

Youth Worker Education - Fully supporting those who work with and for children and young people.

Child And Youth Care In A Developing World - Global Perspective.

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FICE Conference

Kisumu, Kenya

29 March 2017

Abstract

Recent research comparing youth worker education in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the USA, identified that programs equally grounded in theoretical and practical studies, and located in the work space of youth organisations and tertiary education institutions, provide the best opportunities for youth workers' education and training. By doing this we support those working with a nation's young people fully, providing them with the tools to deal with the issues that matter most to young people, including education and employment, health, housing, etc. This in turn has a positive impact on the larger community and families.

This presentation will discuss how youth worker education and professional development pathways are vital for the health of a nation's youth.

PhD - Youth Work Training in Historical and Contemporary Contexts: Developing a New Pre-Service Model for Australia.

AIM: To produce work-ready youth work graduates who are able to be independent workers more quickly.

Three sections:

1. Historic and current comparison of youth worker education in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales) and the United States of America
2. Demographic and social profile of Australia's young people (2001-2011).
3. Creation of a new undergraduate youth work degree for Australia, which was favourably evaluated by 12 international appraisers.

Included interviews with recent graduates, youth work organisations and youth work education and training providers, to gain their views on the effectiveness of current youth worker education and training.

Historically, youth work was:

- u A fine balance between social change and social control
- u Initially provided by faith-based organisations and well-intentioned individuals who saw a need to provide a positive environment and opportunities for children and young people in their communities.
- u Education, sport and recreation were initially popular avenues of access to providing youth work to young people
- u Organisations provided their volunteers with some education and training so they were better able to help those in their care
- u Tertiary-based education followed after this.

Current youth work programs:

- u Are provided by either vocational or higher education providers
- u Provide a qualification to graduates that, in most parts of the world, is practically and theoretically based and recognised professionally so that graduates are competent AND capable in their practice
- u Are based on the local theoretical framework of each country
 - u Strengths based - Australia, New Zealand, UK, USA
 - u Therapeutic Care- Canada
- u In the United Kingdom, youth workers must be qualified before gaining employment. Elsewhere, the youth work industry prefers to employ qualified workers

Key issues for Australia's young people (2001 - 2011) similar elsewhere in the world:

- u A changing cultural, linguistic and religious profile of Australia's youth including those who are immigrants and refugees and second generation youth cohort
- u Family formation and the vulnerability of children and young people
- u Education, training and career aspirations of Australia's youth
- u Employment and income support
- u Careers education
- u Health: physical and mental well-being
- u Sexuality and gender
- u Young people and the criminal justice system
- u Cultural and sporting activities
- u Young people and the 'new' technologies.

New degree: Bachelor of Community Youth Work

- u Three years duration/six semesters
- u 20 core units, two electives and 780 hours of assessed vocational practice
- u Courses included addressed what is currently delivered AND the identified gaps in curriculum e.g. family, working with refugees, etc.
- u Strong emphasis on the demonstration of the practical application of the qualification's theory achieved through the recommended objectives, content, skills and assessment details provided.
- u The inclusion of an additional option of an extra Honours year extends the current educational offerings in Australia beyond the current three year undergraduate degree offered in Australia in 2016.

Assessed Field Placement

- u Deemed to be an integral part of study, the appraisers liked the “... *progression in (students) taking the greater responsibility in the placement, displaying greater levels of initiative, etc. to demonstrate competence and knowledge*” (A12) and believed that this area of study
- u ... *was very well covered and is in a sense the most important. It also allows the student to do this in ‘block’ and also get full supervision from both the university and also the supervisor from the work place. I like the way it is integrated with theory and also the visual postcards and journals which allow for reflective practice and is beneficial for students learning and the demonstration of knowledge in problem solving* (A11).

Findings

- **Youth worker education and training needs to be an equal mixture of practice (in the work space) and theory.**
- Youth workers require a sound knowledge and understanding of both practical and administrative skills to successfully address the multitude of scenarios they face daily.
- The benefits of work experience prior to commencing their studies, provides students with a greater awareness of how to apply the theoretical training to support their practical knowledge.
- The youth work sector and recent graduates agree that:
 - Vocational graduates have a greater practical skill base to draw upon once they graduate and are more likely to undertake further study to increase and add to their knowledge base.
 - Higher Education graduates only, have a strong knowledge base but are less likely to possess all of the necessary skills required to undertake the work and often need to be retrained over the first 18 months of employment by their employers.

The need for trained workers

- u Youth work provides support to children and young people as they navigate through their social, psychosocial, physical, mental health and emotional development.
- u The youth work sector benefits from having properly trained workers
- u It provides the youth work sector with workers who are fully able and prepared, theoretically and practically, to support the young people in their care.
- u Impacts at the community, family and individual (children and youth) levels
- u Employing local workers has the following benefits:
 - u Better understanding of local issues
 - u Addresses issues of regional imbalances of human right resourcing/staffing numbers
- u Providing employment opportunities and career paths.

The current situation in Kenya

- u Most current programs focus on the child and young person's ability to speak English and Kiswahili
- u An enormous volume of workers are volunteers who are learning on the job, with no time to truly reflect upon their practice.
- u Gaining the knowledge and skills to do their job more efficiently will support those working with children and young people to help them to thrive in their own lives and within their communities.

In Kenya, trained child and youth workers addresses the following issues:

- u An increasing youth population means there is an increase in the quantity of programs required; the quality of those programs must also be addressed to ensure that all needs of the children, young people and their families/communities are suitably addressed.
- u Polygamous families - a need for parenting skills
- u High risk of gender-based violence creates a need for accurate information and how to support and help those affected
- u High rates of family violence where children and young people are more often the victims. Workers require the knowledge and skills to support all involved.
- u Emerging complexities.

Challenges of providing youth worker education

- u Needs to be cost effective:
 - u Accessible for those who want and ought to receive the training
 - u Covers all delivery costs
- u Pitched at the relevant level of training for local workers
 - u Further/technical/vocational
 - u Skill sets
 - u Certification
 - u Diploma
 - u Higher education
 - u Undergraduate degree
 - u Postgraduate degree
- u Sufficient organisations to provide places where students can undertake supervised placement during their studies.

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