?
- What barriers disappear as relationships form?
- What other barriers become significant, persistent challenges?
- What ground rules and practices create safe and stimulating space for learning for everyone?

Throughout our exploratory process, thought leaders, focus group participants, and survey respondents all recommended working locally. Some ideas include:

- **Build relationships and communicate openly.** Find or create opportunities to get to know each other, build trust, and develop partnerships. Keep an open mind, being nonjudgmental and discussing commonalities while not ignoring the differences. Integrate each other’s strengths into respective work with youth. Build a growing understanding between the two communities of youth workers. *Respect, compassion, listening, understanding* and *tolerance* were all words used.
- **Create places and spaces.** Develop the places and spaces where youth workers across systems and sectors can come together to share, define, reflect and develop practice strategies for promoting holistic development and deliberately promote the spiritual and moral development of children and youth.
- **Work for shared understanding and goals.** Have honest and open communication about differing goals. Determining shared goals includes establishing and communicating them together. Discuss belief systems and share and reflect on the differences and similarities of those belief systems. Dialogue openly with each other as well as ensure self-reflection to find those opportunities for common ground.
- **Share knowledge and opportunities.** Provide an opportunity for workers to get together and share what they are doing. Conduct joint trainings, workshops, and events. Share resources, best practices, program ideas, activities, and curriculum (including professional development curriculum).

## Create a Framework for Moral and Spiritual Development

Young people struggle with their own identity particularly during adolescence. Adults who work with them have an important responsibility to be able to help them dialogue and explore the many facets of who they are as human beings. This includes their moral, ethical, and spiritual facets. Since both faith-based and community youth organizations are concerned with the development of children and youth, they are in a position to work together to address these multiple aspects of a young person. The language that is used and the major focus of work may be different, but, we may also find more similarities than differences as we expand our partnerships together. The framework needs to:

- **Determine how moral and ethical development relate to spiritual and religious development.** Develop definitions, narratives, and safe places where youth workers in all settings can create more intentional dialogues about these issues with each other and with young people.
- **Support youth workers to be better prepared to have these hard discussions.** Assist youth workers in developing knowledge and skills for responding to youth questions and concerns related to sensitive issues. Empower youth workers so that they feel prepared and comfortable in responding in ways that support youths' development.
- **Find shared meaning through narratives.** Remember that abstract definitions may do less to stimulate shared commitments than would shared experiences, stories, narratives, and actions. People will create meaning through these shared stories. Through stories and narratives, the work will come alive and have meaning for youth workers. Through action, it will become part of who they are.

While looking more broadly and across the sectors to find common ground, it is important that the particular priorities, issues, and challenges of specific groups not be marginalized or ignored. Within each of the sectors, there are a broad range of racial/ethnic, religious, geographic, gender, type of community, and other particularities for both young people and youth workers. The challenge is to find the creative interplay between what is held in common and what is unique. Furthermore, it is important to support the specific work needed in a particular community, culture, or tradition while also finding bridges and connections between that work and the broader community.

## Integrate the Discussion about Qualifications and Preparation

*“How do we create a movement of peaceful pluralism? I think we have the right pieces, the ten competencies plus two.” – Faith-Based Youth Worker*

Both faith-based and community-based youth organizations are discussing and deciding about what is most needed to prepare highly skilled staff and volunteers to work with youth. The discussions are happening in local organizations and religious institutions; in local intermediaries and networks; on college and university campuses; and on the national level. Based on the information collected, there are clear areas of common ground around core youth worker competencies and shared commitments, at least on the surface. Yet this project only began to scratch the surface of the definitions, assumptions, and best practices available for

exploration. For example, whom are we talking about when we use the term “youth worker”? Is it just the professional, or does it include volunteers? What does it mean to empower youth, to communicate effectively or to work with them in ways that support asset building—the widely endorsed competencies?

