

WORKFORCE CRISIS AND OPPORTUNITY: THE EVOLVING FIELD AND EMERGING PROFESSION

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ABSTRACT: Child and youth care (CYC) practice significantly contributes to the well-being of children, youth, families, communities, and businesses in the United States. Research conducted over the past 15 years has documented systemic problems that limit the availability of a well-prepared, competent workforce to meet the needs of the rapidly expanding field of CYC. Recent practitioner-led efforts have focused on field building by defining the field of practice, describing the body

of knowledge and skills, establishing professionally sanctioned ethics and practice standards, and implementing a national professional credentialing system. This article describes the current state of the field and proposes a vision of a national effort to unify professional development across the field, highlighting current trends, milestones, challenges, and priorities. The current evolution of the CYC profession holds great promise in creating a unified approach to workforce development that can significantly impact the emergence of a competent workforce.

Key Words: Certification, credentialing, child and youth care (CYC), standards, child and youth work (CYW), competency assessment, workforce development, competencies, certification programs, education programs, advocacy, professionalism, childcare, professional development, professionalization, and field building.

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WORKFORCE CRISIS

Child and youth care (CYC) is a significant contributor to American communities and society. CYC services are offered through a multitude of systems that include early care and education, community-based child and youth development programs, parent education and family support, school-based programs, community mental health, group homes, residential centers, day and residential treatment, early intervention, home-based care and treatment, psychiatric centers, rehabilitation programs, pediatric health care, and juvenile justice programs. There are more CYC practitioners serving the community than all of the other human services professionals working with children, youth, and families combined according to Curry, Eckles, Stuart, & Qaqish (2010).

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that there are currently 1.7 million practitioners nationally (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). Given the limitations of the Bureau's classification and tracking systems, the Annie E. Casey Foundation Workforce Study (2003) found the actual number is significantly higher (ranging between 2.3 and 6 million), depending on the source and the job titles included in the estimate.

The U.S. Bureau has reported that CYC work was among the fastest growing occupations for the decade 1998–2008, and that it must increase by 26% to keep up with demand. It is clear from any of these workforce estimates that CYC practitioners are a large and growing group that are significantly involved in promoting the well-being of children, youth, and families in American communities.

The number of children and youth in the U.S. population has grown from 64.2 million in 1990 to 73.7 million in 2006 (an increase of 9.5 million). Children and youth comprise approximately one quarter of the total population. Over the past 100 years the prevalence of single-parent families has risen substantially. The U.S.

Census Bureau estimates that 20.6 million families are currently single parent families. Increasing economic demands require that an estimated 69% of all families include a single parent or both parents working outside the home (U. S. Department of Labor, 2005). These and other societal and economic forces have dramatically increased the need for out-of-home CYC. This trend is expected to continue in the foreseeable future and will drive the need to expand the number of CYC practitioners available.

Over the past 10 years increasing numbers of studies have demonstrated the connection between CYC services and economic productivity. A Cornell University research project (2004) reported that "Child care breakdowns leading to employee absences cost businesses \$3 billion annually in the U.S." Research has documented that almost 30% of employed parents experienced a breakdown in their child care arrangement, which was associated with employee absenteeism, tardiness, and reduced concentration at work. The average American working parent misses nine days of work per year (Carillo, 2004). As children move through day care and into elementary school, the number of days missed by parents increases to 13. These absences are costly for employers, as is turnover (often child care related). These costs are estimated as one and a half times the annual salary for an exempt employee and three-quarters of annual wages for hourly workers (Phillips & Resiman, 1992).

Increasing numbers of large corporations are funding child care and child care referral services to increase worker productivity. Recent research from a variety of industry and academic sources is quantifying the connection between investments in CYC services and increasing return on business investment. This is demonstrated through improved worker performance and commitment, benefits of being an employer of choice, increases in employee retention which relate to customer retention, and other benefits gained when reliable, competent CYC services are available, thereby increasing worker well-being, satisfaction and productivity. The lack of quality CYC services has economic impact and costs employers billions of dollars annually.

Initiatives to study and address the workforce crisis that exists in the child welfare field are being undertaken by such groups as the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), Annie E. Casey Foundation, Alliance for Children and Families (ACF), Association for Child and Youth Care Practice (ACYCP), American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), National Staff Development and Training Association (NSDTA), National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (NAPCWA), Forum for Youth Investment, Children's Defense Fund (CDF), National Association of Social Worker (NASW). Since the quality of the workforce is considered by many workforce leaders to be a significant, if not the most important, determinant of outcomes for children and youth (Eckles et al, 2009; Gannett, Mello, & Starr, 2009), promoting a competent workforce through certification can potentially improve the quality of care and promote positive outcomes for millions of children and youth.

In 2003 the Annie E. Casey Foundation conducted an extensive study of the problems facing the human service workforce. They concluded that “Frontline social service workers are the heart and soul of our nation’s publicly funded human services system” (p. 1). Research led them to define eight key factors that pose the greatest challenge to this workforce including: “Nonprofit, government, and for-profit employers cannot find sufficient numbers of quality staff; when they do, too many of those workers do not stay; workers are paid less than those in other jobs at comparable levels; there is limited opportunity for professional growth and advancement; workers receive poor supervision, and little guidance or support; rule-bound jobs leave little latitude for discretion and drive out the most entrepreneurial workers; the education and training these workers receive do not match the roles and demand actually encountered on the job; and workers are paid less than those in other jobs that require comparable skills” (pp. 22-23).

The Alliance for Children and Families observed, “There are many variables necessary to create successful child welfare outcomes, but none is as important as workforce quality ... The child welfare workforce must be supported and invested in, even during times of fiscal constraint” (Dreyfus & Hornung, 2006, p. 1).

The Child Welfare League of America, American Public Human Services Association, and Alliance for Children and Families (2001) noted “The greatest concerns for the child welfare field are the increasing number of children needing services and the lack of qualified staff” (p. 1). They further noted that turnover often exceeds 50% per year and position vacancies often surpass 12%. A listing of key challenges for staffing included: increasingly complex demands for services and workloads, lack of resources for clients, insufficient training, inadequate financial compensation, safety and liability concerns, and poor physical and organizational working conditions.

The findings of these three studies are typical. Many of the studies echo similar themes and concerns. It is becoming widely apparent that much information is missing from our understanding of the depth and size of the problem with the child care workforce. What we do know is that the current workforce is not well prepared to meet employer and community needs.

It is widely believed that a multitude of problems are related to the failings of the CYC workforce. Current trends indicate that the need for out-of-home developmental and educational programs (i.e., early care and education, afterschool, recreation, and community youth services) will continue to increase in the foreseeable future. The lack of a competent, well-prepared workforce that employers can depend on to supply the increasing numbers of workers needed in CYC programs is having a significant impact on types of services available, access to these services, and the quality of services. Lack of adequate training and preparation is a significant contributor to high staff turnover and safety concerns that often lead to poor service outcomes, litigation, and program closure due to regulatory violations.

Many studies report that the failure to provide adequate early developmental and supportive services leads to increased costs to society as welfare and incarceration

tion costs that are paid out over the span of a lifetime. Experts estimate that the country saves between \$1.7 and \$2.3 million for each high-risk youth prevented from adopting a life of crime (Newman, Fox, Lynn, & Christiansen, 2000). Child development researchers believe that the national cost of failing to provide at least two years of quality early childhood education for poor children under five is in excess of \$400 billion (Barnett, 1995). The failings of the child care workforce are costing the U.S. billions of dollars.

Workforce research clearly demonstrates that the problems which impact the CYC field are not limited to a particular practice setting or geographic region. There is a commonality of problems across the entire system irrespective of regional location and practice setting. The failings of the CYC workforce have a significant social and financial impact on individuals, communities, and society as a whole, in the present and far into the foreseeable future.

One of the consequences of the evolution of the CYC field as separate practice settings is that national organizations addressing workforce development have all limited their work to a single setting. Given the commonality of problems across settings and regional areas, it is clear at this juncture, that a concerted national effort working across settings and geographic areas is needed to address the problem. Until recently, no national organizations have taken the lead in creating a priority for this type of work.

WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITY

The Association for Child and Youth Care Practice (ACYCP), working in concert with national and international partners, established the Child and Youth Care Certification Board (CYCCB) in 2007. This organization is a collaboration of practitioners, employers, and educators to address critical needs of the workforce. The formation of CYCCB establishes an organization composed of key stakeholders, with national and international scope, whose mission is to promulgate a unified profession with integrated credentialing and education systems that promote widespread workforce development, independent of setting or geographic location. This has not existed previously. Many believe that leadership from an organization of this scope holds the key for future workforce development and integration.

CYCCB will undertake the most comprehensive and widespread effort to date to address key issues that have previously limited the emergence of a well-prepared and stable workforce in the CYC field. This effort, focused on extending the field building activities previously accomplished by ACYCP, is expected to make a significant contribution to improving the developmental, educational, recreational, correctional, and treatment programs available to children, youth, and families in American communities. To accomplish this goal, CYCCB will provide leadership to (1) promote a unified vision of the field of practice, (2) increase collaboration between stakeholders across practice environments, (3) promote higher standards of practice, (4) increase and coordinate research efforts to explore the impact of sys-

tem change on the workforce, employers, and communities, and (5) expand public awareness of the contribution of CYC practitioners, and expand practitioner participation in advocacy.

Unified Vision of the Profession

The needs of young people and families have been addressed by a multitude of service providers that have developed in relative isolation from each other. Professional CYC in the U.S. has developed over the last 100 years. Programs typically emerged out of a local need to provide for the young people in a community. This led to regional variation in priorities, philosophies, and approaches. As state and federal funding was used to enhance programs, many programs evolved following the requirements of these funding streams. Typically this funding only addressed needs within a specific practice setting with little consideration for the overall workforce. This has led to the current divisions within the field where each practice setting generally views itself as unique and isolated (Charles & Garfat, 2009; Morgan, 1998).

