

# Youth Worker Platform

*South End/Lower Roxbury Youth Workers' Alliance, 2009*



Youth work involves a commitment to youth development and to social justice. Youth workers are the adults who work with children & teens, ages 6-21, outside of school. Young people spend 80% of their lives growing and developing outside of school. We work in large national institutions and small teen programs, traditional afterschool programs and city community centers. Each of our jobs is unique, and centers on developing positive relationships with young people to support their growth and development intellectually, emotionally, artistically, spiritually, and physically.

Youth workers are community leaders building the rising generation of leaders. Long-term relationships with caring adults are vital to meaningful youth development. Living wages, respectful work conditions, and voice in decision making enrich the field and ensure the long-term retention of youth work practitioners. When youth workers are consistently in young people's lives they build trusting relationships, challenge youth to grow, and strengthen their self-worth. In this environment, young people will aspire to become the next generation of healthy, successful leaders.

The Youth Worker Platform captures our core beliefs that have emerged from decades of organizing and dialogue. We call on youth workers, youth, community organizations, and our allies to use the Platform as a guide for youth development and organizing work. As participants in a larger movement for social justice, we also hope to work in solidarity with others. As youth workers, we especially support young people organizing for justice, and we commit to advocate for our priorities together here in Boston and beyond.

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## **1) Youth are our greatest strength and thrive in a loving collaborative community of youth, families, and youth workers.**

- \*Positive youth development requires respect for the strengths and potential of youth.
- \*Positive youth development requires long-term meaningful relationships between youth and caring adults.
- \*The deficits youth experience primarily stem from the policies and practices created by adults.
- \*Communities have a responsibility to collaborate to help youth reach their full potential; this begins with youth, families, youth workers, and neighborhoods, and includes schools, businesses, faith groups, and government.

## **2) Healthy youth development is built upon culturally-relevant programming that is accessible to all youth.**

- \*Healthy youth development must include a variety of holistic age-appropriate opportunities that meet the needs of all young people in order to develop the mind, body and spirit.
- \*Culturally relevant programming is responsive to people's core identities, groups, and communities.
- \*Our communities need additional focused prevention strategies to reduce violence. Policies must be designed for youth to engage in positive exploration and support restorative justice models for all.

### **3) Youth Workers are vital to the health of future generations and our communities.**

- \*We deserve a quality of life based on respect which includes a supportive network of colleagues, a living wage with benefits, quality supervision, meaningful professional development and opportunities for advancement.
- \*We deserve a work environment that promotes self-care to heal from the trauma and struggles we face alongside youth.
- \*We must expand pathways to support community members, including young adults, to enter and advance in the field.

### **4) Youth Workers must drive the advancement of the field of youth work.**

- \*The invaluable perspective of youth workers includes their on-the-ground experience and the productive engagement of youth voice.
- \*The professional growth of the field must be youth-centered, culturally-relevant, and community-conscious.

### **5) Youth workers are committed to a grassroots democratic process.**

- \*We build the voice, power and self-determination of youth and youth workers to meet their needs and affect policy.
- \*Youth workers also play a critical role as interpreters between youth and policy makers.

### **6) Leaders in the field of youth work, including funders, must be community-conscious.**

- \*Community consciousness is connectedness: understanding of a community's cultures, strengths and needs, and participating in the daily struggles and joys of youth.
- \*Community consciousness is empowerment: engaging community voice to increase community control.
- \*Community consciousness is responsibility: sharing accountability with the community and to future generations of youth.

### **7) Sustainable youth opportunities and programs, just like education, are a fundamental part of a just society.**

- \*Long-term relationships between youth and well-trained and well-supported youth workers are required for sustainable programs.
- \*Sustainability requires long-term funding built on genuine partnership, including programming and operating costs.
- \*Public policies that promote youth development are required for sustainable programs.
- \*Government and private funders must commit to creating sustainability for youth programs.

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*The Youth Worker Platform was developed by the South End/Lower Roxbury Youth Workers' Alliance. Founded by youth workers in Boston, the YWA provides leadership development and builds connections among youth workers, in order to increase opportunities for all youth. The Youth Workers' Alliance is a replicable model in the field of youth work, building collaborations, supporting living wages and healthy work environments, and inspiring respect for the field.*

*For information contact: South End/Lower Roxbury Youth Workers' Alliance, [www.youthworkersalliance.org](http://www.youthworkersalliance.org).*