DESIGNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Youth service professionals in various settings across the United States are responsible for preparing youth and youth adults, ages 12 to 25, to be successful in employment, postsecondary education, and adult life. Whether they work in the public workforce development system or other public agencies (e.g., child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, health, disability services), in schools or postsecondary institutions, or for nonprofit organizations, they are often the "face" of their organizations. Young people frequently base their decisions about whether or not to engage with an organization on their relationship with one or more youth service professional. As a result, much rests upon their level of competence in connecting with and assisting youth through a critical period of their development.

While the transition from adolescence to adulthood is challenging for anyone, many youth face additional complications resulting from one or more of the following experiences: living in poverty, having

low literacy skills, having one or more disabilities including mental health conditions, being homeless, being an English language learner, being in the foster care system, being involved in the juvenile justice system, etc. (Langford, Badeau, & Legters, 2015; Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). Given this is a critical yet demanding job for even the most experienced youth worker, *are these professionals adequately prepared and supported to meet the demands and achieve the targeted outcomes?*

While much attention is paid to whether or not youth programs and services are high-quality and achieving outcomes, significantly less consideration is given to ensuring that the professionals who work directly with youth day-to-day in non-school settings have the competencies they need to be effective. According to the Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG), "investments that support enhanced and ongoing professional development of those working with older youth and young adults are urgently needed" (Langford, Badeau, & Legters, 2015, p.30). YTFG outlines several recommendations for supporting professional development including investing in competency-based training to build expertise in adolescent development, positive youth development, trauma, implicit bias, and effective interventions. According to Baizerman and Roholt (2016) professional development benefits youth workers and the field in four ways. Professional development (a) enhances the legitimacy of youth work legally, socially, and politically and ensures that professional practice is up-to-date; (b) establishes youth workers as professionals to be taken seriously among other professionals; (c) legitimizes youth workers as spokespersons for and with young people to affect policy, funding priorities, and interventions; and (d) demonstrates ongoing professionalization of the field.

Efforts to improve program quality and outcomes in youth services require attention to building and sustaining a qualified workforce of youth service professionals (Starr & Gannett, 2016). This raises the question—*What can agencies and organizations, as well as their funders (public and private), do to invest more in building competencies and supporting growth among youth service professionals?*

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) has been working for over 10 years on developing and piloting strategies and resources to address the professional development needs of youth service professionals with a particular focus on those working at the intersection of youth development, workforce development, education, and disability services. The passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 has elevated the importance of building staff capacity to work collaboratively across systems, agencies, and organizations to plan, deliver, and align workforce development, education, and support services to youth and adults. Given WIOA's increased priorities around achieving employment outcomes for disconnected youth and youth with disabilities, agencies and organizations must ensure that the staff responsible for serving youth and young adults are equipped with the necessary competencies to serve these populations effectively.

This Info Brief describes strategies and considerations for designing and delivering professional development for youth service professionals at

the state and local levels. By highlighting strategies, required resources, and lessons learned from three different professional development initiatives, this brief aims to inform the decisions of organizations, agencies, and funders as they consider how to invest in professional development efforts within the workforce development system as well as other youth service systems and program contexts.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN ACTION

Designing and delivering quality professional development for youth service professionals requires careful planning and implementation in order to achieve the desired outcomes. Between 2013 and 2016, NCWD/Youth has field-tested various strategies as part of three professional development initiatives targeting youth service professionals. All three initiatives involved delivering in-person group training using content from the same curricula, the Youth Service Professionals' Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (YSP/KSA) training modules. The YSP/KSA training modules are a series of eight day-long training curricula designed to develop core competencies that youth service professionals need to connect all youth, including those with disabilities, to opportunities for work, further education, and independent living. Some of the ways in which the three initiatives differed include how participants were selected for the training, who delivered the training, and how the training was integrated with other professional development activities and methods.

The following overviews of each initiative highlight different approaches that can be used to design and deliver professional development. Where available, the overview includes data on professional development outcomes based on participant and organizational feedback evaluations.

Strengthening Youth Systems through Cross-Agency Training— YSP/KSA Demonstration Project

In 2013, NCWD/Youth partnered with three competitively selected sites to conduct a demonstration and evaluation of professional development. The project aimed to demonstrate the components of high-quality professional development in the workforce development system, to deliver high-quality training and technical assistance to youth service professionals (YSPs) across a variety of systems, and to evaluate the effects on YSPs' competencies, individual and organizational practices, and organizational policies and culture. Each site consisted of a cross-agency partnership including at least three youth-serving agencies that committed to working together to build their staff capacity and improve youth outcomes within their geographic region. The lead agencies and their partners in each site were:

- The Baltimore City Mayor's Office of Employment Development, Youth Services Division (Baltimore, MD) led a partnership with the Career Academy/Baltimore City Schools and the Housing Authority's Successfully Moving Youth to Work agencies.

