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Staff Perceptions of Youth Recreation Programs

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This thesis submitted by Lana L. Huberty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science is hereby approved by the final evaluation committee.

STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF YOUTH RECREATION PROGRAMS

by

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B.S., Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2002

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A Thesis

Travis Kaye

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of

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This thesis submitted by Lana L. Huberty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science at St. Cloud State University is hereby approved by the final evaluation committee.

In the past, recreation agencies defined their youth service mission as engaging children in fun and games. This mission involved keeping youth off the streets and out of trouble. However, expectations often were limited to opening facilities and hiring minimum wage, part-time employees to baby-sit the youth and facility. As programs have developed, and youth development professionals have acquired a more sophisticated understanding of the potential of youth programming, a new mission has evolved. This mission involves professional staff members including the youth in program planning and development. These programs also aim at teaching youth confidence, self-esteem and other non-traditional skills such as leadership and organization. In addition, these programs are offered in comfortable, safe environments that are open during the hours when schools are closed and youth need a place to hang out. To accomplish this new mission, recreation professionals have become more open minded and think outside the box. Part of this new way of thinking involves an understanding of the youth and their key role in a program's success (Witt, 1998).

John P. Moore

Chairperson

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This evolved mission has been studied in recent years and a few common characteristics have emerged among different youth programs such as collaboration, youth friendly facilities, and professional staff. In order to receive adequate funding, the recreational professionals find they need to continually track, evaluate, report and justify their program outcomes. The challenge in offering a successful youth program seems to be embedded in securing the financial and professional staff resources up front. Once established, the program can grow to reach and creatively serve youth.

The most important program resource tends to be the staff. While new facilities are important, recreation and community centers cannot be effective without highly qualified and dedicated human resources to operate them. Thus, a long-term investment in employing staff in both outreach areas and mainstream facilities is vital.

Repeatedly the review of literature reinforced the important role recreation professionals have in providing youth services. The work attitudes and experiences of these professionals seemingly impact the experiences of the youth during their participation in recreation activities. Therefore, understanding how the recreation professionals receive their roles and work environment is critical to a program's success.

Donnis Nunn

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STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF YOUTH RECREATION PROGRAMS

Lana L. Huberty

In the past, recreation agencies defined their youth service mission as engaging children in fun and games. This mission involved keeping youth off the streets and out of trouble. However, expectations often were limited to opening facilities and hiring minimum wage, part-time employees to baby-sit the youth and facility. As programs have developed, and youth development professionals have acquired a more sophisticated understanding of the potential of youth programming, a new mission has evolved. This mission involves professional staff members including the youth in program planning and development. These programs also aim at teaching youth confidence, self-esteem and other non-traditional skills such as leadership and organization. In addition, these programs are offered in comfortable, safe environments that are open during the hours when schools are closed and youth need a place to hang out. To accomplish this new mission, youth agencies have had to become more open minded and think outside the box in their program's strategies. Part of this new way of thinking involves an understanding of the youth professionals and their key role in a program's success (Witt & Compton, 2002).

This evolved mission has been studied in recent years and a few common characteristics have emerged among different youth agencies. These include trends such as collaboration, youth friendly facilities, and the employment of diversified, professional staff. In order to receive adequate funding, the recreation professionals find they need to continually track, evaluate, report and justify their program outcomes. The challenge in offering a successful youth program seems to be embedded in securing the financial and professional staff resources up front. Once established, the program can grow to reach and creatively serve youth.

The most important program resource tends to be the staff. While new facilities are important, recreation and community centers cannot be effective without highly qualified and dedicated human resources to operate them. Thus, a long-term investment in employing staff in both outreach areas and mainstream facilities is vital.

Repeatedly the review of literature reinforced the important role recreation professionals have in providing youth services. The work attitudes and experiences of these professionals assumingly impact the experiences of the youth during their participation in the recreation activities. Therefore, understanding how the recreation staff perceive their roles and work environment is critical to a program's success.

Focusing on this belief, the Recreation Staff Survey was developed and utilized in this study.

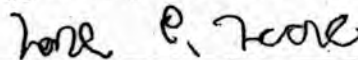
The Recreation Staff Survey was developed to gather information on local recreation professionals' attitudes and experiences in the work place. The survey was available to approximately 300 youth recreation providers via the Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association (MRPA) website. A total of 35 responses were returned through e-mail or regular postal service. The findings focused on the following four areas: staff training; collaborations; professional opportunities; and the overall youth program impact. The survey findings were quantitative in nature, providing a descriptive account of the agencies youth programs and program service.

The results from the study found the following: current administrators of recreation professionals are reportedly doing a good job of providing opportunities for staff training, and offering adequate personal learning and growth options; collaborations among youth program providers are very common as a variety of partnerships between municipalities, private agencies and other groups interested in investing in societal youth, are now in existence; employing professional staff is a top priority as it is acknowledged that the staff can make or break a program; staff members that are able to connect with the youth are necessary for program longevity; recreation professionals are aware of the positive impact they are having serving youth.

These findings support the review of literature that found that staff members play a vital role in providing mentorship and guidance to the youth involved in recreation programs. Overwhelmingly, the Recreation Staff Survey respondents perceive their organizations' programs as having a positive impact on our youth.

Month Year

Approved by Research Committee:



Mark Moore

Chairperson

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Statement of the Problem	2
Purpose of the Study	3
Research Questions	3
Assumptions	4
Delimitations	4
Operational Definitions	4
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	7
Examples of Recreation Program Providers	7
Current Youth Issues	9
Why Are Youth Recreation Programs Important?	13
Successful Programs in Meeting Youth Needs	15
Common Characteristics of Successful Youth Programs	17
Challenges to Offering Successful Programs	29

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	viii
Chapter	
I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	1
Rationale for the Research Problem	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Purpose of the Study	3
Research Questions	3
Assumptions	4
Delimitations	4
Operational Definitions	4
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	7
Examples of Recreation Program Providers	7
Current Youth Issues	9
Why Are Youth Recreation Programs Important?	13
Successful Programs in Meeting Youth Needs	15
Common Characteristics of Successful Youth Programs	17
Challenges to Offering Successful Programs	29

Chapter	Page
Conclusion of the Review of Literature	33
III. METHODS	35
Participants	35
Instrument	35
Procedures	36
Data Analysis	37
IV. RESULTS	38
Demographic Profile	38
Primary Findings	40
Recreation Professionals' Impressions About Youth Programming Involving Collaborations	41
Summary of Findings	49
V. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	51
Summary	52
Discussion	54
Conclusions	58
Limitations	59
Recommendations for Practitioners	60
Recommendations for Future Research	60
REFERENCES	62
APPENDIX	64

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.	Agencies that Participated in the Recreation Staff Survey	39
2.	Agencies Involved in Collaborations and Not Involved in Collaborations	42
3.	Staff Belief that Disconnected Staff Members Act as a Barrier to Participation in Their Agency's Youth Programs	43
4.	Staff Belief I Currently Having Adequate Facilities for Serving Youth	44
5.	Staff Belief that High Fees Prevent Youth from Participating in the Programs	44
6.	Staff Belief in the Lack of Knowledge of Their Programs by Potential Clientele Being a Barrier to Youth Participation	45
7.	Staff Belief that Youth Do Not Have Time to Participate in the Programs Being Offered by the Agency	45
8.	Staff Belief that Youth Do Not Have Any Interest in Participating in the Programs Being Offered by the Agency	46
9.	Staff Belief that Youth Have Other Hobbies They are Participating In	46
10.	Staff Belief in Their Respective Organization's Opportunities for Staff Development and Trainings	47
11.	Staff Belief in Advancement Opportunities by Their Current Organization	48
12.	Staff Belief That They Are Having a Positive Impact on Youth Through Their Organization's Youth Programs	49

Chapter I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Chapter I provides the rationale for the research problem, states the problem, and clarifies the purpose of the study. Research questions are also stated, along with the assumptions and delimitations. The chapter ends with the defining of terms significant to this study.

Rationale for the Research Problem

Professionals offering community recreational opportunities believe that their programs have an important role in the everyday lives of the youth they serve. Recreation providers believe they fill a crucial void for youth created by unsupervised free time and opportunities to participate in less favorable activities. In response, recreation professionals strive to offer programs that enable youth to develop the values, skills, competencies, and self-confidence necessary to become successful adults (Korfhage, 2003). Costs to the general public for offering these community youth programs are often justified by the belief that by fulfilling today's youth's needs, society will avoid higher indirect costs in the future. Future costs could include expenses such as those related to incarceration or treatment of drug related addictions. Yet, recent studies have found that community programs offerings are only reaching a

small percentage of youth, while many others remain involved in undesirable behavior (Bocarro & Estes, 2002). In fact, juvenile crimes have increased, the numbers of child abuse and neglect reports have grown, and teen suicide rates continue to rise (Fearn, 2002).

Throughout literature it is evident that recreation staff members can play an important role in the success of youth programs. This youth professional can have a positive influence in changing undesirable youth behaviors.

Statement of the Problem

Today's youth deserve quality recreation programs and professional staff members to monitor them. The problem of this study is to determine if staff members' perceptions of their roles is critical to a recreation program success. This research project has included questioning recreation professionals in the state of Minnesota who are members of the Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association (MRPA). These participants had the Recreation Staff Survey available to them on the MRPA website in August 2005.

The information gathered through the Recreation Staff Survey was quantitative with open-ended items. The questions focused on the following four topics: youth program collaborations, successful youth program components, job satisfaction with a focus on job advancement and training opportunities, and staff member's overall belief in the youth programs' impact. Basic demographic questions were included.

Collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and will be quantitative in nature. The Recreation Staff Survey results will be made available to MRPA members through the MRPA website in the spring of 2005.

Purpose of the Study

The field of youth service traditionally has high turnover and a lack of financial and facility resources. Having professional staff members who are able to connect with the youth is a vital component of any youth service organization. The question of importance is how to attract these professionals to the agency, how to keep them motivated on the job, as well as how to keep them committed and employed for an extended period of time. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to gain some understanding of how recreation staff members in Minnesota view aspects of programming and professional development within their work environments and responsibilities.

Research Questions

1. What are recreation professionals' impressions about youth programming that involves community collaborations?
2. What do recreation professionals feel are the critical program components necessary for serving youth?
3. How do recreation professionals feel about their opportunities for training, personal growth and career advancement?

4. Overall do recreation professionals believe that they are making a positive impact on youth through their work?

Assumptions

Three assumptions were made including the honesty of the survey participants, a normal distribution of data, and that recreation programs are essential for youth.

Delimitations

The delimitations include that the study focuses on youth recreation programs and was only available to MRPA members by being offered through the MRPA website. Therefore the data collected came from those employed only in Minnesota with access to the MRPA website.

Operational Definitions

High needs: A characteristic of youth often associated with low socioeconomic status. This term can also relate to those children who are often left home alone, come from single-parent homes, or relate to any of a variety of aspects that put the child at risk of participating in negative activities. This term is interchangeable with disadvantaged and at risk. Ultimately, the term high needs could be used to describe a number of children.

Community recreation providers: Agencies that are funded for the purpose of serving the recreational needs of children in the local area. Examples being utilized in this study are municipal and non-profit agencies.

Recreation programs: Programs that include traditional sports activities, as well as non-traditional leisure programs such as social recreation and educational opportunities.

Third sector: Refers to what is most commonly called the nonprofit, the non-government, or community sector (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

Troubled youth: Clear definitions elude us, but all educators recognize their troubled youth students. They are students who may be called violent, aggressive, withdrawn, bullied, depressed, anorexic, poor, or simply "at-risk." They are the ones who exhibit psychological and social problems and cause societal concern beyond academics; in fact, some of them may be academically successful. What they have in common is that they are in distress (McAuliffe, 2002).

Collaboration: This occurs when two or more individuals work together to achieve a mutual goal. In the context of youth development organizations, collaboration is seen as an effort to identify assets and mobilize the missions, purposes, and programs of several organizations to solve identified social problems. In this way, community collaboration is viewed as a goal that seeks to "bring individuals and members of community agencies and organizations together in an atmosphere of support to systematically solve existing and emerging problems that could not be solved by one group alone" (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

Youth development: A process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences that help them to become socially, morally, emotionally,

physically, and cognitively competent. Positive youth development addresses the broader development needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based models, which focus solely on youth problems (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature begins with an introduction and description of a variety of youth development program providers. The literature research describes the current challenges youth are encountering and the role of how youth programs can offer positive services to help youth meet these challenges. The research will look into both program successes as well as challenges that youth recreation professionals are encountering.

Examples of Recreation Program Providers

There are a number of well-known national youth-serving organizations or organizations with a significant youth development component, each proudly possessing its own identity. Wertlieb, Jacobs, and Lerner (2003) detailed the following groups:

- 4-H serves youth ages 7 to 18 through a variety of interactive programs.

These programs include arts and crafts, animal science, theater, leadership, community service, woodworking and many other options. Youth learn to compete at their local county level and can advance on to a higher state

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature begins with an introduction and description of a variety of youth development program providers. The literature research describes the current challenges youth are encountering and tie in how youth programs can offer positive services to help youth meet these challenges. The research will look into both program successes as well as challenges that youth recreation professionals are encountering.

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level. Here they have the opportunity to meet and compete with youth from around their state.

- Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America has proven that the use of mentoring in youth development is an effective tool that produces positive outcomes. The process used by this program matches an adult, known as a “Big,” with a child, known as a “Little.” The Big spends time one-on-one with the Little on a regular, normally weekly basis.
- Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) serves 4 million youth nationally and internationally by operating more than 25 national youth development programs in areas such as: character and leadership; education and career development; health and life skills; arts; and sports, fitness, and recreation. Using its character and leadership programs, BGCA addresses the concept of building a civil society. These programs are aimed at helping young people become caring and responsible citizens, while acquiring the necessary skills to be active participants in both their communities and democratic process. In 1999, Louis Harris, and Associates for the Boys and Girls Clubs of America conducted a survey. This survey discovered that of the 1,592 alumni queried, 80% said that the BGCA staff helped them learn right from wrong, 95% indicated that BGCA was the best thing available in their community, and 52% said participating in the organization “saved my life” (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003). The survey also found that BGCA alumni rated the

educational programs offered as the most important club activities in which they participated, with tutoring/homework help rating and career development rating highest.

- YMCA of the USA has been in business over 150 years. Each site is independently incorporated and governed by a volunteer board. The organization serves members of all ages through a variety of programs. Their specific youth development curriculum includes camps, physical education, education assistance, and numerous other offerings.
- Several other youth development providers exist in the state of Minnesota such as Girls Scouts of America, Boys Scouts of America and Future Farmers of America.

In conclusion of youth recreation providers, it is found that, although each of these national groups may articulate specific goals that are linked to its individual mission, it is actually quite remarkable that many of their respective mission statements, purpose statements, and core beliefs are quite similar. They may not always have the same language, but certainly are similar by way of intention (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

Current Youth Issues

Historically, interest in the instrumental role of recreation for addressing youth issues has fluctuated, but over the past decade there has been a resurgence of interest in developing youth recreation programs with broader purposes. The expansion of

youth recreation programs has been spurred by four main factors. Witt and Comptom (2002) wrote of these four factors:

- The first factor is the changing demographics. In the major cities of the United States, the proportion of African-Americans, Hispanics, and immigrants has increased substantially, inevitably creating tensions and challenges of assimilation within communities. The situation is exacerbated by high rates of unemployment and the relatively large numbers of families living below the poverty level. Currently, society is encountering one of the most critical challenges in the history of mankind. For the first time, almost half of the world's population is under 20 years of age-and one fifth is between 10 and 19 years of age. A billion people are expected to be born over the next decade. These young people will shape our world and will leave a lasting legacy for future generations. It is up to the current leaders of society to ensure that these young people are a positive part of society: not outside of it (Bell, 2003).
- The second factor pertains to with the concerns about negative youth behaviors. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, many cities reported substantial increases in drug use and violent crime among youth, accelerated school dropout rates and increased rates of teen pregnancy. While declines in these negative trends have occurred in the last few years, the rates are still unacceptably high. Local residents and political leaders

have looked for youth development programs to be a part of the solution to these problems (Witt & Comptom, 2002).

- The third factor spurring youth program expansion is the growth in the number of latchkey children. Problems associated with a lack of adult supervision at home are pervasive across communities because of the number of two wage-earner families and the number of single-parent households. If children are not directed into constructive activities outside the home, then they are likely to spend after-school time watching television, playing video games, or being out on the streets where they may be susceptible to peer pressure to engage in inappropriate or negative activities. Accordingly, there has been a groundswell among youth service providers in the number of after-school, summer, and late-night programs for children. Buoyed by a belief that today's adolescents encounter more challenges on the way to adulthood from time-crunched parents, dangerous substances and behaviors, over burdened schools, and a more demanding job market, society no longer believes that adolescents should fend for themselves during non-school hours. In some communities, an array of school-based extracurricular activities such as sports, music, art, community service, and community-based youth programs, provide young people with ample choices for supervised activities outside of school. This is far from the norm. Availability, cost, transportation, and interest limit many adolescents' choices during the non-school hours. In a recent

opinion poll, 62% of 14-17 year olds agreed with this statement: "Adults criticize teens for wasting time, but adults do not realize there is not much for teens to do after school." More than half wished for more after-school activities in their neighborhoods or communities (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

- The fourth factor concerns educational attainment. In the 1990s, many states established mandatory standardized tests designed to assess students' abilities in basic subjects. Educators and education policy makers have come under considerable pressure to demonstrate improvements. While the primary focus is on improving the quality of education within the school day, there has been growing recognition that after-school recreation programs can contribute to achieving this goal. Nobody denies that young people can cause problems. Some are delinquents; some live risky lives; some are in inaccessible youth cultures. There is violence, even racist violence and hooliganism and so on. So what is new? This democratic society and governance can deal with our youth within existing legal frameworks. What cannot be dealt with is the growing apathy of young people within the democratic process, and poor preparation for the labor market by the education system (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

In conclusion of current youth issues it is found that, even though there are a variety of youth recreation program opportunities available, there are still youth who remain disconnected from services offered in their respective communities (Boccaro

& Estes, 2002). This could be due to parents and guardian disinterest, cultural diversity issues, or simply individual youth choices. It is a challenge to involve all youth, leaving the recreational professional to strive to simply promote and offer programs to youth with the hope of involving a vast majority.