Participants in this project identified a number of areas where more work needs to be done collectively to find common language and think about how we may move forward together as we think about the preparation of staff and volunteers who work with youth:

- **Create definitions, common language, and understanding together.** For example, define what it means to be a youth worker, who youth workers are and their roles in various settings, from informal to formal
- **Define successful work with youth.** Work together across sectors to generate a definition and indicators of what successful work with youth looks like. This can lead to a clearer sense of the common ground. Identify general practice or program standards.
- **Deepen the work on core competencies.** Develop a deeper interpretation and application of the core competencies by providing tips and strategies for strengthening each competency and creating additional competencies that may need to be added for a particular community. Explore the competencies in both faith-based and community-based youth organizations to ensure their relevancy to multiple populations.
- **Understand more about professional development.** Define the current quality, quantity, and content of training, technical assistance, and other learning opportunities within each sector and across sectors. Include pre-service training as well as in-servicing training.
- **Develop together credentials, certificates and degrees.** Look across the campus to see what is already occurring to prepare those who work with youth and think about inter-departmental work. Research existing degrees to find out if they are relevant and available to both faith-based and community youth workers and see if it is beneficial to expand the audience intentionally.

## Conduct Additional Research

The need for additional knowledge and research is woven throughout the recommendations. In addition, to keep this work moving forward, research agendas should be designed in order to learn more about the common ground between faith-based and community-based organizations. The following are a few ideas that have already surfaced:

- **Learn more about youth workers.** Create an in-depth profile of youth workers with nationally representative samples that include youth workers from multiple sectors and settings. This work can build on an existing study and protocol done by the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition of front-line youth workers ([www.nextgencoalition.org](http://www.nextgencoalition.org)).
- **Explore the relevance of contexts, particularly nature.** Some contexts, such as the nature-based setting of many camp experiences, may be particularly important for certain aspects of youth development. Explore how specific contexts, such as nature, may impact positive youth development and how youth workers can be trained to facilitate these impacts.

## Develop Practical Tools

*“I think I got the theology right and I understand a lot about spiritual formation, but I don’t feel like I understand a lot about the other aspects about youth.”*

–Faith-Based Youth Worker

To do this work, people will need hands-on tools, many of which may emerge most effectively from local innovations and experiments. These tools may include the following:

- **Create a tool kit.** Provide the tools that help youth workers understand spiritual development and moral/ethical development. Find common space for youth worker dialogue about spiritual development and moral development and then ways to apply what they learn into their specific setting.
- **Develop the needed materials.** Develop the people, practices, exercises, resources, Web, and print materials that would be used at local workshops and conferences so that these ideas and goals can spread through existing networks.
- **Recommend a beginning bibliography.** Identify the essential literature that should be read by youth workers in both sectors that can become a shared knowledge base about young people, adolescent development, and best practices related to the core competencies of youth workers (see Appendix G).

## Tap into Existing Models and Networks

*“Don’t reinvent the wheel; if there are programs/organizations out there that provide services or will train staff/volunteers, they should use them.”*

– Survey Respondent

The national thought leaders recommended that we find examples of cross-sector training and professional development and capture the lessons already learned. Some of this information was already provided by survey respondents when they were asked to identify places and organizations that already offer “professional development opportunities, systems, or frameworks” that build bridges between faith-based and community-based youth-serving organizations. Some of the suggestions were relevant to both audiences, but may not be doing intentional work to bridge these two groups and may be key places to begin capturing lessons. (See Appendix C for a list of the various organizations named.) These included:

- Existing systems and practices that focus on both faith-based and community-based youth workers (e.g., American Camp Association)
- Local, state, or regional intermediaries, networks, coalitions and alliances
- Community-based asset-building efforts or coalitions
- Faith-based and interfaith/multi-denominational efforts

- Issue-oriented social justice and advocacy networks
- National community-based organizations
- Foundation- and government-initiated efforts

In short, find the examples of cross-sector training to capture lessons learned. There may be many organizations, particularly at the local level, that are doing innovative work that touches on the possibilities for cross-sector professional development. Some of those models are intentionally cross-sector; others are cross-sector simply because of who is involved and the nature of the community. Finding and learning from these examples provides an experiential foundation for future collaboration.

## **Begin the Conversations . . . and the Experiments**

This exploratory project begins to lay out an agenda for dialogue and action aimed at strengthening youth work practice in both community-based and faith-based settings. Yet, in many ways, it is only a start—like the greeting and introductions in a long, significant conversation. It appears that we have something to talk about together, and people who have been engaged in this process have appreciated the invitation and the “space” to have these conversations.