- The City of Los Angeles Economic and Workforce Development Department (Los Angeles, CA) led a partnership with

the Los Angeles Unified School District and the County Department of Children and Family Services.

- New York State Department of Labor (Albany, NY) led a partnership with the Office of Children and Family Services, Division of Juvenile Justice and Opportunities for Youth, the New York State Education Department, Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services – Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) and the P-12 Office of Special Education, and YOUTH POWER!/Families Together in New York State, Inc.

At the start of the project, NCWD/Youth worked with each cross-agency site to assess their professional development needs and develop shared goals and strategies for supporting professional development. This planning phase informed each site's selection of four of the eight YSP/KSA training modules relevant to their specific assessment results and goals. Each site developed an initial logic model outlining the outcomes they aimed to achieve through professional development and corresponding staff and organizational practices they would focus on improving to achieve the outcomes. This logic model was revisited and refined following the training phase.

In the training phase, NCWD/Youth provided youth service professionals at each site with four days of cross-agency training delivered over a four-month period (one day of training per month). All sites completed training on *Knowledge of the Field*, which covers foundational theories, concepts, policies, best practices, and professional ethics. Los Angeles and Baltimore selected training in *Assessment and Individual Planning*; New York and Los Angeles selected training in *Career Exploration and Preparation* strategies; and New York and Baltimore selected training in *Engaging Employers*. In addition, Los Angeles participants received training in *Connecting to Community Resources*; New York received training in *Program Design and Delivery*; and Baltimore received training in *Communication with Youth*.

In order to build organizational capacity to deliver future training and support trainees, NCWD/Youth also trained two staff per site to serve as "facilitators-in-training" to assist NCWD/Youth's expert facilitators. The on-site facilitators-in-training were also responsible for providing follow-up support to the trainees between and after completion of the training sessions. Additionally each site partnered with a postsecondary institution to provide credits or a credential for completing training.

In the post-training phase, the agency administrators and trained staff from each site participated in technical assistance designed to support the trainees in applying what they learned to improve their work with youth. This included assisting the agency administrators with identifying ways to support staff in applying new skills and strategies gained through the training.

The third-party evaluation of the demonstration project focused on determining the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of the professional development. Training participants were asked to complete a pre-survey and a post-survey for each training session in which they participated. They also completed six-month and 12-month

follow-up surveys to measure behavior changes in the year following the training. Additionally, site administrators were interviewed prior to the first training and six and 12 months post-training. The evaluation design utilized Donald L. Kirkpatrick's (1994) Four Level Model for evaluating professional development (Reaction, Learning, Behavior, and Results).

The evaluation indicates that the majority of training participants across all three sites found the training to be useful to their work and of high quality (e.g., facilitation was engaging, training content was well-organized) (Russell, 2016).

Measures of participant learning show that participants' confidence in their abilities and their knowledge increased in many of the competencies covered by the training delivered to their site. A sample of specific post-training learning outcomes from the sites includes the following:

- More Baltimore training participants reported that they had a high degree

of confidence in their ability to support employers providing work opportunities to youth than prior to the training (95% were confident or very confident post-training compared to 83% pre-training).

- More Los Angeles training participants reported that they had a high degree of confidence in their ability to create work-based learning opportunities in the community (75% were confident or very confident post-training compared to 44% pre-training).

- More New York training participants reported that they had a high degree of confidence in their ability to build youth's employment seeking skills (88% were confident or very confident post-training compared to 74% pre-training)

Additionally, training participants from each site reported that they had increased confidence in their ability to assist youth with disabilities in

making decisions about disclosure –a skill important to their becoming self-determined adults who are able to advocate for accommodations in employment and postsecondary education if needed.

The results from the six-month follow-up evaluation show a strong level of behavior change indicating that many participants consistently applied what they learned during the training. Participants reported regularly using strategies (70%) and using resources (50%) from the training in their individual practice as well as sharing knowledge gained (64%) from the training with other staff in their agency, behaviors which are strong predictors of improved organizational capacity. When asked about their organizations' support following the training, the majority of participants said they felt encouraged to apply what they learned and to improve practices covered in the training.