This view of the field offers serious limitations within the workforce. Practitioners coming into the field are only prepared for work in one practice arena. Many never recognize the opportunities offered by jobs in other settings, and if they do attempt to change employment settings, many face the disappointment of starting over at the bottom of the employment ladder when their credentials are not recognized. These are significant deterrents to people who are seeking career employment with opportunities for increasing pay and career advancement. The vision of CYC as irreconcilably divided practice settings has served to establish the current field of practice, but in no setting has it led to the emergence of an adequate workforce.

Many of the major practice arenas (early care and education, afterschool care, residential, and youth development) have developed competencies that describe practice and have established credentialing programs. In 1975 the Council for Professional Recognition began issuing the competency-based Child Development Credential to entry-level early care and education practitioners. In 1989 the Military Child Care Act established a competency-based credential for afterschool practitioners in military settings. The competency-based Youth Development Associate credential for afterschool and youth development practitioners was piloted in Boston beginning in 2003. Residential practitioner credentialing has been available through the Ohio Association of Child and Youth Care Professionals, CYC Certification Institute in Texas, Wisconsin Association of Child and Youth Care Professionals, Wyoming Association of of Child and Youth Care Professionals beginning in the 1970s. Many of these programs are competency-based. Credentialing programs for afterschool workers exist in 14 state affiliates of the National AfterSchool Association (Dennehy, Gannet, & Robbins, 2006; Eckles, Thomas, Gonzales, & Fedke, 1995).

Until recently it was widely believed that the differences between practice settings made it impossible to train practitioners in foundational knowledge and skills to prepare them for work in multiple settings. Analysis of competencies drawn from across service settings carried out by the Child and Youth Care Certification Institute in Texas and the North American Certification Project in the 1990s confirms that fundamental knowledge and skills exist that cross the boundaries between practice environments. These competencies provide a significant foundation that can be used to unify training, education, and credentialing programs across practice arenas (Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2002; Eckles, Thomas, Gonzales, & Fedke, 1995).

Further validation of this idea was found when a panel of experts compared the *Competencies for Professional Child and Youth Work Practitioners* (which describes practice across settings) to the recently adopted *Nationally Recognized Core Competencies For Afterschool and Youth Development Professionals (2011 draft)* (which describes afterschool and youth development practice). They found the competencies from both documents were “significantly congruent” (p. 3). The documents clearly describe a similar body of knowledge, skills, and values even though they were developed independently (Child & Youth Care Certification Board, 2011a).

CYCCB credentialing is based on the professional certification program developed by the North American Certification Project (NACP) and the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice (ACYCP). This program, developed over a seven-year period by over 100 practitioners in the U.S. and Canada, was pilot tested on 775 practitioners in six states and two Canadian provinces. It is based on competencies that were compiled from the review of 87 competency sources drawn from the major practice settings in the CYC field. The assessment process includes performance on a 75-item, scenario-based exam, supervisor assessments, and a portfolio. The certification program reflects the best thinking of the professional community on the skills and knowledge necessary for professional practice and how to best conduct cost-effective competency assessment. Perhaps more importantly, the program is based on competencies that span practice settings and prepare practitioners for employment in a variety of settings (Curry, Eckles, Stuart, & Qaqish, 2009; Curry, Schneider-Muñoz, Eckles, & Stuart, 2011; Eckles et al., 2009).

The competencies, reviewed by an international panel of experts, reflect the most comprehensive analysis conducted to date to identify the core knowledge and skills involved in professional CYC work in the U.S. They clearly demonstrate that foundational concepts and practices exist across practice environments. These competencies represent a major paradigm shift and provide a platform for unifying workforce development, education, and credentialing across practice environments.

Members of the CYCCB believe there are many advantages to the unified view of the field. Practitioners will benefit from education and credentialing that prepares them for employment throughout the field, thereby increasing access to employment. Unified training and education programs will create pathways for pursuing

career development over the span of a lifetime, thus increasing employment opportunities, career motivation, and retention.

Employers will have access to a workforce that is grounded in professional practice and prepared with the basic tools to deliver high quality developmental care. Fewer organization resources will be needed to prepare employees with basic practice concepts and approaches. Hiring from a workforce pool that has already invested in job preparation will decrease the number of failed hires. An integrated credentialing system will provide a dependable means for assessing previous learning and competence when employers make hiring decisions.

Educators will have a blueprint for expanding content offered in their academic programs that will increase class sizes and better align educational programs to the needs of employers, communities, and the workforce. Articulation between college programs and other sources of quality instruction will increase access to education. Training and credentialing organizations will have a model for how to fit their contributions into the larger context of the overall workforce. As the system integrates, increased unification of training content and opportunities for in-service and community-based training to articulate to college degree credits are expected to occur.

The community will benefit from an increased prevalence of well-prepared practitioners to staff the many CYC programs needed by children, youth, and families locally. All of these benefits taken together are expected to have a significant impact on creating a career-oriented, well-prepared workforce that has access to critical professional development opportunities and wide employment.

The CYCCB is implementing the national professional certification program as a framework for understanding what a fully prepared practitioner knows and can do, independent of setting. CYCCB will establish wide access to testing services through agreements with training entities, universities, employers, and the professional community. Over time, summit meetings will be held with key stakeholders to explore the benefits and challenges of creating an integrated education and credentialing system. Specific training in aligning competencies and assessment methods will be undertaken to support wider understanding of the characteristics and benefits of this integrated system.