Why Are Youth Recreation Programs Important?

Society needs to support efforts to create positive opportunities to develop the potential of all youth. Although it is important to help problem youth, this service cannot be the entirety of one's work. A society needs to nurture all children under the age of 20, even those who will never land in juvenile court or otherwise be a statistic in the "at-risk" youth tallies. Youth related programs should help youth develop the values, skills, competencies, and self-confidence necessary to be successful adults (Korfhage, 2003).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s most agencies defined their at-risk youth services mission as engaging children in fun and games so as to keep them off the streets and out of trouble. However, expectations often were limited to the opening of facilities and the hiring of minimum wage, part-time employees as baby-sitters of the youth and facilities. The successes of those plans were of limited value because they were time-bounded. That is, during the larger amounts of time when youth are not engaged in these diversionary activities, the their opportunities to participate in anti-social behavior remains (Witt & Compton, 2002).

There is growing public support, both ideologically and financially, for more structured activities during non-school hours. This support stems in part from the view that these activities and programs do more than fill idle time and keep youth off the streets. They also can provide youth with enriching experiences that broaden their perspectives, improve their socialization, and enhance their skills. A shift in thinking about what youth need for successful adulthood is behind recent efforts to increase the supply of after-school activities (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

A 1999 survey showed a clear benefit from pro-social activities such as pool tournaments, kickball games, and arts and crafts classes. Among the benefits listed were less drug use and risky school behavior, such as skipping class, as well as a significantly greater liking for other aspects of school (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

Although differences exist across cultures and socioeconomic groups, analyses of cross-cultural data indicate that children do not, as a rule, make effective use of their free time. Youth often spend much of their free time in passive non-stimulating activities such as watching television or playing video games. Even when time is expanded to include work and school settings, much of the typical adolescent's time is spent in activities that are not intrinsically interesting, or activities that fail to capture and sustain concentration and attention. In contrast, there are data to suggest that youth do engage in challenging tasks in which they can develop their skills when adults are available for guiding and mentoring. These activities can foster their well being and development (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

In conclusion, when considering the importance of youth programs it is determined that positive youth development involves many aspects. Youth development is a process preparing young people to meet opportunities, challenges, and risks through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences. This process helps youth to become socially, ethically, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent. Groundbreaking work in this area identified that numerous organizations and commissions have defined generic sets of competencies that go beyond academic or cognitive competence to include vocational, physical, emotional, civic, and cultural competence. Research was required to support the basic argument that services alone, particularly services that treat problems only, do not ensure development. Research does support the idea that young people who have beaten the odds had, somewhere in their lives, a caring adult, high expectations, and the opportunities for meaningful participation (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

Successful Programs in Meeting

Youth Needs

The societal goal for successfully serving our youth is to assist in the creation of healthy, happy, and competent adolescents on their way to productive and satisfying adulthoods. According to Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003), the ingredients of positive youth development include the following five C's:

1. Competence in academic, social, and vocational areas;
2. Confidence or positive self-identity;
3. Connections to community, family, and peers;

4. Character or positive values, integrity, and moral commitment;

5. Caring and compassion.

Programs vary on how they meet these five C's, making the definition of youth development programs elusive. At a general level, youth development programs help participants to develop competencies that will enable them to grow, develop their skills, and become healthy, responsible, and caring youth and adults.

The term youth development, having become somewhat of a buzzword, has increasingly been associated to a wide range of programs that come in all shapes and sizes. Examples include single-focused programs such as sports teams, youth newspapers, and affiliates of national youth-serving organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and Boys and Girls Clubs. They are located in or sponsored by local schools, civic organizations, municipalities, museums, libraries, community organizations, and religious institutions (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). In the United States, millions of children and adults are engaged in these organized programs and activities. Such organizations are rarely an integrated part of the public education system; nonetheless, they are a crucial venue for learning, setting and achieving goals, and developing character.

Although each organization champions a specifically defined niche, the similarity of the missions and visions that drive them may surprise one. Good ideas and intentions for positive youth development abound, but the key to lasting impact is in successful execution. The 4-H youth development movement, even after 100 years, continues to change the lives of millions of youth for the better. Throughout its

century of service to the nation and the communities that define it, 4-H has remained steadfast to a few basic principles. It has reinvented itself time and again, yet has continued to represent all that is good and right about youth development organizations (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

In conclusion of successful youth programs, approximately 500 national and 17,000 state and local organizations classify themselves as offering youth development programs. It is not possible, nor desirable to design one blueprint for a successful youth development program. In addition, schools, families, and communities each assist in the development of these programs.

Common Characteristics of Successful Youth Programs

In reviewing aspects of the various youth recreation service providers, it is evident that trends of successful programs appear. The following section will detail these trends.

A common trend is offering young people a place where they have ownership and responsibility, feel welcome and safe, and can socialize, obtain information, and receive services. While community centers cater to a sector of youth, many youth want independence from adult-like facilities. There has been an increased call for separate spaces in which youth can congregate (Witt & Compton, 2002).

A second priority issue in offering successful youth programs is recognizing the key role of adults in planning, organizing, leading programs, and in mentoring. A

diversified staff (based on a mix of race, gender, age, and education) is desirable. An ethnically diverse staff that includes people from different service backgrounds (recreation, arts, education, social work, psychology, etc) is likely to be more comprehensive and responsive in its approach to youth development. The most effective adults are those who work in partnership with young people, seeing themselves as supportive friends and advocates. These leaders are motivated to save, reform, or rescue young people from their current circumstances (Witt & Compton, 2002).

Most recreation leaders are motivated by the tasks at hand. They hope to improve the quality of life for their constituents. Korfhage (2003) gives the following examples of what a youth recreation leader can do to have a permanent, positive impact on youth:

- They never underestimate the enormous values of socialization through recreation programs. A sense of community for young people is created. Assess their interests and needs and create programs for them that they need. Define and connect similarities for those in these communities. Explorer ways to expand horizons and share ownership with the group. Provide tokens of ownership such as shirts, badges, membership cards, etc. Plan for longevity as it takes time for relationships and activities to become effective.

- Young people are empowered by being given leadership roles. Let them make decisions in areas that affect them. Create a structure that allows them to belong and feel needed.
- Role models are provided. Young people need to have opportunities to relate to adults. Mentoring programs can make a measurable difference.
- Teach them about freedom and give them hope for the future. Provide opportunities for discussion and debate. Encourage honesty. Expose them to ideas, not just games.
- Identify resources to help young people how to obtain the basic necessities of life.
- Organize job skill, fitness and nutrition programs.
- Create a volunteer program that benefits both youth and others. Teach them to be leaders and be resourceful and creative.
- Create places for young people to be themselves.
- Provide meaningful alternatives to the negative aspects of television and the Internet.
- Find ways to bring families and generations together.
- Promote cultural diversity.
- Educate young people about the dangers of drugs, sharing needles, alcohol and unprotected sex.
- Create opportunities for young people to experience safe adventures.

- Enlighten youth about the need to be environment stewards who support conversation and sustainability.

It has been found that written program descriptions paint an incomplete picture of a youth development professionals' job. Many of the qualities that distinguish a positive, caring, youth-centered tone depend upon the staffs' demeanor and attitude toward the participants.

A third priority characteristic in defining successful youth programs is collaboration. Collaboration is often used to describe the ways in which organizations work together toward mutually beneficial goals. Collaborations, coalitions, alliances, cooperatives, partnerships, networks, and similar terms are a part of the collection of ideas used by innovative youth development professionals who seek to maximize the organizational assets found within a community.

