Developing youth workers: Career ladders for sector stability

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A B S T R A C T

Youth development principles advocate for supporting young people, while the staff who work with them face chronic issues like heavy workloads and poor support which are linked to job turnover. Prior quantitative research has presented college-based training as a best practice to professionalize and stabilize the youth workforce. Career ladders that are credit-bearing offer youth workers a stackable credential, as well as an entree into higher education for their personal and professional growth. This article presents case studies to understand qualitatively why and how experiences in higher education result in job promotion and professional retention. Case studies of three urban youth workers reveal insights into their perceived supports and impact of participation, as well as how they overcame barriers and connected learning to working. These emergent themes connect career ladders with professional tenure to inform workforce development and research in this sector. Recommendations based on findings are highlighted for practitioners.

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1. Introduction

Effective community practice depends upon the ability of local agencies to plan for and provide services to affect the health, welfare and recreation of a community (Zastrow, 2010). Within this broad construct, delivering quality and engaging services to children and adolescents is a key factor in determining positive youth outcomes, specifically. Community-based organizations (CBOs) play an important role in developing youth and encouraging them to community action and social change (Richards-Schuster & Dobbie, 2011). But this work must be intentional and strength-based. Agencies which effectively incorporate youth development principles best support the growing capacity of all young people (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004).

These efforts depend upon a quality and skilled workforce to implement them. Youth workers are called upon to provide young people with the increasingly complex skills and supports they need to enter adulthood equipped for the future (Ahrens et al., 2011). At the same time staff is being asked to do more, the youth services field is repeatedly censured for “low pay, heavy workloads and excessive regulation. Lack of training and poor support cause many to leave the field,” (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003, p. 1). Stability created from the retention of well-trained and dedicated youth workers is always critical, but is especially pressing when youth themselves experience uncertainty, as the present climate of economic instability affects domains such as housing, employment and higher education.

Positive youth outcomes are contingent upon community investment in quality youth workers.

The role of training youth workers as a retention strategy is often described as a best practice (Curry, Eckles, Stuart, & Qaqish, 2010, p. 58) and has been studied empirically. Shockley and Thompson (2012) described models of credited undergraduate certificate programs in higher education designed to retain urban youth workers which showed both high rates of completion and conversion of these credits toward a degree (p. 738). Program designs like this are based on the idea that professionalization of the workforce will serve to stabilize it. Indeed, Curry, McCarragher, and Dellmann-Jenkins (2005) found that non-graduate education was a retention factor for both new and experienced workers (p. 943).

This article moves beyond these quantitative studies by using case studies to understand why and how educational experiences result in professional retention. Three youth workers in high-need urban communities with various levels of education were interviewed about their opportunities in college and its connection with their tenure in the youth field.

2. Career ladders

Career ladders, a phrase used to describe vertical mobility within one’s own organization or professional field, are often described in terms of being deficient. Staff turnover and sector instability are frequently attributed to a dearth of robust career ladders in education, health and human services fields which may offer less pay or clear opportunities for growth within an organization. Frontline, low-wage staff stands most at risk. Specifically in the out-of-school-time field, additional challenges for CBOs like limited agency funding, young
staff, and reliance on part-time staff may also contribute to workforce instability (Fleming, 2012). In this context, career ladders can serve to not only strengthen youth programming and the youth services workforce, but also to foster local economic development through stable jobs (Midgley, 1995).

“Organizations that provide for career goals and professional development in organizations and that reward their employees with promotions and compensation not only offer an emotional incentive to stay, but also constitute large opportunity costs associated with leaving that organization” (Weng & McElroy, 2012, p. 258). These authors’ findings describe that employees’ particular work experience also reinforces their broader career choice. Opportunities for professional growth not only resulted in reduced job turnover, but also occupational commitment more broadly as employees are reinforced as to their choice of career (p. 262).