CYCCB leaders believe that this is a critical time in the evolution of the CYC profession. The credentialing and education programs that support the workforce are expanding. Without national leadership with a vision of a unified profession and professional development system, it is likely that divisions between settings will continue to produce short-sighted solutions to the overall workforce crisis. Prioritizing a unified vision of the profession at this time can go a long way in focusing limited resources to produce results that better serve the entire profession and the diverse needs of American communities.

CYCCB members recognize that success in unifying the field of practice will require a sustained effort to promote a unified professional vision. This infers a need

to establish opportunities for collaboration across practice settings, stakeholders, and regional areas.

Collaboration

The emerging professional identity that embraces commonalities between practice settings is opening the door to true collaborative action. Practitioners in many settings are realizing that all are working to maximize developmental outcomes, and all are using core methods and approaches.

The workforce studies are creating a pathway for increasing collaboration. Although each of the studies focuses on a particular segment of the total workforce, the problems identified and solutions indicated point in a common direction. No segment of the workforce has been successful in creating an adequately trained and available pool of potential employees. No segment has developed training, education, or credentialing programs that adequately address needs. Failures in recruitment and retention are widely experienced. Problems are widespread and require large scale intervention to create a response scaled to address the need. All of the workforce studies point to a preparation system that is broken and in need of fundamental reform. The emerging understanding of the commonalities of the problems faced by all of the practice settings is opening the way for increasing collaboration.

Collaboration is increased when groups identify common needs and themes that are mutually beneficial. This typically creates a platform for mutual support and collaborative action. Many of the organizations sponsoring workforce studies have identified the need for policy reform, increased public understanding of workforce needs, increased funding, better access to relevant training and education, and recruitment and retention. Many of these workforce studies were undertaken by groups working together. Many groups have already responded to their study recommendations by expanding their collaboration agendas. The recognition by each of these groups of the benefits of working collectively and thereby increasing their influence is expected to further drive collaboration.

The CYCCB promotes a collaborative environment that supports cooperation, exploration of challenges and benefits, and understanding of the field as a whole. The collaborative environment seeks to create a shared vision with shared resources and benefits. This vision provides an important link for acting together for the benefit of all children, youth, families, and the workforce as a whole.

The CYCCB is prioritizing the development of a protocol for linking existing certification programs. As collaboration moves forward, there will be a need for a methodology for comparing the competencies that various certification programs are based upon and arriving at a way to demonstrate the breadth and depth of each program relative to other programs. It will also be necessary to compare credentialing requirements and methods for demonstrating competence. Once this is available, the groundwork will be laid for integrating all certification programs to expand recognition across practice silos and increase reciprocity. This

significantly benefits the workforce by increasing the value of credentialing and professional recognition.

The CYCCB has implemented a revenue sharing program that provides a model for distributing revenues and benefits through collaboration. Certification fees collected from practitioners are shared with key stakeholders to provide funding for the emerging professional community and groups that share CYCCB's vision. As participation in credentialing expands, this revenue stream is expected to become a significant funding source to support organizations and programs that have had difficulty in the past finding funding to advance their contributions. Revenue sharing based on collaborative involvement will increase motivation for working together.

The CYCCB is composed of representatives drawn from major practice settings, employers, certified practitioners, credentialing organizations, professional associations, training providers, and educators. Combined with the CYCCB's Advisory Committee and Advisory Network that expand this representation exponentially, and CYCCB's goal of unifying the field of practice, CYCCB is in a unique position to share information across a broad spectrum to promote mutual understanding and collaboration. CYCCB is active in joining existing collaborations and establishing new collaborations to fill gaps. As this process moves forward, it is expected to increase contact between siloed groups and promote collaboration around a unified vision of the field.

Over the past 4 years the CYCCB has prioritized creating collaborative partnerships with major national organizations in various practice arenas. This included the Next Generation Workforce Coalition (Next Gen), National AfterSchool Association (NAA), American Association of Children's Residential Centers (AACRC), and National Partnership for Juvenile Services (NPJS). Each of these organizations is collaborating with CYCCB in the integration of credentialing and workforce development across settings. Representatives of each of these organizations participated in the revision of the *Competencies for Professional Child and Youth Work Practitioners* to assure that the document described practice in current language accepted in each practice arena (CYCCB Competency Review Committee, 2010).

NAA, the National Institute for Out-of-School-Time, the Florida AfterSchool Network, and CYCCB completed a comparison of the Nationally Recognized Core Competencies for Afterschool and Youth Development Professionals to the CYCCB competency document to assure that the newly adopted national afterschool competencies aligned with the CYCCB credentialing initiative. Work is underway to link the 14 existing state level afterschool credentials to the CYCCB credential, offer CYCCB testing at NAA events, and partner in the development of an afterschool leadership academy that offers competency-based training, and education that supports national credentialing.