Collaboration has not always been considered a positive term. Presently, however, collaboration is considered an innovative and necessary tool for realizing community goals. Increasingly, leaders and managers of all sectors realize that no single organization, or type of industry, can achieve its full potential without considering the benefits of joining forces with others to accomplish its objectives. Consequently, it is a growing trend for organizations to rely on collaboration and coalition processes and structures to advance their mission of cultivating community assets to better serve youth (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

Park and recreation department programs frequently include after-school tutoring, community service, job training, leadership development, health education

and developing social skills. Unfortunately, existing staff often is not equipped to direct programs. In certain circumstances, parks and recreation departments have assumed leadership in coordinating community youth services. They seek to supply services on a residual basis filling niches not available from other suppliers. Adopting this facilitator role requires agencies to serve as enabling agents and to take on the tasks of coordination, referral and technical assistance (Witt & Compton, 2002).

Another example of collaboration is that of local churches working with other community youth providers during special community events. Across faiths, the vast majorities of congregations offer, or cooperate with others to offer, youth programming. Although congregations and religious youth workers emphasize passing on the specifics of their own faith tradition as the top priority, they also recognize the importance of a wide range of goals and priorities, many of which do not have a specific religious connotation (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

Perhaps, the most cited aphorism in youth development is the African proverb; it takes a village to raise a child. Park and recreation departments, churches, and other youth service agencies must be perceived to be part of this village.

It can be argued that national youth-serving agencies provide the best examples of collaborative models in how they are organized and structured to make decisions and deliver services. Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and other local affiliates of national youth-serving agencies are autonomous in various ways from their national organizations. Yet, collectively, they function as networks of clubs, associations, chapters, and councils that function collaboratively to fulfill the

mission of their respective organizations. They pay dues or affiliation fees to support the national office, and there is typically a method by which national priorities are established through a mechanism of shared decision-making. The mission, vision, values, and service delivery of each organization is determined collaboratively through strong volunteer and paid staff leaders at both the local and national levels.

Collaboration is an essential management and intervention strategy for realizing the promise of positive community-based youth development outcomes (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

Overall, the importance of being grounded in the context of the community means collaboration. Successful programs connect youth to society as a whole and provide resources to move an individual successfully into adulthood. They are not single-issue, single-purpose institutions. They have been successful in constructing themselves around the multiple needs of the individuals they serve.

One final note on collaboration comes from McAuliffe (2002).

Much of our strength lies in the community and the circle around young people needs to be large. Small circles characterize social isolation. All young people should be standing on the shoulders of giants: their families, neighborhoods, teachers, school counselors, coaches, and religious group members. All human beings owe much to the circle of community that is around and behind them. None of us have made it alone. The price we pay for our cultural hyper-individualism is high. In its extreme, it assigns the losers to the dust heap in which castoffs dwell. The sole location of power in the individual represents a tension that American society has not dealt with, for we are not islands. Instead, our tentacles inevitably stretch, often unknown to us, into networks of human connection. So let us widen the circle of community for all youth, especially those who are troubled. Let it surround us all. (pp. 3-4)

Through this message it is clear that collaborations can offer support systems for our youth.

Outcome evaluation is central to continued funding and continuous improvement efforts. Elected officials are likely to require evidence of a program's success before appropriating public tax dollars for its continuation. At the beginning of the 1990s, youth service providers' main evaluation efforts focused almost exclusively on measuring attendance, service quality, and user satisfaction. However, the forces driving the funding support for youth programs are concerned with outcomes, such as what happened to given youth as a result of their experiences, or what return the community received from its investment in the program (Witt & Compton, 2002).

Traditionally external funds are short-term, relatively unstable, and designed for well-defined programs. Thus, they should be regarded as temporary resources that provide an opportunity to pilot test programs and to demonstrate to elected officials that programs have positive outcomes that make them worthy of support from the city's general fund. In some cases, this has occurred, and programs have become a line item in the general fund. However, too often this evolution of funding from temporary to permanent sources has not occurred, even when effective outcomes have been demonstrated and strikingly favorable benefit-cost analyses are shown. The impact of lack of continuity on youth can be likely to be traumatic. It reinforces prevailing cynicism with the system, and endangers a trust that may develop with mentors and programs. The withdrawal of funding when trust and a mentoring

relationship have been established becomes another broken promise in their lives. So, evaluation is vital to the on-going success and commitment of recreation programs. Recreation professionals need to be accountable in their tracking system to prove their successes to the financial provider.

Another priority characteristic of youth programs is the inclusion of Social Services. It has been found that youth activities are more effective when social services are integrated. These elements include that of education, health, social protection, nutrition, and community responsibility. The fact is that a hungry child cannot learn. It is hard to expect an uneducated young person to participate in a democracy. It is difficult to bring services to families when they cannot be located without substantial effort because they are homeless. The point is that economic and human developments are interconnected (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

The next priority characteristic involves mentoring. Mentoring programs encourage the development of supportive relationships for youth with adults and among peers. These programs empower youth, communicate expectations for positive behavior, and provide opportunities for recognition. Program duration also relates to program atmosphere. Longer-term programs recognize that development is ongoing and with more enduring support and greater opportunities for meaningful relationships are possible. Youth development includes a sense of belonging or bonding with other program participants. An empowering atmosphere exists when program staff and activities encourage youth to engage in useful roles, practice self-determination, and develop or clarify their goals for the future. Programs convey a belief in adolescents

as capable individuals when they communicate expectations for positive behavior by defining clear rules for behavior and consequences for infractions, fostering pro-social norms, and encouraging youth to practice healthy behaviors. They can provide opportunities for recognition by rewarding positive behaviors within the programs or by structuring opportunities for public recognition of skills (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

When positive relationships are in place, an alliance can be created that far exceeds the strength of a group working alone. Trust is developed when adults and youth have opportunities to get to know each other and to work together on issues of common concern. Experiences with leadership training, community problem solving, role reversals, reflection, team building, shared service projects, and social activities all facilitate crossing the generational divide (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

Wertlieb, Jacobs, and Lerner (2003) cite the following list, which allows projects to measure meaningful youth participation.

- Voluntary and never forced.
- Inclusive, challenges stereotypes, and does not discriminate on the basis of sex, income, ethnicity, disability, etc.
- Allows young people to participate to the maximum extent of their capabilities.
- Allows young people to initiate ideas and make decisions when they are capable of doing so.
- Allows young people to be well-informed and prepared for participation.

- Respects and recognizes young people's contributions and takes them seriously.
- Is conducted in a language and manner that young people understand and with which they are comfortable.
- Has fair rules for participation and involves young people in making and/or reviewing the rules.
- Is honest about its purposes/methods and transparent about what happens next.
- Is flexible and sensitive to its context.
- Is safe and free of violence.
- Is connected with things that matter/are relevant to young people.

Programs developed on this basis have to be flexible to ensure that continuous involvement of different participants remains relevant. This leads to individual empowerment and programs customized to meet specific needs. This results in a variety of choices for participants. Furthermore, it is cost efficient, as need is targeted directly. No need, no service.

The final priority characteristic involves targeted outreach. Offering recreation programs does not mean stopping at the center door. Targeted outreach extends the reach of youth development programs beyond the youth who attend agency facilities to those who are not comfortable in institutional settings. Through outreach efforts, professionals reach out and assist youth who are systematically excluded from, unaware of, or unreceptive to an agency's service (Bocarro & Estes, 2002).

Many youth targeted by outreach programs have very unstable lives. For example, in the studies of Bocarro and Estes (2002), certain program participants were residentially unstable, often moving at a whim to stay with another family member or friend or moving with their family to another residence. Programs must be flexible to deal with the stresses created by the high mobility of these youth. This residential instability also has had an impact on a child's trust. Changing schools and moving to different areas entails different people coming in and out of one's life. This state of uncertainty could result on youth finding it hard to develop intimate relationships. Difficulty in developing supportive networks of friends can lead to additional stress.

Outreach is manifested through two different, but related vehicles. First is the recreation center, which provides a flexible and adaptable medium for delivering services. Centers can be scheduled for the evening or daytime, for long or short periods, on a continuous or one-time basis, and can offer a wide range of programs.

The second form of outreach is roving leader programs, which are even less facility-dependent than centers. The premise behind these programs is that youth workers who roam a neighborhood in which they are based will be able to connect with youth. Often, workers live in the areas where they work, giving them credibility with and a better understanding of these youths. Four elements of roving leader programs have been identified that differentiate them from other service vehicles. First, services are based on problems in young people's lives as opposed to a specific program activity. Therefore, services are available to youths who have the greatest need rather than those who have paid a fee or joined a given group. Second, programs

are heavily dependent on the relationship between youth and staff. Third, contact occurs in the community, not in an institutional setting. This element is important, because most institutions have formal standards that guide youth leaders in client selection and service, which may eliminate some youth from participating. Finally, the services provided by roving leaders are not initially requested by youth. The leader is required to reach out and take steps to alleviate any fear, suspicion, or hostility that might exist. All of these outreach principles stress the importance of the personal relationship developed between staff and youth (Witt & Compton, 2002). As a result, innovative programs materialized, particularly programs that engaged youth on their own territory, on the street and other places where they congregated.