Higher education is an important factor in gaining job skills, responsibilities, and increased earnings that lead to this professional growth and stability. The impacts of education on salary trajectories are well cited. U.S. Census Bureau’s (2011) data show that education levels affect long-term earnings more than any other demographic factor. In earlier writing on the subject, Ebenstein (1996) explains the thinking behind structuring career ladders:

Improved chances for career advancement for direct support workers, including salary increases and greater autonomy and decision making, can be linked to earning college credits, completing specialized courses. These incentives can help agencies retain their most experienced, motivated, and accomplished staff. (p. 116)

Kirkwood and Riegelman (2011) posit that college programs can successfully serve workforce needs through “Career ladders that include transferability of coursework to 4-year institutions and continuing education, including certificate programs” (p. 220). College programs designed specifically for sector workers enable staff to envisage opportunities and growth. Demonstration projects of learning community models in higher education have recognized this, grouping students into occupational clusters (MDRC, 2007).

Quantitative studies showing trends in these various areas are widely available. Textured qualitative data on the workers themselves is less obtainable, especially when broken down by sector. This article describes the personal career and educational trajectories of three youth workers in New York City (NYC) who participated in a sector-based college certificate program. Interview data depict their attitudes and perspectives on their career in the youth-serving field. The authors highlight how these individuals understand their career growth, and offer themes for new directions in workforce development and youth services.

2.1. Youth studies certificate

The Youth Studies Certificate (YSC) at the City University of New York (CUNY) targeted workforce development opportunities in neighborhoods of high need. The YSC aimed to provide intra-agency career ladders and broader capacity building for CBOs in New York City’s youth development field. This 5-course, 12-credit certificate program ran from 1999 to 2011, received grant funds through both city and state agencies, and was offered through several CUNY campuses in the community. The five courses included: a non-credit Bridge to College writing and critical thinking course; coursework in social services; group dynamics, youth development; and an internship experience at a youth agency.

The target audience was incumbent CBO staff, to whom the course sequence was made available at no tuition cost. Admission into the program required a Partnership Agreement form which entailed staff-sponsoring agencies to commit to a raise, bonus or other incentive upon completion. In these ways the YSC promoted the professional development of cohorts of individual youth workers with broader goals of fostering occupational commitment and growth for workers and improving services to youth in diverse communities. Instructors selected to teach in the program had firsthand applied knowledge of the youth field. The coursework itself was interdisciplinary, and featured social work, education, psychology and recreation.

As the leading public university in the United States comprised of 24 institutions in communities throughout New York City, CUNY educates more than 540,000 students; its diverse student body traces ancestry to 205 countries, and 47% of undergraduates have a native language other than English (City University of New York, 2012). CUNY engaged hundreds of youth workers in the YSC, and boasted a retention rate of 72% for students who started the credited coursework: nearly all of these were from underrepresented ethnic and racial groups (Shockley & Thompson, 2012). The program is cited among few initiatives nationwide which provide educational opportunities for youth workers (Bowie & Bronte-Tinkew, 2006; Fleming, 2012).

The YSC was designed as a ‘stackable credential’, a program which enables workers to grow in skills and professional responsibility on their path to higher degrees. Stackable credentials address certain opportunity costs of higher education: students can gain skills to earn more without having to leave the workforce or wait for degree completion. Additionally, students who make academic progress but fall short of attaining a degree often do not have a lower level credential to fall back on (Jenkins & Weiss, 2011, p. 33). Appelbaum and Leana (2011) describe the need for a training pathway which “builds formally from one level of training to the next, with certifications for each that are transportable across settings and employers” (p. 7).

The YSC aimed to provide both educational and career pathways for staff, improve youth services, and spur workforce development in high-need communities.

3. Materials and methods

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand what YSC graduates identified as meaningful in their career and educational plans, and the influence of participation and completion of a 12-credit, themed curriculum. The researchers explored the role of the YSC experience and its application in the life of staff, both professionally and academically, as well as its impact on the youth in their communities.

Research questions were derived from previous empirical study in this area as well as the authors’ assumptions that youth workers who completed the YSC would be poised to take advantage of career ladders at their organizations and be retained in the youth field. Primary research questions for this study about the educational and career pathways of workers included:

1) How did the YSC impact the educational and professional development of program graduates?
2) How did the YSC cohort model affect the learning process and career of the graduates?
3) What were the motivators, facilitators and barriers experienced along their educational and career pathways?
4) What features of workers’ educational experience contributed to tenure in the youth development field?