AACRC now offers CYCCB testing at their national conferences. Some AACRC member organizations are offering training based on the CYCCB certification requirements. A study is underway in California to explore the impact of high quality

training and certification on practitioners, the organization, and youth and families receiving services. Work is beginning with the national accrediting bodies for residential organizations. The Council on Accreditation (COA), the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), and the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Health Care Organizations (JCAHO) are exploring the incorporation of CYCCB professional development and credentialing requirements into national accreditation standards.

In 2010 the NPJS passed a resolution in support of CYCCB's national credentialing effort and began offering CYCCB testing at their national conferences. A national initiative funded by the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) is gearing up to develop a national curriculum for detention and corrections workers based on the CYCCB competencies which will lead to CYCCB credentialing.

The CYC professional associations in Ohio, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Maine, and Texas operate certification programs. In 2009 CYCCB conducted meetings with these organizations to explore the possibilities of creating a unified credentialing system. This led to each certification provider committing to support a national unified credentialing system, offering reciprocity to practitioners credentialed in other states, using the same competencies and code of ethics, and participating in the revenue sharing program.

CYCCB members believe that opportunities for collaboration are increasing. This is reflected by workforce studies that reveal commonalities of needs, overlapping professional development competencies and similar challenges faced across practice environments. It is strengthened by the increasing recognition by diverse groups of the need to work collectively to increase the impact of policy initiatives. CYCCB brings to the table an agenda based on creating a unified vision that adds models for revenue sharing and a leadership that understands the needs of the entire field of practice. These factors acting together are expected to significantly increase opportunities for collaborative action.

Higher Standards of Practice

The evolution of many professions reflects much of the same history as that of CYC. Social work, a profession that has very recently established itself, has similar roots. In the early days of the social work field anyone could represent themselves as a social worker irrespective of their competence or preparation. Over time the members of the social work field realized the importance of their contribution. This led them to unify their efforts to establish practice standards, create education and training programs, and promote their profession to the public. Over the past 40 years legislation has been enacted in most states so that a professionally sanctioned definition of social work practice and competence has been adopted. Social work now requires completion of extensive education and supervised practice. Most states require licensure or certification by the state to assure that practitioners are adequately prepared and cognizant of relevant laws and standards of practice.

This evolutionary path is common to the professions of education, counseling, medicine, engineering, and nursing. In each of these cases, a point was reached where the practitioners in the field and the public realized the importance of the field's contribution and took action to assure that practitioners met reasonable requirements before being allowed to offer services to the public. These actions taken by the professional community in conjunction with regulatory bodies significantly improved practice and created a workforce capable of meeting community needs.

The members of the CYCCB believe that the CYC profession is arriving at the stage where significant numbers of practitioners are recognizing their contribution to society and their responsibility to promote and regulate competent practice. Codes of ethics have been established in many of the major arenas of the field. The Standards for Practice of North American Child and Youth Care Professionals created a widely supported statement of values, principles, and beliefs across practice settings. The *Competencies for Professional Child and Youth Work Practitioners* (the basis of the CYCCB program) established a set of knowledge and skills competencies at the fully professional level that reflect the complexity of practice and the foundational knowledge and skills needed for practice in a multitude of environments. The CYCCB certification program adds a well-researched, standardized, and normed approach for determining when practitioners meet standards of practice set by the professional community. These developments herald the field's arrival as a true profession ready to move forward with an agenda to establish professionally sanctioned practice standards.

The emergence of CYCCB as a vehicle for implementing national professional CYC regulation is a sign that the profession has reached a new stage of evolution. The fact that CYCCB is an outgrowth of and widely supported by major CYC professional associations (e.g., the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice and the International Leadership Coalition for Professional Child and Youth Care) demonstrates that the professional community is coalescing to support this new vision of a unified profession based on practice standards promulgated by the professional community.

The most successful and widely recognized credential in the child care field is the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. This is widely used in early care and education to establish competence as an entry level practitioner. Carol Brunson Day, Director of the Council on Professional Recognition during the early development of the CDA, reports that it took 10 years, over \$120 million dollars provided by the federal government to create the sponsoring organization (Council for Professional Recognition), federal program guidelines that required all Head Start programs to hire practitioners who had completed the credentialing process, and federal subsidies to support employers, to establish the credential (C. Day, personal communication, August 30, 2007). To date, 200,000 practitioners have been credentialed. These same standards are now used throughout military child care programs and provide a basis for child care regulation in 49 states and

the District of Columbia (Gannett, Mello, & Starr (2009). The military and Head Start child care systems are not perfect but are available across the U.S. and are recognized as higher quality than services available in most American communities. This demonstrates that credentialing supported by government regulation and funding can be enacted to raise practice standards, expand the workforce, and address large scale needs of employers and communities (Florida Afterschool Network, n.d.). The Council on Professional Recognition has documented that the CDA program has significantly impacted wages, working conditions, turnover, motivation to complete additional professional development, and public policy (Gannett, Mello, & Starr, 2009).

Contrast this with the experience of CYC certification programs sponsored by the professional community in Texas, Ohio, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and Maine. All of these credentialing programs exist in states that do not require credentialing and have minimum requirements for workforce preparation. None of the employers impacted are federally subsidized. State professional association certification efforts have existed for more than 30 years, and fewer than 4,000 CYC practitioners have been credentialed. This is an insignificant number when compared to the 1.7 to 2.3 million CYC practitioners that the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates exist in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). It is also insignificant when compared to what has been accomplished by the CDA program with governmental policy and funding support.