In conclusion, in successful youth programs several common characteristics are evident. It is known from experience that when young people have the chance to participate in a community's affairs, they gain self-esteem, confidence, and essential life skills such as decision-making, conflict management, and the ability to work in diverse environments. As they build these competencies, youth begin to think of themselves as stakeholders in society. They also acquire a sense of responsibility for the common good and a positive attitude toward active citizenship. This researcher cannot underscore enough the importance of ensuring that young people feel a part of something larger than themselves and believe they have something to contribute to their family, school, and society. Particularly in a time when regional and ethnic violence continues to divide communities worldwide and when young people are turning their anger and frustration into acts of violence or even terrorism, it is critical

that we nurture a spirit of citizenship and democracy in this younger generation.

Society needs to provide greater opportunities for youth to be positively engaged in their communities (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003). The following are common success factors youth recreation programs should include:

1. Youth having a space to call their own
2. Diversified staff
3. Collaboration among youth service providers
4. Outcome evaluation of the youth services
5. Inclusion of social services
6. Recognizing the important role of mentoring
7. Targeted outreach

Challenges to Offering Successful Programs

Recreation providers often find challenges in offering their services to youth. The following are some challenges that have been identified by Boccaro and Estes (2002).

Hiring and keeping quality staff is a challenge. Because staff members are attracted to work in youth outreach programs are usually intrinsically motivated by the prospect of genuinely making a difference in the lives of kids, there is a danger of taking these staff members for granted. They are often given little support, supervision or training opportunities. These negatives collectively result in a high rate of attrition. Youth development staff positions often involve long hours and relative

isolation. There is a lack of status and professional identification, and a constant struggle to do the right thing in the right way. Even when high-quality staff members who enjoy the job are recruited, retaining them for an extended period of time can be difficult due to low salaries, long hours, and the high emotional and physical nature of youth development programs. Also, the lack of professional development and career opportunities add to these staffing challenges. Youth professionals need to believe in the positive impact of their program on youth as well as their individual role in the lives of the youth to stay motivated. The program administrator plays a vital role in staff retention by providing adequate training, resources, and positive feedback and support to youth development staff.

The second challenge involves the program outcome evaluation processes and how it relates to potential funding. An elaborate competitive tendering process causes lacks of long-term sustainability of innovative programs that work. This results in lack of collaboration between services and institutions and short-term funding of fads and pilot projects. Consistent and relevant evaluation of what programs work and do not work, and the reasons why, is more important than ever. There has been a lack of evaluation of results for each person engaged in services and institutions. Evaluation is often an add-on as opposed to an integrated activity designed together with clients and other key stakeholders.

The next challenge is in program design and implementation. Faults in methodology and program design include the following two items. The first item is the domination of one-sided approaches and associated issues at the expense of

integrated theories that deliver a social definition of development. These approaches need to focus on relationships within communities as well as individual needs. The second item involves a shortage of responsive, client-driven service delivery designed around changing needs of young people consistent with the rapid changes in society. Gaps in service provision lead to a lack of dependability and consistency, which participants look for and need in their programs. Non-participation in structured recreation organizations is often the result of organizations being too tame, too over organized, or too much like school to appeal to some youth. Thus, while conforming youth may continue to be attracted to these organizations and the adults who run them, other youth may find these organizations unappealing or irrelevant (Boccaro & Estes, 2002). For example, some research has found that adolescents were not involved in formal recreation activities because they were too aligned with school organization and structure. Thus, because the nature of the program was too reminiscent of school or because the programs took place in school, youth were put off.

The final challenge identified is the possibility that adults, who are often middle-class professionals, frequently attract children who match their characteristics, and may unwittingly deter kids who are different. These adults may not identify with the youth. Four main factors that contribute to non-participation identified are: a lack of interesting programs, transportation problems, lack of knowledge, and the cost of programs offered. Boccaro and Estes (2002) found there are two interesting reasons behind sporadic participation. First, youth clubs often found it too great a challenge to deal with testing and disruptive behavior displayed by participants. In other cases,

non-participation resulted from a lack of confidence on the part of the youth themselves. This led to youth exhibiting passivity and an unwillingness to cross into new thresholds and try new experiences.

In conclusion, if youth programs are going to deliver outcomes that communities seek, they must be interesting enough to young people to attract their participation. Those who have been exposed to the action and excitement of illicit activities require challenging, interesting programs to retain their interest. For all youth, avoiding boredom by finding constructive and interesting things to do can be a challenge. Too often, youth believe that adults plan for them, rather than with them. Recreation personnel sometimes forget that it is the journey, rather than the activity itself that is the most rewarding. Many agencies have empowered youth by having them take ownership and responsibility for programs. There has been a shift from centralized top-down decision-making by recreation professionals to decentralized, youth-centered decision making. Youth agencies have increasingly been involved in sponsoring and planning youth summits and encouraging youth participation in community-wide task forces. The typical charge to these forums is to solicit broad community input to identify all dimensions of the problems, recommend actions to alleviate the problem, and coordinate and mobilize community resources. The summits have helped communities move from identifying problems to creating and organizing programs designed to ameliorate the problems (Witt & Compton, 2002).

Conclusion of the Review of Literature

In the late 1980s and 1990s, most agencies defined their at-risk youth services mission as engaging the children in fun and games to keep them off the streets and out of trouble. However, expectations often were limited to opening facilities and hiring minimum wage, part-time employees to baby-sit the youth and facility. This goal of removing the potential for anti-social behavior by diverting them into positive activities elsewhere is of limited value because it is time-bounded. That is, during the large amounts of time when they are not engaged in these diversionary activities, the opportunity for anti-social behavior remains. As programs have matured, recreation professionals have acquired a more sophisticated understanding of the potential of youth programming, and the mission has evolved. The focus has become youth development that encompasses both problem behaviors and helping youth increase pro-social attitudes and behaviors (Witt & Compton, 2002). As a results youth recreation agencies are increasingly adopting the following components into their programs:

1. A sense of safety, but one accompanied by challenging and interesting activities.
2. A sense of belonging.
3. Supportive relationships with adults.
4. Involvement in decision-making and opportunities for leadership.
5. Involvement in the community.

Programs designed with these components in mind focus on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, rather than merely keeping youths occupied. Ultimately, professionals that cling to the fun-and-games orientation will fail to position themselves as relevant to community efforts to develop a system of youth services and realize the funding support that exists for recreation services (Witt & Compton, 2002). The youth professional plays a vital role in the overall success of the program. Maintaining a positive and inclusive attitude with these staff members will keep the programs consistent and successful for youth.

Through the review of literature of youth development programs, several common characteristics emerged. These include trends such as collaboration, youth friendly facilities, and the employment of diversified, professional staff. Financial resources were available to various youth recreation providers. In order to receive these funds, the recreation professionals find they need to continually track, evaluate, and report their program outcomes. The challenge in offering a successful youth program is in securing the financial and professional staff resources up front. The program can then grow to reach more youth and creatively serve kids. Youth development programs can then strive to continuously have a positive impact a wider variety of children.

Chapter III

METHODS

Chapter III identifies the participants for this study, discusses the instrument, describes the procedures by which the study will be conducted, and details the data analysis process.

Participants

The population of this study was 300 professional youth recreation professionals, all of whom are members of the Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association (MRPA). A variety of youth service agencies were contacted via the MRPA website. The people involved in the surveys were youth recreation providers at all levels within these agencies and included both full-time and part-time employees. The sampling technique used was convenience sampling that resulted in a 12% rate of return (35 completed questionnaires).

Instrument

The survey was developed with the assistance of Dr. Steve Anderson, Family Studies Professor at the University of Connecticut. In July 2001, Dr. Steve Anderson had conducted the Neighborhood Youth Center Programs study that offered a staff survey section. This staff survey section included similar questions as those required

for the Recreation Staff Survey. With written permission from Dr. Steve Anderson, this author utilized questions from his existing resource to enhance the Recreation Staff Survey.

The original Recreation Staff Survey was pilot tested with ten staff members of the local Elk River Boys and Girls Club. Through the pilot test it determined that although the questions were easy to understand, they were not in an easy to follow format. It was also determined that additional questions relating to demographic information were necessary. In response, the survey questions were revised and basic demographic questions were added to the beginning of the survey. The study instrument consisted of a survey questioning the agencies youth outreach methods, programs, successes, and challenges. The surveys were provided to the participants on-line and returned via e-mail or regular mail service. One survey question asked, "How satisfied are you with your organization on each of the following?" and then went on to list agency components such as "Administration's support for my staff," "Programs offered," and "Overall quality of physical facilities." Other examples of the survey questions are "How would you rate your overall satisfaction with your work?" and "Overall, how effective do you think your organization is in working with youth?" (An example of the complete survey can be found in the Appendix.)