The data were collected through document analysis and interviews described in further detail below. Additionally, the researchers considered the single cases and constructed a cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006), gathering data for emergent themes and differences. After each interview, the researchers would meet and discuss the interviews, rework the protocol, and code preliminary inductive themes.
3.1. Sample

Research subjects were purposefully selected by the researchers as program graduates who were known as having been promoted at their respective agencies since completing the YSC. The three participants, Alejandra, Chris and Mary, completed the Youth Studies Certificate between fall 2001 and spring 2006 at CUNY campuses. Two of the participants were female, one male, and all self-identified as being from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. They ranged in age from 33 to 50 years old at the time of the interview. Chris and Mary both worked at afterschool programs with community-engagement themes. Alejandra worked for a community health program that provided outreach and engagement. Each participant had completed the 12-credit certificate, though they varied in regards to the total number of college credits completed prior to and since attaining the YSC. Mary completed the certificate and plans to re-enter college soon, and Alejandra continued in college after the certificate but has yet to attain her baccalaureate degree. Chris entered the certificate having already earned an associate’s degree, took additional classes while enrolled in the certificate, and since has earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees. The authors aimed to compare these three different, subsequent educational paths in light of interviewee responses to the research questions.

3.2. Data collection

Document analysis (Merriam, 1998) was possible through YSC student-level administrative records. The documents available for analysis which contributed to the data were provided by participants’ records and their youth agencies’ websites. The student applications and files were reviewed for student demographics, educational background, personal statements describing personal and professional objectives, and work experience. From this, the researchers were able to enhance the student profiles from the participants’ perspective of entry into the certificate. The websites of their employer agencies provided background information for each and provided data needed for a descriptive summary of workplace, goals, mission, and client base for each agency represented.

Conducted in fall 2011, interviews were semi-structured based on the following themes: participant history including educational and career experience, the role of the certificate, the role of YSC cohort, how participation in the certificate influenced their practice and perception of themselves as a youth worker, supports and barriers, and the meaning derived. Two researchers conducted joint in-person interviews at the time and place most convenient for the interviewee. By choice those occurred at the subject’s job site, all of which were located within the bounds of New York City. Subjects provided written consent per the study’s IRB approval. A university tote bag was provided to subjects as a token of thanks for their time.

Each interview took approximately 60 min and was audio-recorded, though researchers also took notes. The researchers facilitated member checking by preparing a summary of the key points of each interview and submitting it within a week to the participant for review. All interviewees validated summary data and one provided minor clarifications.

3.3. Data analysis

The data was analyzed as a cross-case study (Yin, 2003) as well as a basic phenomenological study (Van Manen, 1990). The researchers looked at each participant’s situated experience as a case and then examined the data for themes across the small sample. The data was primarily analyzed inductively through open coding and secondarily with a deductive approach using career development, adult learning, and career ladder themes.

It is important to mention potential limitations in this study. One limitation of the study is the small sample size (N = 3), though this is consistent with a case study approach. Findings discussed are meant to be illustrative, not generalizable. As administrators and counselors for the program, researchers acknowledge their positionality (i.e. authority figures, friends, funding sources) and issues of reflexivity in the research process (Creswell, 2012). The fact that more than five years passed since these students finished the YSC helped to mitigate these effects.

4. Findings

Alejandra, Mary and Chris each completed the 12-credit Youth Studies Certificate, have been promoted after this milestone, and have remained in youth-serving jobs. Each of them cites the YSC as a springboard for their subsequent professional growth. Findings suggest that the YSC activated career ladders for these staff, consistent with program design. Themes that emerged within this context include general supports and barriers, the impact of participation in the YSC, content knowledge, and the impact of academic learning on work contexts and youth served. Examples, chosen in part for their relevance to readers interested in replicable program models, are discussed below.

4.1. Supports

Participants identified supports which helped them start and complete the certificate and continue their education. When deciding to start the YSC, participants identified work-based supports and events as their catalysts. All were encouraged to apply to and participate in the certificate by their immediate supervisor. In addition, each identified that they already had an internal desire to start or continue their education which was then matched with the opportunity to go to school without tuition cost. When asked about motivators, Chris described how his work experience of supervising social work students was instrumental in his decision to return to school. He realized that with his associate degree he possessed skills and knowledge which were valuable to students pursuing more advanced degrees who were about to earn more money than he did. This external trigger facilitated his return to school.

In addition to supporting their participation in the certificate, supervisors were also instrumental in career development for the participants. All described how their careers developed while participating in the certificate as well as once they completed the certificate. Alejandra described how her progressive job changes were at the recommendation and encouragement of her supervisors. In her experience, their engagement was the key in facilitating her career growth despite their losing her as a valued employee.