Our hope is that these conversations will continue, be deepened, and spread to other people, settings, and networks. Frameworks and questions presented in this publication may be springboards for exploratory dialogues and new relationships.

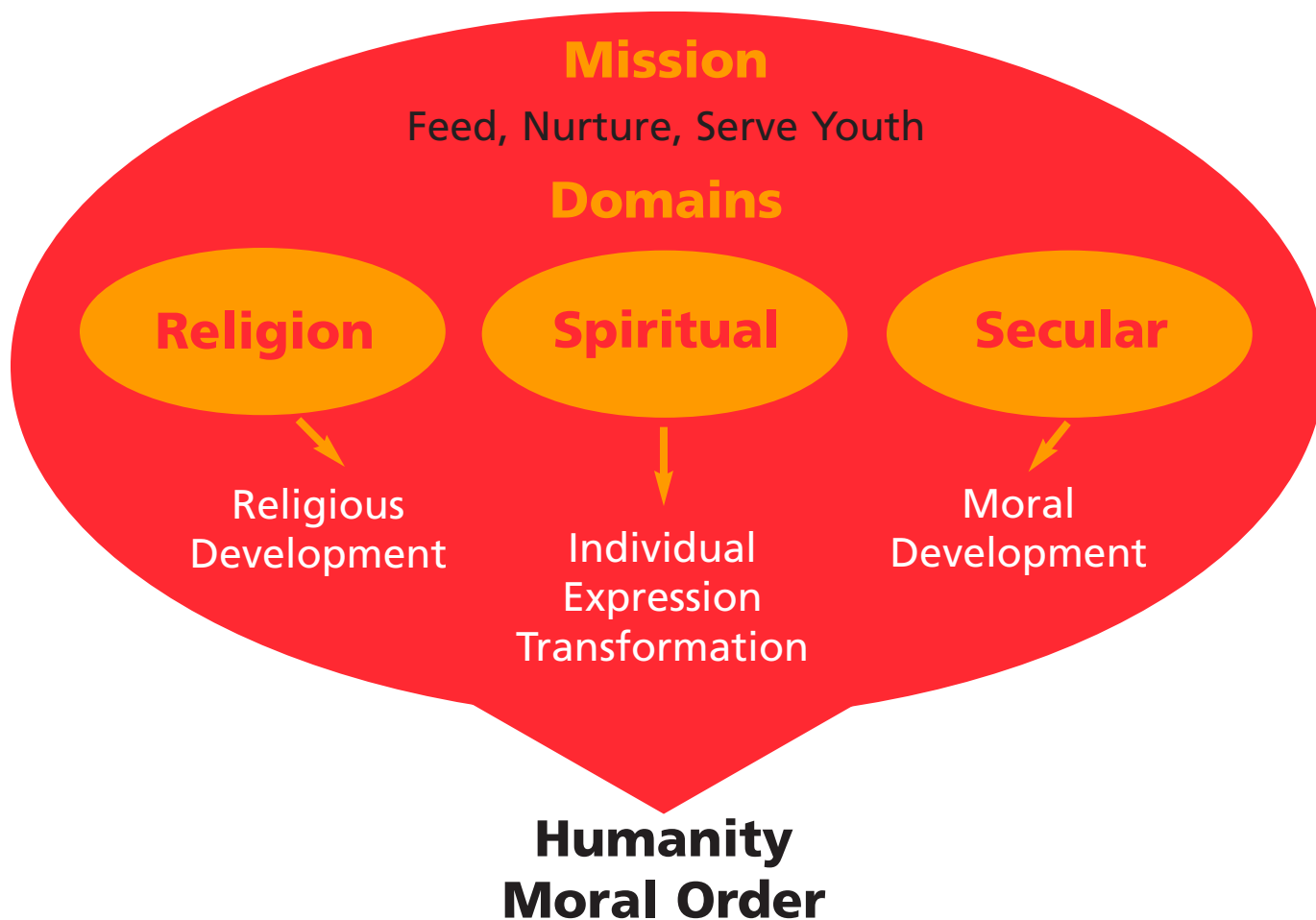
There is also a sense, though, that the conversation will only get us so far. It’s easy, for example, to spend so much time on the barriers and challenges of cross-sector engagement that you lose perspective on what really happens when people of good will come together for shared learning and action. It’s easy to forget about what you can do individually and together to support and engage young people in your organizations and communities. These conversations and learnings can lead to important new shared activities and actions—on-the-ground experiences based in relationships where trust, mutual respect, and shared stories can grow.