Interestingly, both the credentialing programs sponsored by state professional associations and the CDA program suffer from similar limitations. These same limitations are prevalent in many other credentialing programs that are emerging to address local community needs. Because the need for entry level employees has traditionally been the focus of workforce initiatives, most credentialing programs focus on this population. Although these programs offer some benefits to employers and communities by offering a system for training, credentialing, and ultimately hiring an expanded workforce, they fail to address practitioner needs for access to increasing levels of responsibility and pay, true career development, and access to jobs across practice environments. Although the CDA credential is widely recognized in early care and education, it is almost unknown in corrections, treatment, recreation, community services, or residential care. State professional certification programs are more widely recognized by residential, afterschool and community youth services employers but are not generally recognized in the early childhood community. This makes it difficult for workers to find employment outside of the practice community in which they started because their credentials are not recognized or valued by employers in other practice settings. Additionally, none of these programs are well integrated into an overall career development model that helps practitioners move from entry to more advanced practice. These disconnects within the professional development system discourage workers and make it difficult to sustain a career in the child and youth care profession.

The CYCCB certification program begins with a vision of what a fully prepared practitioner, ready for work in a variety of settings, knows and can do. This allows for employment across practice setting boundaries and creates a natural pathway to move from entry to more advanced practice. As more credentialing programs emerge, CYCCB members believe that it will become increasingly important to have in place a unifying context to address problems of limited benefit to practitioners offered by workforce preparation programs and credentials. The existence of credentialing and education programs offers some benefit, but many believe that until licensing standards require completion of education and credentialing programs, the overall impact on the field will continue to be limited.

Over the past 30 to 40 years most states have enacted some form of child care regulation. Most states have responded by creating regulatory and licensing standards that describe minimum requirements. These standards are widely used to establish the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable practices. Although regulations exist in many states (not all) to specify minimum standards that must be met by child care programs and administrators, no states have standards that encompass the depth and breadth of knowledge and skills that the professional community believes is essential for competent practice across the profession.

Most states now require a criminal history background check to verify that practitioners are not convicted of certain offenses against children and families. This, coupled with minimum requirements of a high school education, basic literacy, and maturity of at least 18 years, is considered adequate preparation for work with most children. Some states require limited training in child care practices, first aid, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). But even in these more advanced states, required preparatory training rarely exceeds an 8- to 15-hour orientation. For example, in Texas, early childhood practitioners working with small children must complete CPR training and complete an 8-hour orientation before supervising children. This orientation must include developmental stages, age-appropriate activities, positive guidance, self-esteem exercises, supervision and safety practices, positive interactions, and the prevention of the spread of communicable diseases. For practitioners working with children younger than 24 months, an hour of the preservice training must cover: shaken baby syndrome, sudden infant death syndrome, and early childhood brain development. During their first year of employment, these practitioners are expected to complete an additional 15-hours of professional development training (Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, 2010). Although these requirements seem thorough, one might wonder how much depth of information can be included in this limited time-frame. What benefit does this actually provide to practitioners entering the field with little or no previous preparation? The public mandate to ensure safe environments for children often leads to increasingly restrictive rules with little consideration for addressing fundamental practitioner preparation. It is little wonder that much regulatory action is aimed

at limiting abusive and negligent practices. It is hard to imagine that a workforce that meets these minimum standards and that is largely paid minimum wage would attract the kind of practitioners that can skillfully and thoughtfully prepare young people for adulthood. Time has shown that, at best, this approach promotes a care system minimally capable of meeting the needs of children, youth, and families. This approach has done little to address the needs of the overall workforce and has codified the belief that practitioners need little or no preparation before working with children, youth, and families.

CYCCB members and many others recognize that the impact of training, education, and credentialing will continue to be limited until regulatory standards are enacted that require adequately prepared practitioners. Until there are widely used standards to drive the need for training, education, and credentialing, there is little reason for practitioners to invest in them. Until salaries are aligned with these requirements, there will be little motivation to complete preparation programs and engage in ongoing career development. As in the case of the CDA program, it took hiring mandates and subsidies to employers to create an environment that motivated employers and practitioners to meet higher practice standards (C. Day, personal communication, August 30, 2007).

Child care regulation is the responsibility of each state, unlike the CDA program, which is a federal initiative. Since state regulatory requirements are generally low, organizations seeking to set themselves apart by meeting higher standards typically pursue accreditation through national accrediting bodies such as National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Council on Accreditation (COA), Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), Council on the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), etc. Increasing standards of practice will necessitate raising both the state regulatory requirements and the national accreditation standards.

The CYCCB will establish collaborations with other influential groups to pursue public policy initiatives to raise standards of practice. Several factors offer encouragement that this can be accomplished. Maryland recently became the first state to mandate practitioner certification in residential care. Assuming that the evolution of the CYC field follows the example of other professions, participation by other states typically expands relatively rapidly once any state has stepped forward to lead the way. Accounts of abuse and neglect throughout the child care, foster care, mental health, residential, and correctional systems have brought much public attention to the failings of the child care system. Many states have already increased standards while other states are poised to make changes. Workforce studies are highlighting the connection between the availability of quality child care services and economic impact on employers. The plethora of articles published by practitioners relating to the failings of the child care system denotes an increasing consciousness that the child care system is not meeting community needs and action must be taken to improve it. Increasing regulatory standards is an approach often used.