Procedures

The procedures for the survey were as follows: In August 2005, the youth service agencies were contacted through the MRPA website and asked to participate in

the investigation by MRPA President Michelle Snider. Michelle noted that MRPA was assisting a parks and recreation professional with a master's degree project. She encouraged members to complete the survey and return by the end of the month. It was also stated that the survey findings would be shared with the MRPA membership. The researcher's contact name, mailing address, and e-mail address were also listed.

The timeline for this study was as follows: The survey tool was established by the researcher in spring of 2005 and included a confidentiality statement and 27 survey questions. The pilot test took place in May and, with the necessary changes, the survey was finalized in June. The Recreation Staff Survey was sent on to MRPA President, Michelle Snider, who made it available to MRPA members via the MRPA website in August of 2005. Recent research on telephone surveys, mailed surveys, and e-mail surveys found that the response rate is highest for e-mail surveys and this popularity is expected to grow (Hertz, 2005).

Data Analysis

The data that were collected through the surveys was quantitative in nature with open-ended items. The responses provided information on the agencies youth programs, agency collaborations, facilities, and staff perceptions of growth opportunities and job satisfaction. The survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Through a review of literature, the researcher has sought to identify the important roles recreation professionals have in providing youth services. The work attitudes and experiences of those professionals assumingly impact the experiences possessed by the youth during their recreation programs. The Recreation Staff Survey was developed to collect information on local recreation professionals as to their attitudes and experiences in the work place.

Demographic Profile

Three hundred recreation Minnesota recreation professionals had access to the Recreation Staff Survey through the Minnesota Parks and Recreation (MRPA) website. Of these 300 individuals, 12%, or 35 recreation professionals participated in the survey. These respondents indicated working primarily in municipal recreation (80%) and private non-profit agencies (14.3%) and represented 27 different agencies. Other accounted for the remaining 5.7%. For specific agency details see Table 1.

Table 1

Agencies that Participated in the Recreation Staff Survey

Agency Name	Frequency
Andover, City of	1
Apple Valley, City of	1
Boys & Girls Clubs of Elk River	3
Boys & Girls Clubs of Zimmerman	2
Champlin, City of	1
Chaska, City of	1
Cottage Grove, City of	1
Eagan, City of	1
Eden Prairie, City of	1
Falcon Heights, City of	1
Fridley, City of	1
Golden Valley, City of	1
Hutchinson, City of	1
Kilowatt Community Center	1
Lakeville, City of	1
Lino Lakes, City of	1
Maple Grove, City of	3
Maplewood, City of	1
Monticello Community Center, City of	1
New Brighton, City of	1
New Hope, City of	2
New Ulm, City of	1
Plymouth, City of	1
Rosemount, City of	1
Roseville, City of	2
Stillwater Area Public Schools	1
St. Paul, City of	1
Woodbury, City of	1
Total Survey Participants	35

Of the 35 survey respondents, 57.1% have a bachelor's degree and an additional 34.3% have further additional education including graduate degrees. On the question pertaining to the number of years of experience in recreation, the majority of respondents primarily indicated 10 to 15 years. Both "management" (34.3%) and "programming" (37.1%) were listed as the primary job function by respondents. Of the respondents, 85.7% are employed full time by their agency.

The agencies represented by the respondents operate a variety of facilities. Those facilities reported by a majority of the respondents include 82.9% open space, 68.6% athletic fields, 54.3% meeting room(s), and 74.3% gymnasium facilities.

Primary Findings

Through the surveying of professional recreation staff members on job satisfaction and attitude, the following four research questions were addressed:

1. What are recreation professionals' impressions about youth programming that involve collaborations?
2. What do recreation professionals feel are critical components for serving youth?
3. How do recreation professionals feel about their opportunities for training, personal growth and career advancement?
4. Overall do recreation professionals believe that they are making a positive impact on youth?

These research questions, along with the survey findings, will be detailed in the next four sections.

Recreation Professionals' Impressions About Youth Programming Involving Collaborations

With respect to research question number one, on the topic of collaboration, 96.9% of the survey respondents reported that their respective recreation agency was involved in at least one collaborative partnership in offering youth programs. This information is shown in Table 2. Agency partners cited included the Y. M. C. A., libraries, Midway Men's Club, Community Education, School Districts, municipal/park and recreation departments, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Athletic Associations, police departments, private recreation providers (e.g., golf course and karate studio), Red Cross, 4-H, and the University of Minnesota Extension Services and Centennial Showboat. The majority of these partnerships were rated as good to excellent. Examples of how these agencies collaborated included a variety of programs such as family events and summer sport camps.

Table 2

Agencies Involved in Collaborations and Not Involved in Collaborations

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	31	88.6
No	1	2.9
Total	32	91.4
No response/ Did not answer	3	8.6
Total	35	100.0

Recreation professionals' impressions of critical components for serving youth

This section relates to research question number two and the critical program components for serving youth. The most important factor reported by recreation professionals for serving youth was a feeling of connectedness between the staff and the youth. With 97.1% of survey respondents reporting, disconnected staff is a common barrier to youth participation. Other significant program components reported included adequate facilities (71.4%), offering programs with affordable fees (57.1%) and making sure the youth have awareness of the programs being offered (57.1%). For exact data on these responses see Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6.

When asked to specify what new or different types of recreation facilities the respondents thought would better enable their organization to meet the needs of their clientele, eight respondents (23%), answered having an indoor pool and a community

center with space for athletics and meeting spaces. A teen center was the next most requested facility need with seven requests. A request for an outdoor pool was the next most popular idea with six requests. Only one survey participant responded with “None, we have what we need!”

When asked to identify other potential barriers to youth program participation, respondents included the youth lacking the time to participate, no interest by the youth in the programs being offered, and simply the youth having other hobbies which they are already involved in. This information is shown in Table 7 through Table 9. Respondents mentioned these last three barriers to participation less frequently than those previously discussed.

Table 3

Staff Belief that Disconnected Staff Members Act as a Barrier to Participation in Their Agency’s Youth Programs

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	34	97.1%
No response/ Did not answer	1	2.9%
Total	35	100.0%

Table 4

Staff Belief in Currently Having Adequate Facilities for Serving Youth

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	25	71.4%
No response/ Did not answer	15	28.6%
Total	35	100.0%

Table 5

Staff Belief that High Fees Prevent Youth from Participating in the Programs

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	20	57.1%
No response/ Did not answer	15	42.9%
Total	35	100.0

Table 6

Staff Belief that Youth Do Not Have Knowledge of Their Programs Being Offered by the Agency

Staff Belief in the Lack of Knowledge of Their Programs by Potential Clientele Being a Barrier to Youth Participation

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	20	57.1%
No	15	42.9%
Total	35	100.0

Table 7

Staff Belief that Youth Have Time to Participate in the Programs Being Offered by the Agency

Staff Belief that Youth Do Not Have Time to Participate in the Programs Being Offered by the Agency

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	15	42.9%
No	20	57.1%
Total	35	100.0

Table 8

Staff Belief that Youth Do Not Have Any Interest in Participating in the Programs Being Offered by the Agency

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	12	34.3%
No	23	65.7%
Total	35	100.0

Table 9

Staff Belief that Youth Have Other Hobbies They are Participating In

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	17	48.6%
No	18	51.4%
Total	35	100.0

Recreation professionals opinions of their opportunities for training, personal growth and career advancement.

In response to research question number three of opportunities for training, personal growth and career advancement, survey participants were positive on these topics. As shown in Table 10, 77.1% of the responses were "somewhat satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the staff training and development programs of their respective

organization. Only 17.1% of respondents chose “somewhat dissatisfied” and 0% chose “very dissatisfied” with their particular program.

Table 10

Staff Belief in Their Respective Organization’s Opportunities for Staff Development and Trainings

	Frequency	Percent
Very dissatisfied	0	0%
Somewhat dissatisfied	6	17.1%
Somewhat satisfied	18	51.4%
Very satisfied	9	25.7%
No response/ Did not answer	2	5.7%
Total	35	100.0%

On the topic of opportunities for staff advancement (see Table 11) the respondents were not as positive with 43.8% reporting “very dissatisfied” and “somewhat dissatisfied” and 46.9% reporting “somewhat satisfied” and 9.4% reporting “very satisfied.”

Table 11

Staff Belief in Advancement Opportunities by Their Current Organization

	Frequency	Percent
Very satisfied	4	11.4%
Somewhat satisfied	10	28.6%
Somewhat dissatisfied	15	42.9%
Very satisfied	3	8.6%
No response/ Did not answer	3	8.6%
Total	35	100.0%

Overall recreation professionals' beliefs of making a positive impact on youth.

In response to research question number four, a belief that recreation professionals are having a positive impact on youth, the response was 100% "yes," with 34 of the 35 surveyed participants reporting (see Table 12).

