

Setting a Standard: The History of Professionalizing the Field of Youth Work in Indiana

Historically, people have come to the field of youth work by following a variety of paths:

- Some have come to youth work after preparing for a career in another field like social work, education, criminal justice, recreation, or counseling.
- Others have become youth workers “accidentally” when they discovered they had a desire to assist young people toward healthy development so they pursued skill development through training and on the job experiences.
- Still others find themselves working with youth without any preparation at all.

As a result, a group of leaders within the youth development field were convened by the Indiana School Age Coalition in early 2002 to address two key facts: there was a shortage of well-trained, qualified school age care practitioners in Indiana; and the primary contributor to the problem was a lack of professional status. This group determined that one way to raise the status of the youth development field was to identify core competencies and then to qualify practitioners with a professional credential. Such a credential would certify that an individual has mastered a specific set of defined skills and knowledge and has demonstrated competencies to perform particular roles in youth programs.

The Indiana Youth Development (IYD) process represents a state-wide effort to credential qualified individuals who impact children and adolescents ages five to eighteen. The credential is a competency-based professional recognition developed in Indiana by a state-wide team of youth development practitioners. Persons earning this credential demonstrate not only that they possess key knowledge and skills but ability to successfully implement such skills and knowledge.

The IYD Credential is closely akin to the Military School-Age and the National Council of Professional Recognition Child Development Associate credentials. Indiana is one of eleven states to develop a credential process but the only one to recognize the skills for both youth development and child development professionals. The credentialing process involves performance-based training, assessment and evaluation.

The Indiana Youth PRO Association (formerly Indiana School-Age Consortium-ISAC) administers the IYD credentialing process as a state-wide effort to improve the quality of youth professional skills and abilities. The Consortium is an affiliate of the National After-School Association.

IYPA works with higher education institutions such as the Ivy Tech Community Colleges throughout the state and with T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood© INDIANA. Credential costs will vary according to each candidate’s education and work experience.

At the heart of the program are five core content areas which are further broken into more specific competency areas. Additionally, these areas are further broken down into 32 functional areas with numerous assessment criteria. The chart below includes only the five core content areas and a listing of the specific skill areas. *To see the complete description of the competencies and the criteria for assessment go to the IYPA web site: www.indianayouthpro.org.*

Core Competencies	Specific Competency Areas
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT	-Knowledge of Child/Youth Development -Observation/Assessment Methods -Individual Differences -Guidance Skills
FAMILIES& COMMUNITIES	-Diversity -Family Interaction
PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTS	-Healthy & Safety -Indoor & Outdoor Environments
PROGRAM CONTENT	-Inter-personal & Intra-personal Development -Cognitive & Literacy Learning -Physical Learning -Creative Learning
PROFESSIONALISM	-Self Development -Youth Appreciation -Ethical Standards -Professional Development

This credential was initially seen as a way of providing an entry level worker in the youth development field a way to gain knowledge and demonstrate the skills they had learned. It was also hoped that attaining this credential would be a first step along their path to professional growth and development in the field. Recently, Indiana YOUTHPRO has developed an alternate method to achieve the credential which recognized the levels of higher education and the years of work experience that are held by many long-serving professionals in the youth work field.

While the IYD credential is a significant step, it only addresses the situation of those who are already in the field of youth development, no matter how they arrived there. We want to make it possible for an individual to deliberately choose youth work as a career and to be able to receive both the academic training in theory to build their knowledge and skills and the guided skill development they would receive from fieldwork experience under the supervision of a skilled professional. To that end, members of both the Navigators and the Journey Fellowship, in cooperation with partners in the higher education field, have been working at developing a youth work degree to be granted by Indiana University, a joint project of the Schools of Education; Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (HPER); and School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA).