

# **“Capturing Promising Practices in Recruitment & Retention of Frontline Youth Workers,” A Project of the National Collaboration for Youth, April 2006.**

## **OVERVIEW**

This paper by the National Collaboration for Youth emphasizes the crucial need to attract and retain qualified youth workers who are coming alongside our youth today. Recognizing how the high turnover rates of inexperienced youth workers can threaten the effectiveness of youth programs and jeopardize the development of the vulnerable children they serve, the authors offer practical recommendations for successful recruitment and retention.

Digging into the possible causes for high turnover rates, the authors point to a study by Annie E. Casey which documents many conditions hampering the development of a strong workforce such as “heavy workloads, long hours, and high vulnerability to burnout, high turnover among the most talented employees, significant minorities reporting that they do not have access to essential resources, low pay and few rewards for talent and achievement, and staff members’ dissatisfaction with the low level of respect received for their work.” 7

Furthermore, the authors note research on youth work and organizational psychology that list several factors in encouraging youth worker success: “1) adequate compensation and opportunities for advancement; 2) opportunities for professional development and training; 3) a supportive environment that fosters success; 4) clear role descriptions and competence to perform those roles; 5) a sense that staff members’ work is valued; and 6) opportunities for networking.” 9

Building upon the research, the paper then goes on to provide some practical responses:

### **Suggestions for Recruitment**

1. Provide incentives – offer a finders fee, promote peer recruitment, offer a return incentive
2. Capitalize on technology – use online job matching
3. Create Specific Strategies for College-age workers - partner with colleges & universities, participate in career and graduate school fairs, begin with young youth workers
4. Reach out for Diversity – reflect the culture of the community, network within the community, utilize career centers
5. Prepare youth to be youth workers – engage youth as leaders, offer internships

### **Suggestions for Retention**

1. Select Staff Carefully – begin with the interview (bring youth into this process)
2. Provide adequate compensation – increase full-time positions, offer competitive pay, prioritize benefits for staff
3. Offer opportunities for advancement – plan for promotions, offer a flexible approach to advancement, create incentives and support for promotion
4. Create supportive environments and climates that foster success – be flexible, balance work and life responsibilities (such as family/parenting)
5. Insist on Professional Development & Training – require training and offer incentives, offer

certificate opportunities, link concrete competencies to career development plans, link to community resources, create formal and informal mentoring systems

6. Value & Respect Youth Workers –value staff & the work they do, engage staff as active participants in decision making

7. Ensure opportunities for Networking – foster peer-to-peer learning, network and communicate within the organization, network across organizations

Local recommendations for organizations desiring to recruit and retain successful youth workers.

## **Recruitment**

1. Know your demographics. Who is doing youth work well in your area and how do their assets fit real needs?

2. Create innovative recruitment strategies like referral and hiring incentives, internships and work study programs and the internet!

3. Reach out to a diverse population of potential youth workers. Remember second-career and early retirement professionals.

4. Market youth work as an esteemed calling!

5. Evaluate your recruitment strategy regularly!

## **Retention**

1. Establish clearly defined competencies for staff members and recruit accordingly.

2. Offer your staff ongoing professional development.

3. Provide adequate compensation and a clear path for advancement.

4. Whenever possible, accommodate for reasonable workloads, flexible hours, adequate benefits and a voice in organization's decision-making process.

5. Formally recognize and honor workers for their important work.

6. Evaluate your retention efforts regularly!

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION**

1. What is your organization's track record in recruiting and retention?

2. How did they come to their current strategy and how has it been effective or not effective?

3. From the above suggestions, which ones might be helpful in improving your organizations recruitment and retention?

4. What organizations in your community are successful at recruitment and retention and why?

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Recruiting and retaining qualified, passionate youth workers is probably an organizations number one factor in becoming a vital transforming agent among youth and in communities.

Christen B. Yates, 2006