



## **SUPPORT FOR ADULTS IN OUT-OF SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS**

*Adults who work in out-of-school time settings provide the leadership and direction for intentional, quality programs that impact positively on young people. It takes a unique system of training, education, professional development and technical assistance to support the wide range of adult roles and skills essential for quality out-of-school time programming. A recent study of field support efforts in Minnesota suggests that the systems and structures in place are largely fragmented and inconsistent in their work to strengthen the adults who work in the out-of-school time.*

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### **THE STATE OF THE FIELD**

The field of child and youth development has not yet fully established itself as a profession, yet large numbers of workers are engaged in the work. It is estimated that over 300,000 individuals work in a full or part-time paid capacity in the major U.S. national youth organizations alone (Huebner, McFarland & Walker, 2003). Estimates that include volunteers run into the millions.

#### **VARIETY CHALLENGES THE FIELD**

**Multiple Roles:** Child and youth development programs operating in the non-school hours are staffed by a wide variety of adults functioning in roles as leaders, coaches, mentors, advisors, and friends. They come to their task with a variety of credentials. Some have college educations, some have extensive youth work experience, some are learning on the job, and some have little or no training. Some are paid and some are volunteers. Some work full time, others part time and many seasonally. Nonetheless, they all have the potential to play a critical role in the learning and development of young people.

**Multiple Sites:** The interactions between young people and these adults take place anywhere and everywhere. They act as coaches in youth leagues, directors in theaters, and counselors at

camp. They are ministers, street workers, social workers, educators, or volunteers. You will find them in after school programs, in recreation programs, at a large YWCA, in the local library, and in the corner of a local park. Their work environment is typically one that reinforces equality, democracy, teamwork and decision-making among peers. They frequently work in settings where youth come voluntarily, in settings characterized by choice and flexibility.

**Multiple Responsibilities:** Adults who work in out-of-school time (OST) programs have at least three important tasks. They create and maintain healthy relationships with youth. They plan programs that engage young people in exciting activities and interesting programs. And they play multiple administrative and supervisory functions in their organization. When in direct service (typically 25-50% of their time) they play the role of social worker, teacher, mentor, and coach. When the program ends, these same workers are asked to play roles in program administration, volunteer supervision, and even fundraising.

These multiple roles, sites and responsibilities increase the need for sustainable systems of support but make providing such support difficult.

## STRENGTHEN ADULT LEADERSHIP

As the importance of OST programs has increased, so too has the call to improve the preparation of adults shaping these programs. (Larner, Zippiroli & Behrman, 1999). While caring adults are the most important factor in the positive development of a young person (Dryfoos, 1990; Tierney, Grossman & Resch, 1995), few practitioners are fully prepared through education and training for this role.

### A "Typical" Out-of-School Time Practitioner...

- Is female
- Is white
- Has a bachelor's or master's degree (though not necessarily in the field) if she is employed full-time
- Has life experience and a high school diploma if she is employed part-time or is a volunteer
- Has a passion for working with youth

In fields such as childcare, the research indicators point to a highly trained staff as crucial to program quality (Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 1993). Even more compelling research shows that a poor quality program not only misses development opportunities with children and youth, but can actually result in negative outcomes.

## CURRENT NEEDS OF ADULT WORKERS

Available national research finds that OST practitioners and organizations recognize the need for individual skill building opportunities in addition to broader organizational and systems support to meet their professional development needs (Partnership for After School Education, 2002). While needed individual skills in behavior management, creating high quality activities, and communication are widely available, a gap often exists between the need and the existing opportunities for technical assistance. This means steps to improve organizational capacity and to build strong mission and goals, effective leadership, appropriate supervision, adequate compensation, and administrative support often go unmet.

Nationally, it appears that the education, training, professional development and technical assistance that OST practitioners need are available in proportion to the capacity of their individual organizations and the degree to which the broader community invests in their work.