The 12-month follow-up evaluation results indicate a high degree of behavior change; the majority of respondents from each site reported regularly engaging in individual practices identified by their organizations as targeted outcomes. When asked about organization-wide changes, many trainee respondents commented on changes in organizational culture since the training, noting the improved communication between staff and program participants, empowerment of individual staff to do their job with confidence, higher levels of sensitivity to specific youth issues, and increased coaching and support from supervisors. Likewise, administrators reported an increase in valuing and investing in ongoing professional development rather than one-time training efforts. In addition,

they indicated that the cross-agency training aspect of the project allowed for the implementation of new strategies and created the potential for increased cooperation and collaboration in the future, including that necessitated by the implementation of WIOA.

Developing Statewide Capacity to Implement Reform with a "Train-the-Trainer" Model

In 2016, the Ohio Institute for Human Services (OIHS) and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services' Office of Human Services Innovations requested assistance from NCWD/Youth with developing a strategy to build staff capacity across the state to implement Ohio's new Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP). With the goal of assisting the "emerging workforce to prepare for and find meaningful employment," the state of Ohio created "a new framework for serving low-income Ohioans ages 16 to 24, through an integrated intervention program that combines the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth program" (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, 2016). The CCMEP is housed in the Office of Human Services Innovations within the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

As part of the CCMEP's new service model, case managers would be required to use new assessment and individualized planning strategies to assist young adults with identifying their employment and training needs and setting goals using an individual opportunity plan. The plans would identify support that youth may

need to obtain a high school credential, secure a job, gain work experience, and obtain other supportive services (e.g., child care and transportation). Implementation of CCMEP would require significant changes in the roles and responsibilities of case managers, which would necessitate training them on new practices and procedures for serving youth.

Following an initial consultation about their professional development goals and needs, OIHS contracted with the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), which houses NCWD/Youth, to plan and deliver a training of trainers project using four of the YSP/KSA training modules. Initially, OIHS requested that NCWD/Youth deliver training to an estimated 700 case managers across five regions of Ohio. Given the scale of training needed in a short-time frame, NCWD/Youth proposed using a train-the-trainer model which would enable Ohio to develop its own cadre of statewide training facilitators qualified to deliver the training in different regions of the state.

In 2016, IEL worked with four members of the YSP/KSA national cadre of facilitators to conduct the train-the-trainer event for 30 training facilitators. The Ohio-based facilitators were paired to form 15 co-facilitation teams that provided 35 training events across Ohio. A regional team of three co-facilitation pairs worked together to deliver the training for each of the five regions. To support the ongoing quality of the Ohio-based facilitators, NCWD/Youth staff and the four national cadre members provided coaching to the Ohio-based regional training teams on-site during the first three-day set of trainings held in each of the five regions in May. Each coach ob-

served the three pairs in their assigned regional team, provided detailed and individualized feedback, and collaborated with each pair (as well as individual trainers as needed) to construct a plan for on-going preparation and support. The technical assistance and support for the Ohio regional facilitators continued for three months as they trained case managers throughout the state.

Participant evaluations were completed by 253 of the 570 training attendees. Of those who responded, 81 percent rated the overall quality of the training as very good or excellent, 85 percent agreed or strongly agreed they would recommend it to a colleague, and 90 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they gained knowledge and/or skills from the training that they can use in their work. Many participants described that they planned to use what they gained from the training to better connect with clients, to develop more comprehensive assessments of youth, and to better engage youth using new activities and tools. Several participants suggested the training should be provided to all case managers.

Developing a Professional Learning Community through an Academy Model

In 2014, IEL began a partnership with the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates (DC AYA) to develop and facilitate the Youth Workforce Leaders Academy, a professional learning community for youth service professionals providing workforce development services to youth ages 16 to 24 in the District of Columbia. This partnership was established when IEL and DC AYA responded to

a grant solicitation from the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region's Greater Washington Workforce Collaborative (GWWC). The Community Foundation had recently conducted a quality program assessment and improvement initiative led by the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) called the DC PEPNet Collaborative. Through the initiative, six nonprofit organizations engaged in training on youth program quality standards, completed organization-wide quality self-assessments, and developed quality improvement action plans (Ross & Thakur, 2014). At the conclusion of this initiative, GWWC sought to establish the Youth Workforce Leaders Academy to address the need for further professional development opportunities expressed by the organizations involved in the DC PEPNet Collaborative.