During the certificate, the cohort structure was also a support for the study participants. Each identified that the cohort fostered “camaraderie” as students and as professionals, and “a sense of belonging.” Mary shared that the cohort became a family. She indicated that they studied together and encouraged each other. Years later, she still maintained contact with some of her classmates.

Each of the participants identified personal characteristics which enabled them to finish the certificate, too. Mary indicated that it was her approach to tasks that enabled her to complete the certificate as she stated, “I like to complete what I start.” Alejandra shared that she grew more confident communicating in English, her second language. She attributes this to a supportive instructor “who didn’t judge” her. Intentional in his career path, Chris believed that he was someone who would take advantage of opportunities as they came along.

All subject names are pseudonyms.
Continuing beyond the 12-credit certificate was motivated internally and facilitated externally. Chris and Alejandra continued their education during and after the certificate. Mary recently contacted her campus to pursue her degree. As noted previously, Alejandra was supported in her decision to continue in college by her supervisor. Chris, who began taking extra credits while enrolled in the certificate, indicated that programs and funding available to him enabled him to continue. He enrolled in an adult learning program which recognized life experience for credit and he also received two scholarships. Both of these helped him complete his degree faster and provided necessary funding to do so.

4.2. Overcoming barriers

Participants identified several barriers related to their participation in the Youth Studies Certificate. Although each participant identified barriers, there was no overlap between participants as each of the barriers was specific to the individuals and their workplace. Alejandra, as an immigrant from Argentina, described how her personal barrier was language. She was concerned that her speaking skills in English were not strong enough to communicate in the college environment. This was overcome eventually through her supervisor’s encouragement to apply to the YSC and by a college instructor who encouraged her participation.

Mary described the difficulty she had in applying her learning to the workplace because of organizational culture. She wanted to advance her work environment based on what she was learning in the course but met resistance from her co-workers. While she had ideas that she thought would carry her organization forward, she had to educate the staff and later the parents in youth development concepts.

Chris described the difficulty experienced with his peers as his work and supervisory responsibilities increased. As his skills developed, he also gained more responsibility; his former peers became his direct reports. This created a professional strain as some of his peers were not willing to accept him in his new role as supervisor. This was a difficult transition, and he knew both his staff and supervisors were assessing how well he would adapt to the change.

4.3. Impact of participation

Study participants identified the changes experienced as a result of participating in the Youth Studies Certificate. These were changes in self-perception, approaches to work, and thought processes. In addition, one participant identified that participation opened access to other educational opportunities.

In direct relationship to participation in the Youth Studies Certificate, both of the women indicated that they experienced changes in how they perceived themselves as youth workers. Alejandra noticed improved self-esteem and as a result, also perceived that she was “better” at her job. This type of change typifies self-efficacy in which accomplishment encourages belief in one’s capacity at that task (Bandura, 1997).

Mary indicated that she too experienced a change, however, more at the root level. She describes her as a “character change,” in which she reflected on previously held assumptions about young people and re-examined them through a new lens. She reminisced during the interview about her pre-YSC attitude towards one particular youth, noting, “I spent that time judging her instead of helping her.” Mary stated that she became “more observant” and patient in attending to the youth in her program after she started the YSC. Mary talked about her experiences with the material as transformative in how she saw herself and her program participants. Her increased awareness of social issues impacting youth behavior allowed her to examine herself and her preconceived ideas of youth conduct. While she knew she had been “blessed with a gift” to work with youth, her new understanding helped her adjust her thinking and change her actions.

In addition to changes in self-perception, participants identified that their thought processes changed. This was facilitated by a broadened view of principles and practices. Chris framed that his “philosophy was enhanced.” In practice, this led to the development of new policies and procedures and a re-organization of systems at his agency.

Changes in thought processes also fostered changes in practice and how the work was being performed. On a quality level, Alejandra indicated that she was “better at documentation.” Mary described the numerous programs that were initiated to foster youth development and youth engagement at her agency (i.e. Youth Council). She also developed and implemented regular staff training sessions. The two who were experiencing college for the first time, Mary and Alejandra, identified numerous ways that the certificate positively impacted their work. Chris had prior college credits and expressed fewer content items as having impact. However, he did identify the certificate as the “x factor” in facilitating his return to college to pursue social work. His participation in the certificate sparked his professional and educational development.