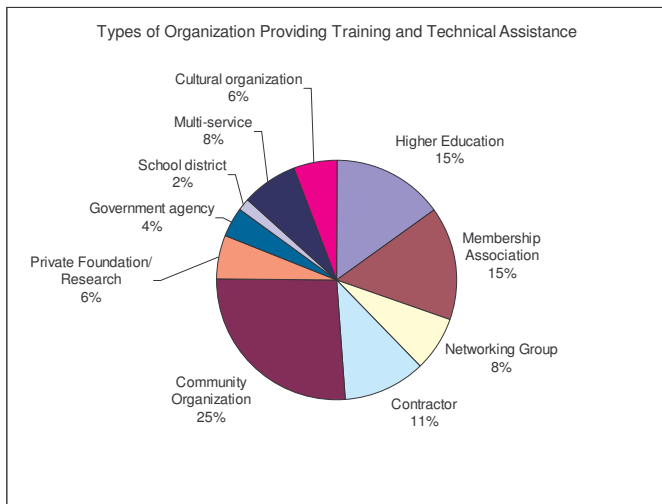
## A STUDY OF FIELD SUPPORTS IN MINNESOTA

An environmental scan to determine "who is doing what" to support out-of-school time practitioners was initiated under the auspices of the Minnesota Out-of-School Time Partnership. A team of OST practitioners working in university, state agency, foundation and community settings set out to understand the current system of field support for OST practitioners across the state. Information was collected from 52 organizations known to offer educational, training, professional development and/or technical assistance services.

The following definitions were used in the study: (a) "training" is defined as training programs, mentoring, and coaching, and (b) "technical assistance" is defined as consulting, networking, and technical services.

## KEY FINDINGS OF FIELD SUPPORT STUDY

- 1. Many Providers:** Minnesota has many organizations that claim to provide for the training and technical assistance needs of out-of-school time practitioners.
- 2. Variety of Organizations:** The types of organizations providing these services to OST practitioners vary greatly. Community organizations, such as the United Way, or the Council of Nonprofits represent 25% of services. Higher education institutions such as the University of Minnesota and Concordia University represent 15% of these services. Membership organizations like the Minnesota School Age Care Alliance account for another 15% of the service providers. In addition, independent contractors, private foundations, research organizations, networking groups, multi-service organizations, cultural groups, government agencies, and public education also provide services.



**3. Gaps in Rural Service:** The scan of providers indicates that there are significant gaps in service in greater Minnesota. Outside of the metro area there are fewer than three organizations serving any one region of the state. While more than half of all the service providers reviewed for this study claim to serve all of Minnesota, these services are available only by request. They are not actively marketing to outstate areas nor do they have regional offices. It appears costs are higher for greater Minnesota since travel and distance are involved.

Organizations providing services available to all of Minnesota are generally located in the metro area and the expense of delivering programs to greater Minnesota is often passed on to the organization requesting training or technical assistance. Few of the training or technical assistance programs included in this scan had offices in all areas of the state or provide locally available training and technical assistance.

**4. Individual Skills and Organizational Capacity:** The scan reveals two areas of identified need for professionals working in OST organizations in greater Minnesota: improved personal skills and strengthened organizational capacity. This dual need mirrors the needs of the field nationally. Professional practitioners identified a need to improve their own skills. However, when asked about training needs, they included a whole list of organizational capacity issues such as better trained supervisors, more pay,

more community advocates, and more networking opportunities (Madzey-Akale & Walker, 2000). It is not just a matter of training and development for individuals. There are organizational assistance needs in areas such as building networks and collaborations in geographically remote areas; finding available staff development resources; expanding organizational capacity to deal with policy concerns; and building community support. These are all important barriers that affect the effectiveness of adult leaders and program quality.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIELD SUPPORT

The scan of field support in Minnesota reveals four important needs: expanded availability and choice; broader focus on all practitioners; improved coordination of content area; increased access to capacity building services.

