

NorthStar Youth Worker Fellowship

Overview

Background Information

For almost a decade now, different groups in Minnesota have been meeting to discuss the importance of quality in our work and to figure out ways to address the calls for credentialing and certification, as well as questions about adopting other various standards and competencies for youth workers.

These meetings and working groups have helped the field raise a lot of questions. What is youth work and what is required to do it? How can we prove quality and expertise to young people, families, organizations and funders? What kind of system would allow youth work to blossom and grow, not feel constricted and inflexible?

To help provide some of the answers to questions about youth work and its practice, the NorthStar Youth Work Fellowship, previously known as the Minnesota Walkabout Fellowship, was created. This Fellowship was not intended to be a typical class or workshop series, rather it sought to provide a “space” for a cohort of experienced youth workers to have time and resources in order to delve deeper into these questions and write position papers that add to the wisdom of the field.

The University of Minnesota’s Extension Center for Youth Development and the Minnesota Department of Education partnered to pilot the Walkabout Fellowship in 2011-12. The initial fellowship cohort included thirteen experienced, practicing youth work professionals. The fellows held various roles within their current positions (e.g., program director, coordinator, event lead, case manager). At least four of the thirteen held a Master’s degree. The fellows all worked in Minnesota; one fellow worked in Northern Minnesota while all others worked throughout the metropolitan area.

Given the success of the pilot – 9 practitioners completed the process, providing a collection of thought-provoking written pieces that you can read [here](#) – it was decided to move forward with a second cohort group and a new name. The 2013-14 NorthStar Fellowship cohort is made up of twelve youth work professionals. These Fellows also hold various positions in the field of youth work, (e.g., direct-line staff, program managers, evaluators) and are exploring issues of autonomy and authority in the field of youth work.

The NorthStar Fellowship is sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Education, the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at Augsburg College, and Youthprise.

Fellowship Purpose

The purpose of the NorthStar Youth Worker Fellowship is to democratize the generation of knowledge in the field of youth work in Minnesota. This will be accomplished by engaging a cohort of experienced youth work practitioners in knowledge creation through exploration,

reflection and study. Ultimately this will create a community of learners to generate more wisdom, language, and leadership in the field of youth work in Minnesota.

The goals of this Practitioner Fellowship are to:

- Unearth and legitimize practice-based perspectives on emergent issues and tensions to broaden current conversations about youth work.
- Support a core group of practitioners in the community who will develop and demonstrate their leadership abilities that include increasing their capacity to represent the field on issues of importance.
- Create a space to incubate practiced theory that influences the field.
- Demonstrate our commitment to explicit education, training, and professional development for youth workers as essential to high quality practice.

Fellowship Structure and Topic

Fellows in the 2014-15 cohort will examine rights-based approaches to youth work in Minnesota's past as well as the possible impact of using this approach on current youth work practice. Each fellow will formulate an inquiry question and spend the year reviewing relevant research and writings; tapping the local wisdom of their professional network; engaging in conversation with local and national leaders in the field; and write a position paper that will inform systems development and field advancement in Minnesota.

Inquiry Methods

In addition to readings, Fellows will tap into their professional network as part of their inquiry process. Fellows will choose their methods for generating data that could include: archival research, surveys, focus groups, interviews, site visits.

Fellowship Requirements

- Attend monthly meetings - typically 3 hours in length - 9am to noon, 2nd Tuesday of the month.
 - Day-long orientation meeting, Tuesday, September 9, 2014
 - Day-long feedback event and writing retreat - April 14, 2015
 - Public presentation of papers - August 2015
- Active involvement in a cohort learning community
- Independent reading, writing, and meetings
 - While the time commitments will vary over the course of the year, expect an additional 8-15 hours per month.
- Produce a position paper for publication

What will Fellows Receive?

- 2 graduate credits available (tuition fees apply)
- \$500 stipend at project completion (can be applied toward graduate credits)
- Books and materials
- Extensive professional development and study delivered in a peer network format
- Extensive opportunities to engage with local and national youth development leaders
- An opportunity to lead and influence Minnesota's youth work field

Who Should Apply?

- Mid- to upper-level youth work practitioners and program managers
- Minimum of five years of experience in direct service, management, and staff development.
- Familiarity with current youth development research, best practices, and professional development offerings.
- Desire to explore youth development practice, professional development, and systems and institutions that impact youth work