

## The Accidental Practitioner

# YOUTHBUILD PHILADELPHIA: AN EXCITING PLANFUL PATHWAY INTO THE CYC PROFESSION



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When in high school, how many of us already decided to begin our careers in child and youth care? How many of us were already preparing for certification as an entry-level child and youth care (CYC) practitioner? How many of us were learning about the North American Standards for Practice of Child and Youth Care Professionals and reviewing the North American Competencies for Child and Youth Work Practitioners? Well...not us! And, likely very few (if anyone) of us who are currently in the field.

However, in Philadelphia several cohorts of young persons have participated in an innovative pilot program designed to prepare high school students for a career in CYC. The program is one of more than 200 programs administered by the Office of Workforce Investment's Division of Youth Services. Nationally, YouthBuild serves more than 6,000 youth in more than 40 states. These programs are community-based pre-apprenticeship programs that provide job training and educational opportunities for at-risk youth ages 16-24 who have previously dropped out of high school.

### Some of the components of the YouthBuild Philadelphia program include:

1. A three-year partnership between the YouthBuild Philadelphia program and the Child and Youth Care Certification Board.
2. Although supplemented with additional content, the Child and Youth Care: Foundations training curriculum serves as the central component of instruction (Academy for Competent Youth Work, 2015). The curriculum is based upon the North American Competencies for Professional Child and Youth Work Practitioners (Mattingly, Stuart, & Vander Ven, 2002; 2010 revised).
3. Community CYC field experiences/internships (in progress) meeting CYCCB and Americorps standards.
4. Consultation with CYCCB certified practitioners.
5. 5. Distance learning technology and instructional methods during the Covid crisis period.
6. Training of trainers of the Child and Youth Care: Foundations course.
7. Certification preparation and testing for entry-level certification. Sample exam items are reviewed and new items plan to be developed for learning and test preparation.
8. Training of proctors for CYCCB certification testing.
9. Encouragement to pursue entry-level certification through the CYCCB.

10. Program evaluation. Pre and post certification exam scores are being examined and an item analysis will be conducted to determine specific item difficulty and examined to determine if any patterns emerge between those who pass the exam and those who do not. Internship evaluations will be reviewed. Focus groups involving the students have been conducted.

### **Perceived Program Positives**

Comments from the students during focus groups regarding the program and instructors have been positive. For example, "This is great in general." "I feel everyone should have access to this information." Students expressed that the curriculum manual was easy to read and the instructor strived hard to make the learning relevant and fun. "I liked watching the clips on Edpuzzle and answering ...That was fun to me." "Yeah, those are fun, ha, ha." "She uses scenarios a lot, so that's good." For some of the students, adapting the curriculum with distance learning because of Covid precautions was viewed as a positive as one student noted "I personally like Zoom." Other unintended benefits included a focus on the students' personal and family lives. For example, several of the YB participants were also young parents and it helped them understand and respond to their children.

### **Perceived Program Challenges**

The most obvious challenge was initiating the program/partnership during the Covid crisis period. Preparing young persons for an inter-personal/relational field of practice during a mandatory "social distancing" environment required much flexibility for everyone involved. All coursework including the training of trainers was adapted using Zoom and other technology. Google Jamboard (a digital whiteboard) was helpful for students who were reluctant to unmute but still invited them to add to the conversation. Collaborative slides added to learning especially on topics like brain activation, hyperarousal, what made them scared, etc. YouTube videos and mainstream movies such as Short-term 12 helped supplement the Foundations course material. Edpuzzle, a video editing tool, was used to enhance and assess student learning.

Another challenge was how to adapt a curriculum (Child and Youth Care: Foundations) that was originally designed for adult practitioners with current experience in child and youth care work for a population that has limited (if any CYC experience) and still in high school. Some of material, was difficult for the students to relate to without sufficient child and youth care experience.

Research indicates that CYC experience is a factor that positively influences the results on the certification exam which includes situational judgement test items (Curry et al., 2013). The Covid crisis has delayed opportunities for internship experiences. The networking of potential internship opportunities and clarification of internship roles and responsibilities needs further development. Established internship programs in higher education can be adapted (e.g., internship manual, agreement and student evaluation forms, weekly student learning/reflection logs).

Although Covid is still with us, in-person instruction is currently being conducted. How to effectively teach an inter-personal/relational curriculum with Covid spacing restrictions continues to be a challenge. In-person instruction also permits the instructor to better monitor attendance and participation. However, personal issues such as child caring responsibilities of students who are also parents continue to complicate full program participation.

## Opportunities

Some of the above challenges also created opportunities to expand our understanding of how to teach and train child and youth care subject matter using distance technology as well as expand the reach of certification information to new populations.

Information learned from this pilot program can potentially inform other YouthBuild-funded programs across the country as well as other high school curricula that includes related coursework (e.g., child development, family financial management, family and consumer science). Perhaps a prototype program structure can become part of a CYCCB-endorsed high school vocational CYC entry-level certification preparation program. At the very least, information learned from this pilot program may help inform high school guidance counselors and students about the potential of a career in the CYC field and create opportunities for a more planful and non-accidental approach to entering the CYC field and profession.



Deborah Getz Ph.D., Associate Clinical Professor, Indiana University School of Public Health-Bloomington, is committed to supporting the professionalization of youth work in the U.S. She led the development of the IU APHS major and minor in youth development, actively engages in efforts to support national certification through the Child and Youth Care Certification Board, and works to support awareness of issues critical to protecting child safety. Deb has engaged in curriculum development, design, delivery, and evaluation on a wide variety of topics in youth development, child protection, personal financial education, and community engagement. She is particularly passionate about educating youth workers and the public about human trafficking prevention and identification.



Mallory Deptola has been in youth work for over 15 years. Before receiving her Master's of Art in Teaching, she had always been drawn to opportunities to interact with children and youth. Her path has led her to working in daycares and summer camps, designing curriculum and events as a program manager with the Girl Scouts of Western Pennsylvania, and teaching theater and language arts as an international teacher in Mexico and Costa Rica. Currently, Mallory works at YouthBuild Philadelphia where she is the instructor for the Child and Youth Development workforce track. She is excited to spearhead the high school program of the CYC program in collaboration with the CYCC board and Academy for Competent Youth Work. She plans to utilize the wealth of youth-centered organizations in Philadelphia to ensure her students are actively involved in the real-life exploration of the competencies.

## References

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[Editor's Note: For more about YouthBuild Philly, see Cindy Wilson's article above. Also go to: <https://youthbuildphilly.org/> ]