IEL and DC AYA were strong counterparts for the task of developing the Academy. IEL provided expertise in youth workforce development policies and best practices across the country as well as lessons from its long history of developing and facilitating professional development and leadership programs. This paired well with DC AYA's expertise on local policies, implementation challenges, and best practices as well as their position in the community as a respected champion for youth and youth service professionals.

The Academy was designed to support the growth and success of 15 professionals annually by engaging them in a year-long professional development learning community. Competitively selected through an application process, the participants work for a diverse mix of nonprofit organizations, schools, public agencies, and other entities that provide youth workforce development services. The Academy uses multiple strategies to facilitate professional development including in-person learning sessions and email group discussions. In addition, they each complete the YSP/KSA assessment for youth service professionals, develop an individual professional development plan, implement a capstone project, and receive support from an alumni peer mentor.

During the monthly learning sessions, the cadre receives training on essential practices and considerations for designing and delivering high-quality youth workforce development programming. Training content drawn from the YSP/KSA training modules includes an overview of the national and local youth workforce development landscape, youth rights and policies, youth development and youth voice, quality program design and delivery, career exploration and workforce preparation strategies, assessment and individualized planning, employer engagement, collaboration and connecting to community resources, and engaging families. IEL and DC AYA work together to identify and arrange for national and local guest speakers who can share their expertise and highlight practical examples on the monthly topic.

The monthly sessions also consist of peer-led discussion and strategy sharing. The Academy's professional learning community model provides a unique opportunity for participants to develop a strong network of peers from other local organizations and agencies. This affords opportunities for learning from each other and opens doors to building collaborations and better coordinating services to youth in the city.

Participants regularly share new strategies and resources with other colleagues at their organization, which enables the organizations to build broader staff capacity.

By requiring each participant to complete a capstone project, the Academy ensures that participants apply their learning from the very start to address organizational challenges or program improvement goals. For example, one participant's project focused on improving transition outcomes of youth aging out of the foster-care system by developing a career pathways program model for their agency that would engage youth during the 9th and 10th grades in year-round career awareness, career exploration, and career preparation activities. This type of project-based professional development provides tangible benefits for the organizations, which makes it worthwhile to give staff release time to attend monthly sessions and other Academy activities.

To measure results and inform continuous improvements, IEL conducts a final evaluation of the Academy each year by surveying the participants and their supervisors. In evaluations from the 2016 cadre, all participants indicated that the Academy helped them grow in most of the targeted competencies. In their open-ended responses, many of the participants indicated that they found the opportunities for networking and building collaborative relationships to be especially valuable. One participant described the benefits of participating as follows: "Through the connections I've made with other youth workforce professionals and the immense amount of resources, both tangible and intangible, I am a much stronger, more aware, more thoughtful professional. I have gained confidence in my work and an amazing amount of knowledge, skills, and abilities that I didn't have or didn't know I had just a few months ago."

REPLICATING SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

NCWD/Youth's YSP/KSA Demonstration, State-wide Train-the-Trainer Model, and Youth Workforce Leaders Academy share the goal of increasing the quality and effectiveness of youth workforce development services by providing group training and peer-to-peer learning opportunities to youth service professionals. By reviewing each of these efforts, it is possible to identify several successful practices that can serve as a roadmap for other entities responsible for designing and delivering professional development.

Clearly define objectives and desired outcomes for professional development focused on developing validated core competencies with input from key stakeholders.

Clearly defining the objectives for professional development is an essential first step in professional development planning. The responsibility for designing or selecting professional development opportunities often rests with agency or organizational administrators, workforce development boards or other governing boards, and funders. While these key decision-makers must be involved, input from youth service professionals and their direct supervisors should shape decisions.

Setting professional development objectives may also require organizations and agencies to review which competencies are essential to the work of their youth service professionals and in

greatest need of development. Regardless of the specific service system or authorizing legislation, three sub-sets of competencies are particularly important for all youth service professionals: 1) competencies for promoting positive youth development, 2) competencies for facilitating career development with an emphasis on promoting informed decision-making and providing work-based learning opportunities, and 3) competencies necessary to effectively address the emotional and behavioral development needs and challenges (including trauma) of adolescents and young adults.

Collecting data from youth service professionals about their current competencies and professional development needs should inform planning. This may involve asking professionals to complete a self-assessment of their core competencies using a tool such as the [Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA) Assessment for Youth Service Professionals](). This tool asks individual staff to rate the relevance of ten validated competency areas for youth service professionals to the work they do, to rate their proficiency in each competency area, and to indicate the amount of prior training they have received in each area. Each competency area outlines knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to work well with youth in general and the additional competencies needed to work with youth with disabilities. Data from staff competency assessments or other types of staff surveys can be analyzed and used to determine priorities for professional development.