Table 12

**Staff Belief That They Are Having a Positive Impact on Youth Through
Their Organization's Youth Programs**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	34	97.1%
No	0	0%
No response/ Did not answer	1	2.9%
Total	35	100.0

Summary of Findings

Administrators of current recreation professionals are reportedly doing a good job of providing opportunities for staff training. Recreation professionals feel they are being offering adequate personal learning and growth options.

Collaborations among youth program providers are very common based on the results of this study. A variety of partnerships are being utilized between municipalities, private agencies and other groups interested in investing in societal youth are now in existence.

On the discussion of components necessary for serving youth, professional staff was listed as the top priority. Acknowledging that the staff can “make or break” a program’s success makes it the key to planning and implementing a youth program. Staff members that are able to connect with the youth are necessary for program

longevity. Other critical program components include adequate facilities, affordable fees, and simply getting the word out to potential youth participants.

Through the survey results it is observed that recreation professionals are aware of the positive impact professional staff members have in serving youth. This supports the review of literature research that found that staff members play a vital role in providing mentorship and guidance to the youth involved in recreation programs. Overwhelmingly, the Recreation Staff Survey respondents perceive their organization programs having a positive impact on our youth.

1. A sense of safety, felt and accompanied by challenging and interesting activities.
2. A sense of belonging.
3. Supportive relationships with adults.
4. Involvement in decision-making and opportunities for leadership.
5. Involvement in the community.

Programs designed with these components in mind focus on emotional and behavioral wellness, rather than merely keeping youth occupied (Witt & Campbell, 2007).

Chapter V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the review of literature it was found that in the past recreation agencies defined their youth service mission as engaging children in fun and games. This mission involved keeping youth off the streets and out of trouble. However, expectations often were limited to opening facilities and hiring minimum wage, part-time employees to baby-sit the youths and facility. As programs have matured, and youth development professionals have acquired a more sophisticated understanding of the potential of youth programming, a new mission has evolved. As a result, youth recreation providers have increasingly adopted the following components into their programs:

6. A sense of safety, but one accompanied by challenging and interesting activities;
7. A sense of belonging;
8. Supportive relationships with adults;
9. Involvement in decision-making and opportunities for leadership;
10. Involvement in the community.

Programs designed with these components in mind focus on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, rather than merely keeping youths occupied (Witt & Compton, 2002).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify keys to successful youth programs. Through the review of literature of successful youth programs common characteristics emerged. These include trends such as collaboration, youth friendly facilities, and the employment of diversified, professional staff (Korfhage, 2003; Roth & Brookes-Gunn, 2003; Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003; Witt & Comptom, 2002). In order to receive adequate funding, the recreation professionals find they need to continually monitor, evaluate, and report their program outcomes. The challenge in offering a successful youth program is in securing the financial and professional staff resources up front. Once established, the program can grow to reach more youth and creatively serve kids (Boccaro & Estes, 2002).

The field of youth service traditionally has high turnover and a lack of financial and facility resources. Having professional staff members who are able to connect with the youth is a vital component of any youth service organization. The question is how to attract these professionals to the agency, how to keep them motivated on the job, as well as how to keep them committed and employed for an extended period of time.

The Recreation Staff Survey was developed to help find the answers to these questions. The survey also looked into collaborations and successful youth program components. The survey was administered through the Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association (MRPA) website to 300 recreation professionals throughout the

state of Minnesota. Results were tabulated from the 35 respondents thus the response was 12%.

Repeatedly the review of literature reinforced the important role recreation professionals have in providing youth services. The work attitudes and experiences of these professionals assumingly impact the experiences the youth have during their recreation programs (Korfhage, 2003; Roth & Brookes-Gunn, 2003; Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003; Witt & Comptom, 2002). Understanding how the recreation staff roles impact youth programs is critical to the program success in reaching this goal. Focusing on this belief, the Recreation Staff Survey was developed. In particular, the survey instrument was designed to gather information on local recreation professionals' attitudes and experiences in the work place. The Recreation Staff Survey addressed the following four research questions:

5. What are recreation professionals' impressions about youth programming that involves community collaborations?
6. What do recreation professionals feel are the critical program components necessary for serving youth?
7. How do recreation professionals feel about their opportunities for training, personal growth and career advancement?
8. Overall do recreation professionals believe that they are making a positive impact on youth through their work?

The Recreation Staff Survey was administered in August of 2005. The data were collected through the surveys was quantitative in nature with open-ended items.

The responses provided information on the agencies youth programs, agency collaborations, facilities, and staff perceptions of growth opportunities and job satisfaction. The survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The research findings focused on the following four areas: staff training; collaborations; professional staff members; and the overall youth program impact. Discussion details of these four areas, conclusions, and the recommendations for practitioners are in the following sections.

Discussion

The first research question was “*What are recreation professionals’ impressions about youth programming that involves community collaborations?*” In answer to this question, 96.9% of the survey respondents reported that their respective recreation agency was involved in at least one collaborative partnership in offering youth programs. The majority of these partnerships were rated as good to excellent. Examples of how these agencies collaborated included a variety of programs such as family events and summer sport camps.

The review of literature found several agencies provide youth programs. Although each of these groups may articulate specific goals that are linked to its individual mission, it is actually quite remarkable that many of their respective mission statements, purpose statements, and core beliefs are quite similar. They may not always have the same language, but certainly are similar by way of intention (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

Collaboration has not always been considered a positive term. Presently, however, collaboration is considered an innovative and necessary tool for realizing community goals. Increasingly, leaders and managers of all sectors realize that no single organization, or type of industry, can achieve its full potential without considering the benefits of joining forces with others to accomplish its objectives. Consequently, it is a growing trend for organizations to rely on collaboration and coalition processes and structures to advance their mission of cultivating community assets to better serve youth (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

The second research question was *“What do recreation professionals feel are the critical program components necessary for serving youth?”* The most important factor reported by recreation professionals for serving youth was a feeling of connectedness between the staff and the youth. With 97.1% of survey respondents reporting, disconnected staff is a common barrier to youth participation. Other significant program components reported included adequate facilities (71.4%), offering programs with affordable fees (57.1%) and making sure the youth have awareness of the programs being offered (57.1%).

According to Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003), the ingredients of positive youth development include the following five C's:

1. Competence in academic, social, and vocational areas;
2. Confidence or positive self-identity;
3. Connections to community, family, and peers;

4. Character or positive values, integrity, and moral commitment;
5. Caring and compassion.

Programs vary on how they meet these five C's. At a general level, youth development programs help participants to develop competencies that will enable them to grow, develop their skills, and become healthy, responsible, and caring youth and adults. It is known from experience that when young people have the chance to participate in a community's affairs, they gain self-esteem, confidence, and essential life skills such as decision-making, conflict management, and the ability to work in diverse environments. As they build these competencies, youth begin to think of themselves as stakeholders in society. They also acquire a sense of responsibility for the common good and a positive attitude toward active citizenship.

This researcher cannot underscore enough the importance of ensuring that young people feel a part of something larger than themselves and believe they have something to contribute to their family, school, and society. Particularly in a time when regional and ethnic violence continues to divide communities worldwide and when young people are turning their anger and frustration into acts of violence or even terrorism, it is critical that we nurture a spirit of citizenship and democracy in this younger generation. Society needs to provide greater opportunities for youth to be positively engaged in their communities (Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003).

The third research question was "*How do recreation professionals feel about their opportunities for training, personal growth and career advancement?*" In response to this question of opportunities for training, personal growth and career

advancement, survey participants were positive. On the topic of opportunities for career advancement the respondents were not as positive with 43.8% reporting “very dissatisfied” and “somewhat dissatisfied” and 46.9% reporting “somewhat satisfied” and 9.4% reporting “very satisfied.”

Hiring and keeping quality staff is a challenge. Because staff members are attracted to work in youth outreach programs are usually intrinsically motivated by the prospect of genuinely making a difference in the lives of kids, there is a danger of taking these staff members for granted. They are often given little support, supervision or training opportunities. These negatives collectively result in a high rate of attrition. Youth development staff positions often involve long hours and relative isolation. There is a lack of status and professional identification, and a constant struggle to do the right thing in the right way. Even when high-quality staff members who enjoy the job are recruited, retaining them for an extended period of time can be difficult due to low salaries, long hours, and the high emotional and physical nature of youth development programs. Also, the lack of professional development and career opportunities add to these staffing challenges (Boccaro & Estes, 2002).

The final research question was *“Overall do recreation professionals believe that they are making a positive impact on youth through their work?”* It is a common belief that recreation professionals are having a positive impact on youth. Through the survey results it is observed that recreation professionals are aware of this positive impact they have in serving youth. This supports the review of literature research that found that staff members play a vital role in providing mentorship and guidance to the

youth involved in recreation programs (Korfhage, 2003; Roth & Brookes-Gunn, 2003; Wertlieb, Jacobs, & Lerner, 2003; Witt & Comptom, 2002).