CYCCB members believe that as this movement is taking shape, it is important to promote regulation that takes into consideration the needs of the many stakeholders involved and the workforce. State regulatory bodies tend to focus on safety with little understanding that a workforce, well grounded in skillful practice is better able to meet the needs of children and youth and are, therefore, able to create safer environments. It will be important to encourage regulators to increase requirements for training, education, and credentialing. Raising these standards will provide the momentum needed to drive the expansion of training, education, and credentialing programs that will serve to make career development accessible to the workforce.

Employers are typically saddled with the responsibility to offer programs that meet higher standards with little consideration to the economic impact that higher standards have on salaries and operating costs. It will be important to promote realistic discussions of the fiscal benefits that can be expected when hiring, training, and turnover costs decrease. It will be equally important to help employers during the transition period through subsidies and by incrementally raising standards over time. Increased practice standards will lead to higher program costs as wages increase. Wages must increase to expand practitioner motivation for staying in the field and engaging in career development and advancement.

At this juncture in the proliferation of regulatory standards CYCCB members believe that a national initiative that encourages regulatory standards be implemented that span practice silos is imperative. State standards are currently evolving in piece meal fashion with little consideration for the quality of the overall workforce. Most states have regulations relating to early childhood practice and residential programs, some have standards that relate to school-age settings, others have regulations for disabilities and youth development programs. Many of these requirements are in conflict and leave significant gaps in requirements. No state has regulations that cover the entire CYC workforce. Time, effort, and funding can be significantly economized if a CYC regulatory system can be adopted that describes practitioners in all service delivery settings. This would support workforce development as a whole with the additional benefit that workforce development through training programs and institutions of higher education will better prepare future practitioners for sustainable careers in the field.

Educators and trainers will need time and support to realign their programs so that the workforce need for additional higher learning can be met. Realignment is already underway in leading universities. The Kent State University Human Development and Family Studies (Child and Youth Development Concentration) has already conducted a review of its coursework and realigned courses to better support the national certification competencies. The department is in process of establishing a national certification testing center. Students are encouraged to sit for the national exam upon completion of their studies and to seek Provisional Certification (Curry, Richardson, & Pallock, in press).

The University of Pittsburgh Department of Psychology in Education has developed courses specific to the national competencies, established a national testing center, helped students access scholarships to support certification, and also encouraged its students to become certified upon completion of their degree requirements. NOVA Southeastern University includes academic tracks in their masters' and doctoral level programs specific to youth work and leadership based on the national competencies. The University of Wisconsin's Youth Work Learning Center has created a series of continuing education courses based on the national competencies, has established a testing center, and encouraged its students to complete national certification. Similar work is beginning at Western Washington University. Indiana University has relocated its youth work degree tracks into the School of Public Health and is implementing coursework to support bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees in youth development and leadership based on the national competencies.

These leading programs are creating a template that will be used by others as higher education in youth work becomes more available. As more programs align with the national competencies, possibilities for coursework and degree articulation increase, credits transfer more easily, and the workforce increases its access to relevant higher education and learning (Curry, et al., 2009; Curry, Eckles, Stuart, & Qaish, 2010).

Additional workforce gains may be possible by adopting the approach currently emerging in Canada. Leading colleges and universities have collaborated in creating a national accreditation process for institutions of higher education. This is expected to provide national standards that will promote consistency in educational approaches to workforce development within the CYC profession in Canada.

CYCCB members believe that increasing regulatory requirements, while realistically considering the needs of stakeholders and the workforce, is key to addressing the immediate and future needs of the workforce and community.

Research

Many of the workforce studies cited previously point to the dearth of information describing the child care workforce. Workforce estimates range from 1.7 to 6 million because not all practitioners in the field are being counted, and therefore who should be counted? Little is known of worker demographics and motivation for example who is in the workforce? How do they typically find employment? How much are they paid? How long do they stay? How often do practitioners work across practice settings? What motivates workers to stay in the field or leave? How many are interested in training, education, and credentialing? What is the impact of supervisor and management support on retention? What is the role of self-efficacy and employer expectations? Little is known of the actual impact of education and certification on program outcomes, safety, and retention (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003).

Sound public policy initiatives must be based on research that describes the problems to be solved and then provides clear guidance as to whether an approach has adequately addressed a need. Information describing the child care workforce is, at best, spotty. Expanded research will need to be prioritized, funded, and carried out to answer basic questions.

Research in the CYC care field has not been widely prioritized. No one has ever attempted to study the entire workforce as a group. The profession is only now reaching an understanding of what is included in the field. Most funding that supports research is narrowly focused on a specific program, geographic region, or practice setting. It has only been within the last 20 years that service outcomes were considered important enough to track and analyze. Evidence-based practice is just beginning to have an impact. CYCCB members believe that the development of the field must be accompanied by a strong, well-funded research effort. The CYCCB certification effort is founded upon a solid research effort (Curry et al., 2009; Curry; CYCCB, 2011b) and upon plans to continue to facilitate research collaborations in the workforce area.