Other types of data that are useful for setting objectives for professional development include performance outcome data, organizational qual-

ity assessment results (e.g. PEPNet Self-Assessment), and customer satisfaction feedback (e.g. input from youth, families, employers, community partners).

Select professional development activities well-suited to the objectives, the context, and the learning styles and levels of the professionals.

Decisions about the professional development content and strategies should be based upon how well they can be expected to achieve the objectives and how well they fit the context of the organizations and agencies. The content and strategies also should fit the needs of the professionals being targeted, including their starting level of knowledge or proficiency, their ability to participate (e.g., when and where, how many hours, how frequent, in-person or virtual), and their learning styles and preferences.

The success of any professional development effort depends upon providing relevant and valuable content in the most engaging way possible. Ensuring that professional development is engaging for adult learners involves building upon their prior knowledge and experiences; focusing on their needs and goals; respecting their experiences, beliefs, knowledge, questions, and ideas; making learning practical, goal-oriented, and problem-centered; providing them immediate feedback and opportunities for self-evaluation; using universal design for learning principles to address learner variability; using collaborative learning strategies (e.g., small groups, pairs); and addressing varying motivations of learners (Russell, 2009).

While in-person training is not always feasible, participants in NCWD/Youth's three initiatives have found it to be highly valuable. A primary advantage of an in-person group format is the opportunity it presents for peer-to-peer learning and support. The YSP/KSA training modules involve a significant amount of peer-to-peer discussions and activities (e.g., case scenarios, role plays). This facilitates sharing of challenges, successful strategies, and resources among participants. Participants often describe feeling energized or encouraged by connecting with peers who do similar work with youth. For some participants, the group training experience is the first opportunity they have to recognize themselves as belonging to a community of youth service professionals. The relationships that they develop in the training environment have the potential to serve as an ongoing source of support and learning through the development of a peer network.

Professional development that incorporates experiential and applied learning strategies can be particularly effective. While these strategies deepen engagement in learning, they can also facilitate the immediate application of new competencies in the workplace. For example, the use of capstone projects in the Youth Workforce Leaders Academy has been a valuable learning strategy for the trainees while also providing a tangible benefit for their organizations. Participants use the new knowledge and skills gained throughout their participation in the Academy to plan and implement a project that addresses a specific need or problem within their organization. The projects often involve evaluating current practices and proposing improvement strategies, implementing changes to improve

existing practices, or implementing an entirely new program or activity.

Ensure the quality of trainers or facilitators of professional development activities.

Skilled trainers and facilitators are required to deliver quality professional development for youth service professionals. When NCWD/Youth chose to develop the YSP/KSA training modules, it also recognized the need to identify and support qualified facilitators across the country to deliver the training. Other professional development efforts should take care in identifying qualified individuals who are knowledgeable about emerging and evidence-based practices and current policy initiatives. In addition to expertise in the delivery of training, professional development facilitators must have a commitment to individualizing training to their trainees' needs and to the professionalization of the field.

If trainers and facilitators are in short supply, organizations and agencies may consider utilizing a train-the-trainer approach. By developing a cadre of training facilitators, as NCWD/Youth did in Ohio, states or local communities can develop their own capacity to conduct training and facilitate professional development activities on a regular or as-needed basis. This is particularly valuable if staff turnover is a challenge and training needs to be delivered on a regular basis to orient and prepare new staff.

Engage organizational leaders and supervisors in supporting professionals' application of learning toward achieving organizational improvement goals.

Supporting professional development requires that organizations ensure staff have opportunities and support to apply knowledge, skills, and abilities gained through training in their day-to-day practice. Studies of organizational performance improvement and youth services professional practice demonstrate that various organizational factors influence "transfer of training" or the extent to which professionals use what they learn in their jobs (Broad, 2005; Roholt & Rana, 2011). What organizations do before, during, and after professional development activities has an effect on their employee's behavior and subsequent organizational performance results. By cultivating a culture of professional development, organizational leaders create the conditions that enable participants to fully engage in professional development activities and to apply what they learn to improve their work. In order to maximize the benefits of professional development, it is important that organizations take steps to both prepare and provide ongoing support to the professionals who are participating.