Youth professionals need to believe in the positive impact of their program on youth as well as their individual role in the lives of the youth to stay motivated. The program administrator plays a vital role in staff retention by providing adequate training, resources, and positive feedback and support to youth development staff.

Conclusions

By addressing the following research questions through the Recreation Staff Survey, these conclusions can be made:

What are recreation professionals' impressions about youth programming that involves community collaborations? Collaborations among youth program providers are very common. A variety of partnerships are being utilized between municipalities, private organizations and other groups interested in investing in our youth are now in existence. Recreation professionals will need to continually seek, evaluate and sustain partnership opportunities to better serve the clientele.

What do recreation professionals feel are the critical program components necessary for serving youth? On the topic of identifying the components necessary for serving youth, professional staff was listed as the top priority. Acknowledging that the staff can "make or break" a program's success is the key to planning and implementing a youth program. Staff members that are able to connect with the youth are necessary for program longevity. Other critical program components include

adequate facilities, affordable fees, and simply getting the word out to potential youth participants.

How do recreation professionals feel about their opportunities for training, personal growth and career advancement? Administrators of today's recreation professionals are reportedly doing a good job of providing opportunities for staff training. Recreation professionals feel they are being offering adequate personal learning and growth options. One area for improvement for an administrator is to offer these recreation professionals more opportunities for career advancement as well.

Overall, do recreation professionals believe that they are making a positive impact on youth through their work? Through the survey results it is evident that recreation professionals are aware of the positive impact they have in serving youth. This supports the review of literature research that found that staff members play a vital role in providing mentorship and guidance to the youth involved in recreation programs (Jacobs, Wertlieb, & Lerner, 2003). Overwhelmingly, the Recreation Staff Survey respondents believe their organization programs have a positive impact on our youth. This internal motivation is key for youth development staff members.

Limitations

The survey respondent limitations relate to the fact that only current MRPA members were given survey access through MRPA website. With this limitation, 35 professionals, or 12%, participated in the study. Also, the study was a cross-sectional reporting of professionals located in Minnesota.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Based on the findings of the research and Staff Recreation Survey, the following recommendations are being made for practitioners:

- Encouraging current recreation staff members to continue to learn, grow and be challenged in the field is important for supervisors to do on an on-going basis.
- The trend is for recreation professionals to continually seek, evaluate, and sustain partnership opportunities to better serve the clientele.
- As an administrator in the youth development field, recognizing the important role of each staff member is vital. Providing the staff members with the necessary resources, training, and support for successfully serving the youth should be a top priority at all times.
- Administrators should recognize and praise their youth professionals in an effort to keep the commitment strong and successful long term.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recent research on telephone surveys, mailed surveys, and e-mail surveys found that the response rate is highest for e-mail surveys and this popularity is expected to grow. Yet, the best data collection process would be to use a combination of survey methods (Hertz, 2005). Or, in order to extend the Recreation Staff Survey access to a greater number of youth recreation professionals, the survey could also be distributed at a special event where large numbers of professionals are present, such as

MRPA's annual conference. For the Recreation Staff Survey, the response rate of 12% was lower than the average e-mail survey response by approximately 30%. Yet it is difficult to compare according to this benchmark, as the Recreation Staff survey was available on the MRPA website, not directly e-mailed to potential participants (Alvarez, 2002). To better the response rate for the Recreation Staff Survey, the survey should be sent directly to MRPA members via e-mail and be followed-up with a reminder 2 weeks later. Another method to expand the research on the topic of recreation staff perceptions would be to make the Recreation Staff Survey available through the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA).

Topics identified in this study that warrant further research are what can youth professional supervisors do to attract, motivate, and maintain good employees? A second research topic could be what trainings topics are youth professionals in need of and which do they feel they have had have been beneficial and why? Knowing the answers to these questions can further the success of youth programs by assisting the administrators in attracting good employees as well as offering these staff members developmental and growth opportunities.

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RECREATION STAFF SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to get a sense of how Youth Recreation Staff members view their roles within their organizations, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the youth programs offered by the organization. The researcher is requesting that all staff in your organization complete this survey. She is defining staff as all persons who have regular (at least weekly) contact with youth in at least one of the organization's recreation programs. Administrators, van drivers, security personnel, custodial personnel, and others such as volunteers or college interns who work with youth are included. The survey is not intended for youth who participate or supervise activities.

APPENDIX

Please take the time to answer each question completely. Staff members play an essential part in the overall service to youth so your responses are very important. Each individual's answers will be kept strictly confidential. The survey is completely anonymous and responses will be analyzed collectively. Thank you for taking the time to be a part of this study.

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The following questions ask some basic information about you and about your experiences as a staff person working for your recreation organization.

1. The name of the organization for which you work:

2. Your organization can best be described as (please choose one):

Municipal (Park and Recreation Department)

School

Non-profit (please specify) _____

Other (please specify) _____

3. Your highest educational level completed? (please check one)

Some high school

High school diploma or G.E.D.

Some college or associate degree

Bachelor's degree

Some graduate study

Graduate degree

4. How many years of experience do you have working with youth? (please check one)

less than 2 years

2 years but less than 5 years

5 years but less than 10 years

10 years but less than 15 years

15 years but less than 20 years

20 years or more

5. What is your primary job at your organization?

Management

Programming

Support

Clerical

Other (please specify) _____

6. How long have you worked in your current position? (please check one)

less than 3 months

3 months but less than one year

1 year but less than 2 years

2 years but less than 5 years

5 years but less than 10 years

10 years but less than 15 years

15 years but less than 20 years

20 years or more

7. What is your current employment status? (please check one)

full time

part time

volunteer (please specify) _____

college student intern

8. What percentage of your time is devoted to each of the following?

	%
Running athletic or recreation programs	_____
Running enrichment/tutoring programs	_____
Running life skills programs	_____
Running parent involvement programs	_____
Running youth leadership programs	_____
Engaging informally (socially) with youth	_____
Administrative work	_____
Other (explain) _____	_____

SHOULD TOTAL

100%

9. What best describes your youth service facilities? (please check all that apply)

- Open spaces/parks
- Picnic shelters
- Athletic fields
- Meeting rooms
- Banquet rooms
- Gymnasium
- Other (please specify) _____

What new or different types of recreation facilities do you think would better enable you to meet the needs of your youth?

The following set of questions asks you to give your views about the youth service organization for which you work.

10. How satisfied are you with your organization on each of the following (please circle the choice that most closely matches your level of satisfaction with each item):

	Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Administration's support for my staff	1	2	3	4
Programs offered	1	2	3	4
Overall quality of physical facilities	1	2	3	4
Overall morale of staff	1	2	3	4
Opportunities for staff training & development	1	2	3	4
How well staff are paid (salaries, wages)	1	2	3	4
Opportunities for staff advancement (e.g. promotions)	1	2	3	4
Freedom of staff to be creative (e.g. to initiate new activities)	1	2	3	4
How well staff strengths are utilized	1	2	3	4
How well staff grievances of complaints are addressed	1	2	3	4

11. Does your organization collaborate with any other agencies to offer any youth programs? (please circle one) Yes No

If yes, please briefly list up to five and provide your opinion of each ones success.

	Excellent	Good	Average	Below Average
1. _____	0	0	0	0
2. _____	0	0	0	0
3. _____	0	0	0	0
4. _____	0	0	0	0
5. _____	0	0	0	0

12. How often does your organization offer youth programs? (please check one)

- daily
 2-4 times each week
 once each week
 monthly
 almost never
 never

13. Which of the following prevent youth from participating in your organizations' program? (please check all that apply)

- Concern for safety
 Fees too high
 Disconnected staff
 Inadequate facilities
 Lack of knowledge about facilities/programs
 Lack of leisure time

17. Should additional youth programs be added? ___ yes ___ no

If yes, what?

The next set of questions asks you to reflect upon your own personal experiences as a staff person. How would you rate yourself on each of the following (please circle the choice that best matches your opinion on each item):

19. How would you describe your level of morale at work:

Very low Somewhat low Neither high nor low Somewhat high Very high

20. How would you rate your overall satisfaction with your work?

Very dissatisfied Somewhat dissatisfied Neither satisfied or dissatisfied Somewhat satisfied Very satisfied

21. How much additional training do you think you need?

I need a great deal more I need a bit more The need for training has been met

22. How satisfied are you with your current wage?

Very Dissatisfied Somewhat Dissatisfied Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied Somewhat Satisfied Very Satisfied

23. How do you rate the quality of relationships between your organization staff and your youth?

Poor Adequate Good Excellent

24. Are you achieving your own professional goals at this job?

Not at all Seldom Somewhat They have been achieved I have surpassed them

25. How much satisfaction do you get from working with youth at this job?

Very Little None Some A Great Amount

26. Overall, do you think you are making a positive difference in the lives of the youth who attend your programs?

No Yes

27. Any general comments? (Please limit your message to 1,000 characters or less)

Again, thank you for participating in this study.