The CYCCB will expand university-based research programs that focus on CYC workforce development. This will be done by creating research initiatives, collaborating with others who sponsor research, and providing technical assistance to groups who need help designing and carrying out research. This will include efforts to validate and improve credentialing programs, document practitioner demographics, explore the impact of credentialing, document interest in and access to higher education and training, and identify methods for encouraging young people to pursue careers in CYC.

Collaborations of researchers will be formed to expand the expertise available to produce more scientifically rigorous studies. Coordination of research agendas will be undertaken to reduce redundancy of effort and wasted funding. Sharing of information, results, and research opportunities will be coordinated to increase the scope of investigations and provide more useful results.

In 2009 CYCCB and Kent State University established the International Institute for Human Service Workforce Research and Development. This institute, guided by an advisory committee of researchers from universities worldwide, established an international university-based research consortium. It has begun the task of seeking funding for research initiatives and working collaboratively to identify and carry out coordinated workforce research. Research is viewed as an important cornerstone in promoting the unified vision of the field, promoting higher standards, and addressing key workforce issues. Creating opportunities for collaboration is expected to help reduce redundant efforts, better focus research efforts on relevant issues, and increase visibility for CYC research.

Advocacy

Many believe that the public is largely uninformed about the state of CYC ser-

vices in the U.S. They suffer the consequences of the current state of the field, but few realize what is driving the problems or what action can be taken to improve the system. No field has attained professional status before the practitioners within the field engaged in campaigns to inform the public about the importance of their work or their needs as a professional group. This has probably not occurred in the CYC field due to the current developmental status of the field. CYC practitioners are only now recognizing the scope of the field and beginning to act collaboratively. There has never been a sustained, collaborated effort by CYC practitioners to inform the public of the contributions of the field and promote higher practice standards on a national scale.

This lack of knowledge regarding the state of CYC services is, unfortunately, equally true for many practitioners within the field. Many do not have a shared vision of the field, understand the forces limiting movement, or have a vision of what might effectively address dilemmas. The CYC workforce is the largest group serving children, youth, and families. A collaborated, informed effort by this group to support needed reforms could have a dramatic impact.

As collaboration among organizations and groups increases and creates a unified vision of the field, it will be increasingly important for the public and practitioners to step forward to support development. Mechanisms will need to be established for distributing information. Connections between existing networking systems need to be strengthened so that ideas and events in one practice setting become available to practitioners in other settings. As people within the profession receive increasing information about other settings, it is believed that this will increase understanding of the field as a whole, and such issues as job opportunities, training, and education.

New information dissemination systems need to be developed. Over the past several years, the CYCCB has identified key information networks within each practice setting. These have been linked to the CYCCB electronic network so that information can be shared nationally across settings. This work is in its infancy but promises to produce a vehicle for information distribution that many believe is key to unifying the field.

CYCCB members recognize the importance that advocacy plays in shaping perception and channeling resources. The CYCCB, working through its partners, Advisory Committee, and Advisory Network, will create a more integrated system for disseminating information and creating dialogue. It will create opportunities for practitioners and the public to be involved in system change and to work with policy makers to identify solutions and improve services.

CYCCB promotes a vision of hope that working together, so that the public, practitioners, employers, and educators can create a system of CYC that will adequately address current community needs and create a foundation for future expansion of the workforce.

CONCLUSION

The current workforce crisis cries out for serious and concerted efforts to address the current lack of common vision, standards, and resources. The changes in the social fabric of American culture and the complexities of maintaining healthy children, youth, and families demand that a unified approach emerge. Unless a new vision takes shape, the increasing needs of young people and communities will overwhelm society's ability to provide the developmental, educational, and social support required. This portends serious consequences for a nation that needs its young people to create a foundation for its future in an increasingly competitive world. The children of today are the citizens of tomorrow. It is not an unreasonable expectation that the adults providing for their care and development create systems and approaches that will adequately support and prepare them.

Much work has been accomplished in each of the field's practice areas to implement programs to meet community needs. A rich international literature has emerged describing CYC practices and approaches. The recent identification of positive youth development principles, solution-focused interventions, and assets-based approaches hold great promise in advancing practice. A wealth of new approaches are making their way into the field. But this relies upon a field populated by practitioners who are educated in these approaches and skillful in the complexities of delivering these services, a field of practitioners who are engaged in child care longer than the average 18 months that many practitioners stay employed, a field where there is a future that extends beyond minimum wage and an early ceiling on advancement.

The CYCCB is an effort by the professional community to address these workforce issues. We have chosen a collaborative approach that is expected to pull together key stakeholders and groups to identify ways to work together to address the overall needs of the workforce. We believe that the CYC profession and our nation have reached a moment where the contributions that the CYC workforce offer will find acceptance and be valued. The need is clearly evident. We recognize that as value for children, youth, families, and the CYC profession increases, additional resources will become available. The CYC profession is a critical resource whose time has arrived.

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