Chris went on to complete his undergraduate and master’s degree. For him, participation in the YSC not only catalyzed his return to college, but also represented additional resources that enabled him to complete sooner. Because the YSC was situated as a special university program within a college’s adult learning degree program, it positioned Chris to access a wide variety of supports including additional scholarships and mentoring. Chris was able to take advantage of the many resources available.

4.4. Connecting learning to youth practice

Participants identified specific content as well as structure that informed their practice, and they articulated how they were able to apply their learning in the workplace. In these experiences they developed academic skills, improved self-perception, and utilized reflection in their practice as youth workers. This finding is consistent with the program design as a sector-based program offered to incumbent workers.

When describing courses that were useful during participation in the certificate, all of the participants explained how the introductory, non-credit College Bridge course was instrumental in their learning as a writing and comprehension course. This course helped students prepare for college-level writing and critical thinking, as well as a life skill such as time management. Chris added that the Bridge course “jump started” his interest in taking more classes.

The other courses provided the “substance that I needed,” as stated by one participant. Specific content that was named as meaningful both during and after the certificate was ages and stages, youth theory, and the book Reclaiming Youth at Risk. These materials provided useful subject matter but were also practical resources which supported these workers in creating programs that were developmentally appropriate and “made the work clearer”.

Two participants identified how learning the “language” of the field influenced their work. Chris described how acquiring youth development terminology gave him the tools needed for communicating with others outside of his agency. He stated that having a “common language” made understanding clearer. Alejandra developed the language of a youth professional and this influenced how she worked. She described how she was “naming things,” meaning that she had learned the vocabulary needed to better describe the work that she was doing. This not only gave her a new capacity but also influenced how she performed her job. This new ability gave Alejandra more confidence and she spoke up more often. As a woman who was previously

self-conscious of her “voice” as an English language learner, this changed her self-perception as a worker: she saw herself as someone who had something meaningful to say.

The participants each described how the certificate improved their professional practice. Alejandra described how participation changed how she interacted with her co-workers. Mary described her experience as one that enabled her to work with youth and engage youth in their development. She newly saw her role as one who helped youth “explore, create, and implement” their goals. Chris was able to observe and reflect on the certificate and apply aspects of the curriculum in his workplace. He noted the model and context as transferable to his job setting. Lastly, Alejandra came to recognize the value of her work experiences and those of her classmates through the peer sharing facilitated by participating in the YSC as a cohort.

5. Discussion

The inductive themes described above depict facets of their experience which proved effective or challenging for these three youth workers. Interview data was secondarily analyzed deductively in relation to themes around career ladders specifically. Informed by the literature in this area, the researchers captured moments which speak to professional growth and increased occupational commitment (Weng & McElroy, 2012). Through the process of applying to, completing and moving on to educational next steps, Mary and Chris have remained at their agency, while Alejandra has remained in the field.

Mary described her professional life before the YSC: “I was in purgatory. I was stuck.” Her youth practice changed as she became more sophisticated about youth concepts, and she believes she was able to lead by example. This resulted in her colleagues becoming more confident about their own professional tools, thus causing a ripple effect at her agency and others for which she has consulted or worked part-time. “I’ve impacted every agency I’ve worked for,” Mary said. “I still apply it each and every day.” She described the courses as giving her the skills in writing, comprehension and grammar that she needed to do her job, though she continues to seek out new trainings. Mary is committed to lifelong learning within the context of youth work. “I know that the YSC, it changed me,” she asserted. She dreams about earning a degree, but knows she’ll always be a youth worker. Mary shared, “I’ve always wanted to make a difference.”

Before the YSC Chris remembered that he was “not really thinking about my future. I just really loved working with kids.” He knew what he was doing professionally was right but he didn’t know why. The YSC broadened his view on effective youth development. He describes his first semester in the program: “I know the objective of the program is to kind of rekindle that flame. Right? So my thing got lit.” He shared that if it wasn’t for starting his education with the YSC he wouldn’t have been promoted multiple times at his agency. Chris described his developed confidence in the principles, practices and philosophies which bolstered his passion for youth work. In light of all he’s accomplished, Chris still looks ahead for academic and professional next steps in the youth field.

