

Youth Worker in Sport and Recreation

LISTING OF COMPETENCIES

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As Developed By

The Provincial Consortium on Youth in Recreation

For Conestoga College's "Youth Recreation Leadership" Certificate Program

General Introduction:

In its work to increase and enhance the opportunities for Ontario youth to participate in sport and recreation activities, the Provincial Consortium on Youth in Recreation (PCYR) has explored what the optimum competencies that a person who works with youth (ages 10 and up) should possess. The results of this exploration are compiled in the following "Listing of Competencies."

To preface this list, it is important to note that the role of the youth worker in sport and recreation programs has changed over the years. Where, at one point, youth workers' responsibilities may have been more directly geared to providing structured programs and activities for youth, now they play a much larger role.

Today's youth worker must actively work to engage young people in helping develop, design, test, run and evaluate youth programs. With emphasis on downsizing and maximizing the use of limited resources, s/he is now also spending more time collaborating with other program and service delivery agents. And, since youth issues such as justice, education, housing, etc. are gaining more attention, providing recreation programs for youth must now be done within the context of what others are doing with and for youth in other service sectors.

Finally, youth workers in sport and recreation now find themselves taking on the additional role of advocating for the needs of youth and of representing youth issues to and with decision makers, funders and policy developers.

The bottom line is that youth workers of today and of the future can continue to enjoy their direct work with young people but must also recognize, understand and accept the more diverse responsibilities that this evolving, and critically important, position requires.

Introduction to Listing of Competencies:

The "Listing of Competencies" has been divided into eight topic areas. These topic areas are:

- Personal Qualities
- Personal Skills
- Professional Qualities
- Professional Skills
- Education and Experience
- Youth Interaction
- Program Development and Delivery
- Advocacy and Representation

To clarify the terminology used in these topic areas note that the term “Quality” refers to an innate trait that a person naturally has or who has worked very hard to develop. Qualities tend to be more attitudinal in nature and often relate to value and belief systems, which make them difficult to teach or to learn. Qualities differ from “Skills” which can be considered more technical in nature and which, for the most part, can be taught or learned relatively easily. Skills tend to be measured more quantifiably as compared to qualities that tend to be measured more qualitatively.

The terms of “Personal” and “Professional” are used to differentiate what an individual may do as an individual (personal) versus on the job (professional). Personal Qualities and Skills and Professional Qualities may be transferable to any work situation. However, Professional Skills will be more unique to the specific youth worker position.

The term “Education and Experience” speaks to that larger understanding of recreation and youth and the environments in which they exist. The “Youth Interaction” section speaks to the importance of the relationship between the youth worker and the program participants. “Program Development and Delivery” emphasizes the need to involve youth in all aspects of program planning and “Advocacy and Representation” outlines the role of the youth worker as an advocate for programs, policies and services for youth.

With respect to what traits are included within each of the eight topic areas, one could debate where the traits have been placed. For the sake of ease of reference and reading, the best judgement has been used but it is recognized that the placement methodology has not been scientifically developed.

The optimum situation would be to engage a youth worker that has the skills and attributes listed in each of these eight topic areas. However, in some cases, it may not be possible to recruit someone with all these qualifications. On-going development and training may be necessary. As such, this listing is then a great tool to identify that direction on-going training and development should take.

Listing of Competencies:

PERSONAL QUALITIES

General:

Caring, compassionate, sense of humour, trustworthy, sincere, approachable, enthusiastic, patient, optimistic, positive, understanding, helpful, honest, direct, empathetic, positive self image, flexible, fair, consistent

With Others:

Builds relationships, team player, respectful, tolerant of others’ differences, open-minded, unbiased, non-condescending, non-judgemental, does not use favouritism

PERSONAL SKILLS

General:

Follows through on commitments, strong verbal communication skills, proven negotiation skills, understands and uses conflict resolution processes, understands group dynamics and processes

With Others:

Motivator, coach, encourager, engager, collaborator, uses facilitative group leadership, listens and questions more than talks and advises, does not lecture, considerate of new ideas

PROFESSIONAL QUALITIES

General:

Ethical and responsible work standards and habits, takes pride in professionalism, knows boundaries and own limitations, takes appropriate risks, is motivated toward professional development, is a self-starter, can handle emergency situations calmly and decisively

With Others:

Maintains appropriate levels of confidentiality, effective and creative problem solver, can think on his/her feet, able to work flexible hours*

* Youth are not available for programming Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. They are available evenings, after school and on weekends. These are the hours a youth worker is required to meet.

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

General:

Competent, sets achievable goals and outcomes, good time manager, able to organize systems, able to source out and use other programs/agencies as resources, creative problem solver, respected by peers and other service providers

With Others:

Relates well to youth, staff and volunteers, is assertive but not aggressive in dealing with behavioural issues, able to build and lead a team

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCES

General:

Is informed on youth issues/culture, is familiar with social policy and systems that affect youth and other sectors (e.g. justice, child welfare, education, housing, etc.), understands youth recreation relative to community development, is aware of components of positive youth development (e.g. stages of growth, risk factors, resiliency-building)

With Others:

Is open and tolerant of gender, sexuality, diversity issues

YOUTH INTERACTION

General:

Can relate to different types of youth, understands his/her role is not a youth counsellor, knows where the fine line is between friend and youth worker, follows through on consequential actions, learns from youth, makes the working environment comfortable for youth, understands and respects the need for a flexible approach, likes youth*

* It may be implied that youth workers “like” youth, but this should not be taken for granted. Young people can sense if youth workers are fearful, disrespectful, distrustful or disliking which is not a solid foundation on which to develop a youth program.

With Others:

Respects and accepts youth as valued and contributing people, can relate to a youth at his/her level, doesn't work to solve a youth's problems but works to help the youth solve them, establishes credibility as someone who can be depended on, has a genuine interest and concern for youth, empowers and supports youth in helping them make decisions, shares power with youth

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY

General:

Is aware of and uses research and evaluation processes, effectively manages volunteers and program systems, actively engages youth in all aspects of program development, delivery and evaluation, programs around youth skills and interests, provides clear parameters within which youth are able to make decisions, embraces the philosophy of planning “with” not “for” youth

Other:

Effectively manages financial and other resources, is able to work within a defined budget, understands funding sources, application processes and fund raising strategies, understands and responds to the need to record “learnings” for future program development and delivery processes

ADVOCACY AND REPRESENTATION

General:

Advocates for youth and on youth issues, presents effectively to a variety of individuals from youth to peers to senior staff to politicians, relates well to parents, teachers, community representatives, meaningfully engages youth in advocacy ventures