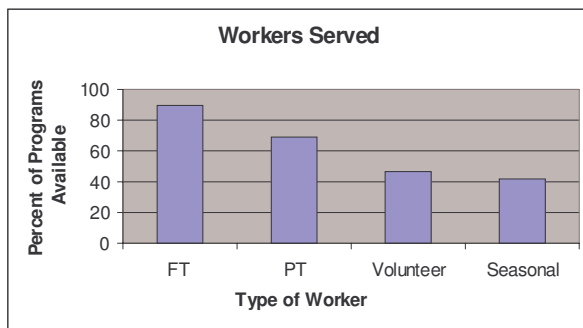
### EXPANDED AVAILABILITY AND CHOICE

*Find creative, cost-effective ways to increase the availability and choice of training and technical assistance opportunities to youth practitioners in every geographic area of Minnesota.*

While there is a wealth of opportunity and choice in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, there is an extreme shortage of such options across the state. The far western and northern parts of the state have the least opportunities available. While there are many organizations willing to provide training and technical assistance to these areas, they do not appear to have the capacity to market their services to these audiences, or if they are available, become cost prohibitive because of the distances needed to travel to reach all parts of the state.

### BROADER FOCUS ON ALL PRACTITIONERS

*Make appropriate education, training and professional development available for part-time, seasonal and volunteer workers.*



Most training and technical assistance programs available are targeted to full-time staff. Since the workforce is comprised primarily of part-time or seasonal staff and volunteers, these services are not adequate. Full-time staff people have greater access to professional development funds, as well as more time to devote to training or technical assistance. Part-time staff and volunteers function as direct service staff and are not always allowed to take time off the job for training.

### **IMPROVED COORDINATION OF CONTENT AREAS**

*Address the uneven availability of training in topics of importance. Some topics are offered by everyone; others are nonexistent.*

Training and technical assistance needs vary greatly depending upon the age of the child or the range of ages of children which the program serves.

There appears to be little agreement about basic standards or core competencies; hence there is little attempt to provide training across the spectrum of need. Work is needed to see that core areas of importance to quality programs are available to all providers.

### **INCREASED CAPACITY BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES**

*Expand and strengthen systems to provide technical assistance to organizations.*

Clearly, the strength of an organization affects the success of practitioners in their programs. Basic organizational capacity such as the ability to strategically plan, write grants, or manage volunteers is overlooked by training and technical assistance organizations. This results in an inability

to access additional resources necessary to build and strengthen programs. In national studies of OST practitioner needs, training and technical assistance were linked to strong organizational development.

The investment of individual and organizational development must be consistent and equally recognized as core components of effective systems.

## **STRATEGIES TO MOVE AHEAD**

### **BE VERY CLEAR ABOUT THE LINK BETWEEN STRONG ADULT LEADERSHIP AND QUALITY PROGRAMS.**

The strength of child and youth development is in the broad range of individuals who are committed to the healthy development of all young people. These adults working on behalf of young people are advocates, mentors, and guides. Whether full-time, part-time, or volunteer, their involvement in the lives of young people is critical for child and youth development. These adults need a system of support that recognizes their practice, not only as a profession, but also as key components in a sustainable high-quality program.

### **BEGIN TO BUILD THE INFRASTRUCTURE TO LINK RESOURCES IN A COMPREHENSIVE WAY THAT MAKES THEM AVAILABLE TO ALL.**

When the systems that support the development of these adults are fragmented, it prevents programs from providing the best possible opportunities for young people. The solution lies in a comprehensive network of training and technical assistance opportunities that emerge from a coordinated system of support.

### **FIND CREATIVE WAYS TO FUND TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.**

We must begin to establish coordinated efforts that will help to solidify the base of practitioner knowledge, expand access to greater Minnesota, and acknowledge the value of alternative forms of training and technical assistance to help OST programs provide the best opportunities for youth and children. As the OST field continues to develop, these issues of training and technical assistance, if not resolved, pose even greater challenges in the delivery of programs.

## **COORDINATE WHAT WE HAVE AND FILL IN THE GAPS WITH NEW RESOURCES.**

Rather than establishing new systems of delivery, we must use the strength of the existing systems to support the delivery of such services. With support, training, and technical assistance, providers will be able to meet the needs of a broader audience and in turn support the growth

and development of thousands of young people across the great state of Minnesota.

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This brief was prepared from *An Analysis of Current Training and Technical Assistance Programs Available to Minnesota's Out-of-School Time Program Providers*. Principal authors Elizabeth Wood and Deborah Moore.

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The Minnesota Commission on Out-of-School Time (MnCOST) is an action project of the University of Minnesota Presidential Initiative on Children, Youth and Families. The Commission convenes in January 2004 and will meet five times over the next year.

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