Alejandra explained how the YSC made her transition to college easy: as a special program, “everything was done.” Dealing with university offices is harder now that she’s earning her bachelor’s degree on her own. She claims the YSC as her “first accomplishment in the United States,” and she has gone on to earn raise after raise. “I was an asset,” she asserted. She has been able to create career ladders for the people she supervises now so they can advance through tiers, too. As she herself has advanced professionally, she works with youth less than she used to, but she’s excited to develop new programs for youth. When asked about how she balances her commitment to the field with home and school, she asks, “Who is going to do it if I don’t do it?”

These profiles portray these individuals as staff committed to serving youth for the long term. The data clearly depicts this adherence as being strengthened by participation in the YSC. On a personal level it reinforced their passion, confidence and ambition. Academically, the YSC provided a training pathway which led them explicitly to understand or attain the next level of higher education, as they pursue their goals incrementally (Appelbaum & Leana, 2011). The YSC functioned as a professional career ladder for all three, as they identified not only their multiple promotions, but also an improvement in the quality of their work with youth and peers.

6. Recommendations

Community leaders, CBOs, higher education administrators, public agencies, researchers, grantors, youth agency staff, and parents comprise some of the stakeholders interested in fostering the skill and career development of youth workers. Not the least of these are the millions of children and adolescents across the country served by them. While not generalizable, findings described in this article may contribute important insights to the research literature, as well as to the practical concerns of administrators within the youth-serving workforce and college programs. The recommendations and insights suggested by this research and grounded in the authors’ experience are:

- Foster professional support.
  - Professors from the field with a sense of the difficulty of youth work provided affirmation and support to staff balancing jobs and school.
  - Supervisors played a key role in encouraging staff to enroll in the program.
  - Agencies who signed Partnership Agreements and provided incentives to support their staff retained quality workers who expressed dissatisfaction with their environments before the career ladder opportunity.

- Develop flexible programs and contextualized coursework.
  - Locate college programs in the community at convenient locations for CBO staff.
  - The cohort model seemed to be an important source of moral, academic and professional support for youth workers in college, especially those who were unsure of their skills.
  - Program flexibility enabled staff to simultaneously participate in the YSC and degree programs so that they were able to accumulate more credits faster.
  - Contextualized learning enabled staff to implement youth development principles at their job site. Coursework advanced students both academically and professionally.
  - Approaching staff in a sector-based, professional context impacted their views of themselves as professionals.

- Provide funding through tuition and scholarships.
  - Grant-funded tuition enabled youth workers to participate in college without the financial burden that otherwise would have presented a major barrier.

The authors recommend attention to these insights when planning and implementing professional development programs, allocating funds, and conducting research. Each recommendation represents intentional support that facilitates the development and movement on a career ladder.

7. Future research

Research subjects depicted in these case studies successfully completed the 12-credit Youth Studies Certificate. Because of the small
sample size, a replicated study with a larger sample might yield generalizable findings. Follow-up research could also include an on-site study to assess the benefits accrued to youth and communities resulting from these youth workers’ participation. An examination of barriers and issues for workers who were unable to complete the certificate would prove useful for planning of future cohorts. For those who did complete the certificate but did not pursue additional higher education, understanding the way students made use of a stackable credential for their career advancement may influence program design, recruitment, and career advisement. Additionally, it may be interesting to conduct research with a sample of YSC completers who did not stay in the youth field. Curry et al. (2005) suggest that education may actually increase occupational turnover because staff see new employment opportunities (p. 935).

8. Conclusion

The social welfare of communities across the globe depends on the strength of supports. In the U.S., trends in health reform encourage community-based approaches, and educated health and human services staff with experience will become increasingly in demand. Organizations’ ability to train and retain quality workers is paramount in this context. The design of the Youth Studies Certificate, in both structure and content, offered a college-based career ladder to diverse New York City youth workers with the aim of allowing them to grow professionally at their agencies through the acquisition of new skills. Occupational commitment was also fostered, evidenced by the sample featured in this study which had surpassed benchmarks for longevity in the child welfare field (Curry et al., 2005). Qualitative research data lend rich insight into program features that staff credit as having made an impact on their work. Staff interviewed link their educational experience with improved professional capacity and positive impacts on services for youth in their communities.

References