There is energy, enthusiasm, and much work to do to build these bridges. All of us together can make the difference. Join us in being catalytic in finding common ground.



# Framework for Moral and Spiritual Development

## Faith and Expression of Service (Ministry)



### COMMON ELEMENTS:

*People* – Belief Systems ■ *Place* – Community ■ *Space* – Learning

One of the requests from participants in the national consultation of thought leaders was to provide a framework for moral and spiritual development. This is one that was developed at the meeting. This is only a starting point; additional efforts to build consensus would be needed.



# Preliminary Reading List for Youth Workers

One of the requests from participants in the national consultation of thought leaders was to compile a reading list that would introduce youth workers in each sector to the foundational texts for their work with youth. Below is a preliminary list of titles that surfaced through nominations from consultation participants as well as the editors' knowledge of the fields. This list is only a starting point; additional efforts to establish criteria and build some consensus would be needed to develop a reading list that is not limited by the knowledge and perspectives of the creators.

## General Youth Development

Benson, P. L. (2006). *All kids are our kids: What communities must do to raise caring and responsible children and adolescents (rev. ed.)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brown, B. B., Larson, R. W., & Sarawathi, T. S. (Eds.) (2002). *The world's youth: Adolescence in eight regions of the globe*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Hamilton, S., & Hamilton, M. A (2004). *The youth development handbook: Coming of age in American communities*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development: Committee on community-level programs for youth* (J. Eccles & J. A. Gootman, Eds.) [Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, Board on Children, Youth and Families]. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Villarruel, F. A., Perkins, D. F., Borden, L. M., & Keith, J. G. (2003) *Community youth development: Programs, policies, practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## Adolescent Spiritual Development

Roehlkepartain, E. C., King, P. E., Wagener, L. M., & Benson, P. L. (Eds.) (2006). *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Smith, C., with Denton, M. L. (2005). *Soul searching: The religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wilson, M. (2004). *A part of you so deep: What vulnerable adolescents have to say about spirituality*. Burlington, VT: New England Network for Child, Youth & Family Services.

## Faith-Based Youth Work

### *Multi-Faith Perspectives*

Patel, E., & Brodeur, P. (Eds.) (2006). Building the interfaith youth movement: Beyond dialogue to action. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Roehlkepartain, E. C. (1998). Building assets in congregations: A practical guide to helping youth grow up healthy. Minneapolis: Search Institute.

### *Christian Perspectives*

Clark, C. (2004). Hurt: Inside the world of today's teenagers. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Dean, K. C., & Foster, R. (1998). The Godbearing life: The art of soul tending for youth ministry. Nashville, TN: Upper Room.

McCarty, R. J., Delgatto, L., & Dunne, T. (2005). The vision of Catholic youth ministry: Fundamentals, theory, and practice. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press.

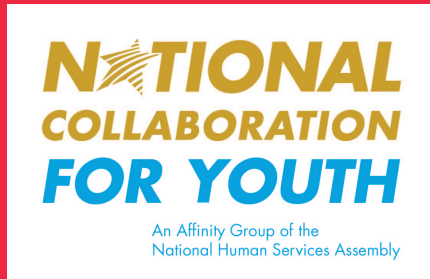
Wimberly, A. S. (2005). Keep it real: Working with today's Black youth. Nashville: Abingdon, 2005.

### *Jewish Perspectives*

Kadushin, C., Kelner, S., & Saxe, L. (2000). Being a Jewish teenager in America: Trying to make it. Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University.



Prepared by



with contributions from the American Camp Association



With generous support from The Lilly Endowment, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana • 2007