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Contact: Kristen Truffa

Email: ktruffa@proyouthworkamerica.org

Phone: (239) 287-0125

www.proyouthworkamerica.org

REPORT EXAMINES GROWTH AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF YOUTH WORK PRACTICE

An estimated 3 million adults are professional child and youth care workers, supporting vulnerable children, teens and young adults on the sometimes perilous journey to adulthood. They work in a range of settings, from residential treatment facilities to juvenile justice programs to afterschool programs. Given the importance of youth workers to the positive development of young people at risk, it is critical that policymakers and the child welfare field itself look hard at the qualifications and professional trajectory of these workers: who they are, how they are trained, and how they are compensated.

This report, from ProYouthWork America, offers a point-in-time look at how one segment of this fast-maturing field – those specializing in teens and young adults – is tackling the challenges of professionalization. For several years, this segment of the field has struggled to define itself, to become a recognized and better-remunerated profession ready to take its place among educators, counselors and other professionals working with adolescents and young adults. How far has it come, and what remains to be done?

Youth Work Practice: A Status Report on Professionalization and Expert Opinion about the Future of the Field reviews literature on the topic and looks at how states, organizations and academia are working together to create clear pathways for advancement for youth workers through systematized training, credentialing and partnerships that link higher education and jobs.

The report includes interviews with experts in the field on growth and current status of the field; about which issues they believe are most important in the movement toward professionalization; and what sort of efforts are most needed right now. Most agree that there should be more professional development opportunities for workers, or at least some subsets of workers; more research linking the practice of youth work to positive outcomes for youth; and clearer standards and practices for the field. Many also agree on the critical need for a 'national voice,' an organization capable of pulling together the disparate strands of youth work, that speaks for the field to both policymakers and the public, and that recruits talented new workers.

[Download the report here.](#)

ProYouthWork America is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to build and sustain a highly skilled child and youth services workforce for the 21st century.