

# NorthStar Youth Worker Fellowship Overview

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## 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 Worker 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.

To date, twenty experienced, practicing youth workers have produced a collection of thought-provoking written pieces that you can read [here](#) – and [here](#). The 2015-16 NorthStar Fellowship cohort is made up of six exemplary youth work professionals examining rights-based approaches to youth work. Their papers will be available in August 2016.

The NorthStar Fellowship is sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Education, the Sabo Center for Democracy and Citizenship at Augsburg College, Youthprise, Ignite Afterschool and the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development.

## 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 2016-17 cohort **will examine youth organizing as a framework for youth work**. Fellows may look at youth organizing work in Minnesota's past as well as explore the possible impact of using this approach on current youth work practice. Each of the fellows will frame 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 writing a position paper that will inform systems development and field advancement in Minnesota.

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## **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 13, 2016
  - Feedback event – Tuesday, March 14, 2017
  - Day-long writing retreat – Tuesday, April 11, 2017
  - Public presentation of papers - August 2017
- 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
- 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