Preparation for professional development should include taking time for conversations between organizational administrators, supervisors, and the professionals working directly with youth. When professional development is a mandated activity, participants may not feel invested or motivated to give it their full attention or effort. Organizational conversations can help participants to develop an understanding of why the professional development activity is important and to reflect upon and discuss expectations for using what they learn in their work. Learner motivation may be enhanced by having professionals develop individual learning goals that align with their organizations' and supervisors' objectives for their development. Getting supervisors and youth service professionals on the same page about goals and expectations

ahead of time prepares both parties for making changes in practices later on.

Organizations can support professionals during and after professional development activities by identifying "organizational drivers," or actions by the organizational leaders and supervisors that they will use to promote the application of learning to improve practices (Bird, 2014). This strategy was employed by the organizations in the YSP/KSA Professional Development Demonstration project. Some common organizational drivers include: holding regular discussions about what professionals are learning and how they are using new knowledge and skills on the job; using learning communities, communities of practice, or peer mentors to assist professionals as they work on applying new practices; providing professionals with feedback and coaching on how they are applying what they learned; and offering certifications, incentives, or recognition for increasing knowledge and/or changing or improving practices. Opportunities to earn postsecondary education credits and credentials for professional development activities are a valuable incentive for professionals.

Evaluate and continuously improve the professional development activities.

Conducting an evaluation of professional development activities is important to ensuring that the experience is relevant and valuable to professionals and that it has the desired impact on organizational performance and results. One commonly used model for evaluating professional development created by Donald Kirkpatrick measures participant reaction, participant learning, behavior change (i.e., whether or not participants apply learning), and results (i.e. achievement of targeted organizational outcomes) (Kirkpatrick

Partners, 2016). Thomas Guskey's model for evaluating professional development in education contexts adds an additional measure focused on organization support and change (Guskey, 2002). Evaluators of the YSP/KSA Professional Development Demonstration project used Kirkpatrick's and Guskey's models to inform their evaluation design. This involved pre- and post-training surveys from participants as well as collecting data in the year following the training from both participants and administrators to determine whether and how learning was applied. Whether surveys, interviews, or other methods are used, some form of follow-up evaluation is valuable to examine the effects of professional development on the organization's performance over time.

Consider a cross-system approach to professional development.

With the move toward more integrated cross-system service delivery and common performance metrics required under the WIOA, and the continuing and ongoing need to effectively leverage limited resources, organizations should consider organizing or engaging in cross-system training and professional development. While they may play different roles in youth's lives or work within distinct settings, professionals who are working with the same or similar youth populations in different organizations and agencies need some similar competencies, including competencies related to coordinating and collaborating with one another. Cross-system professional development brings together various professionals who serve youth in the same community or region to develop competencies for delivering youth services in a coordinated way. Participating together in professional development opens lines of communica-

tion between organizations and agencies that may otherwise struggle to find common ground or opportunities to connect their work.

The formation of a community of practice where professionals from related fields come together to address a common concern is one approach to cross-system professional development. For example, health care, youth development, and social services professionals might gather periodically to develop their cross-system capacity to implement a broad-based intervention on behalf of youth. Beyond building shared capacity for working together effectively, a cross-system professional development community of practice enables youth service professionals to understand the requisite skills set, strategies, and organizational approaches needed to develop systemic interventions.

Where there is significant overlap or intersections of the roles and responsibilities of youth service professionals in various settings (such as child welfare and juvenile justice agencies), organizations may want to develop or adopt an integrated framework of core competencies to guide the creation of a cross-system professional development effort. One example of this is the Core Competencies for Integrated Care, which was developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) (Hoge, Morris, Laraia, Pomerantz, & Farley, 2014).

CONCLUSION

Organizations and agencies responsible for preparing youth and young adults for adulthood need competent and well-supported youth service professionals in order to ensure the quality and effectiveness of their services and programs. This requires organizational investments in providing quality professional development to build the capacity of the youth services workforce. Successful practices to consider in designing and delivering professional development for youth service professionals include: setting clear objectives informed by key stakeholders, focusing on validated core competencies, selecting professional development content and methods that are relevant and engaging, ensuring the quality of trainers or facilitators, providing ongoing support from organizational leaders and supervisors, evaluating outcomes and making improvements, and developing partnerships to provide cross-system professional development.
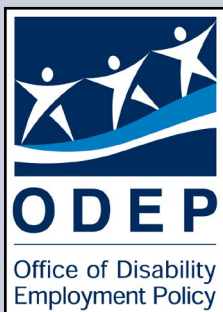
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