

**Pathways to Success by 21 (P21)
Professional Youth Worker Credential Pilot
Final Evaluation Report
April 2009**

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“The program has refreshed my perspective about my work. I just know that this is something that I want to do even more than I ever thought so.”

Pilot Participant

Introduction

This report is an evaluation of the Pathways to Success by 21 (P21) Professional Youth Worker Credential Pilot (PYWC) held in Hampden County, Massachusetts. The evaluation of the P21 PYWC was conducted in 2008–2009 by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) at the Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College. Evaluation activities by NIOST began in August 2008. An Interim Report completed in September 2008 is included in the Appendix A.¹

PYWC is part of the P21 initiative, a statewide effort to improve the future prospects of vulnerable youth ages 16–21 across Massachusetts—including both those who are in school and those who are out-of-school and unemployed. The goal of the P21 initiative is to foster greater collaboration among state-level youth-serving agencies, while simultaneously helping local and regional youth-serving systems to better coordinate services to vulnerable youth.

P21 envisions a statewide youth system that is efficient and effective in ensuring that all youth have the tools and supports necessary to be productive citizens by age 21. To assist in achieving this vision, P21 has implemented a professional development opportunity for front-line staff who serve vulnerable youth in order to: (a) improve program quality by strengthening partnerships that increase the use of resources in a region or community; and (b) create a common approach, based on core competencies, to recruitment and professional development for P21 partner staff.

The pilot was based on a credential model, the School-Age Youth Development Credential (SAYD), developed by Achieve Boston, a statewide collaborative whose mission is to help afterschool and youth workers develop their professional skills and knowledge; advance their careers; and ultimately better serve children, youth, and families.² The Commonwealth Corporation and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development jointly issued the PYWC. A description of the roles of these organizations is included in Appendix C. The Commonwealth Corporation, with support from the Hampden Partner Group, managed the P21 PYWC pilot. The Medical Foundation administered the selection of instructors and training leaders, provided direct instruction, and worked with the Project Coordinator and Student Support Coordinator to implement the pilot project and support pilot participants.

¹ See Appendix A for Interim Report. Information on PYWC activities prior to August 2008 were obtained through document review and key interviews.

² See Appendix B for more information on Achieve Boston and the SAYD.

There were multiple employers with staff participating in the P21 PYWC pilot (see Table 1). Motivation for employer involvement included the opportunities to cultivate particular staff members, to retain staff, and to take part in a unique professional development program. Employers fulfilled multiple roles in the pilot including participation in the Partner Group which guided project implementation. Employers also provided a variety of on-going supports to pilot participants including: rearranging staffing schedules to allow for class participation; talking with participating staff about their experiences; and offering feedback and advice on class projects.

Table 1

Employer	Number of Participants
Department of Youth Services Vendors	
RFK Children’s Action Corporation	1
Center for Human Development, Terri Thomas Girls Program	3
Center for Human Development, CAP	2
Gandara Center, Gandara Group Home	1
Department of Youth Services Core Staff	3
CareerPoint	4
The Care Center	3
New England Farm Worker’s Council	3
FutureWorks	2
MCDI Inc.	1
Holyoke Public Schools	1

Criteria for youth worker participation in the P21 PYWC pilot included:

- Position in direct service at the program level, with leadership potential.
- Proven interest in serving youth and an expressed desire to stay in the field.
- No college degree or a two- or four-year college degree in a field unrelated to youth development.

The P21 PYWC combined 50 hours of trainings and 2 credit-bearing college courses. The PYWC curriculum was framed around 8 of the 11 competencies organized by Achieve Boston for the SAYD.³ The training and coursework was held over a fourteen-month period, beginning in December 2007. College courses and training sessions were held one morning per week making it necessary for employers to grant release time to their participants. There was no charge (including books and fees) to participants or employers for the classes or trainings. The two college courses were interspersed between three training segments. Following the final training segment participants prepared summary portfolios and demonstrated skill gain through an on-site observation. Upon successful completion of the PYWC, participants received a \$1,000 stipend provided by the Hampden County Regional Employment Board.

³ See Appendix D for a list of the Achieve Boston competencies.

Participants for the pilot were chosen from a pool of 50 applicants. Recruitment and selection was coordinated by the Hampden Partner Group. The Hampden Partner Group is made up of stakeholders (employers and other partners) from the youth serving agencies in the region (i.e., state agencies and local community based organizations). A thorough recruitment process conducted by the Hampden Partner Group included an application with an essay on the recruit’s motivation to participate and a Memorandum of Agreement signed by participating employers. Some employers also submitted a letter of recommendation. A part-time (14 hours per week) Student Support Coordinator was available to assist participants and employers. The pilot commenced with a cohort of 25 participants. A total of 23 participants completed the program in January 2009, and a graduation celebration was held in February 2009.

Research Questions

The major research questions shaping the evaluation were:

1. What were the experiences of P21 PYWC participants related to change in knowledge, skills, competencies, practice, and awareness of a youth worker professional peer network?
2. In what ways has participation in the P21 PYWC affected programs and program practices?
3. How do the impact of the P21 PYWC program and the participant experience vary by participant characteristics and preparation, program/supervisor support, and program characteristics?
4. What do the “impact findings” (research question 3 above) suggest about the future implementation and sustainability of P21 PYWC as a statewide youth worker sector initiative?
5. In what ways has participation in the P21 PYWC stimulated cross-agency resource sharing and collaboration toward coordinating the delivery of services to vulnerable youth?
6. How does the work of P21 PYWC fit into the national effort to professionalize the youth worker field?

Information collected through the evaluation was expected to: (a) inform strategies and actions toward improving the program and developing additional cohorts in other regions of the state, (b) highlight outcomes related to changes in staff skills and to impact on program practices; and (c) examine use of cross-agency networking and resource sharing. It is hoped that this report will contribute to a deeper understanding of how the PYWC initiative can improve program quality and be replicated in other communities in Massachusetts.

NIOST has conducted the following evaluation activities since beginning work on this pilot project in August 2008 (Table 2):

Table 2. Evaluation Activities and Data Resources

Activity	Process	Period
Focus group with Hampden County Partner Group	Conduct and review transcript and notes	Summer 2008

Activity	Process	Period
Participant training	Observation	Summer 2008
Participant focus group (conducted by Commonwealth Corporation)	Review notes	Fall 2008
Participant training evaluations	Review notes	Fall 2008
College Course I evaluations	Review notes	Fall 2008
Focus group with PYWC participants	Conduct and review transcript and notes	Winter 2009
Employer phone interviews (7)	Conduct and review transcripts and notes	Winter/Spring 2009
Interview with Student Support Coordinator	Conduct and review transcript and notes	Winter/Spring 2009
Employer survey (14 employers)	Conduct and analyze results	Winter/Spring 2009
Participant phone interviews (4)	Conduct and review transcripts and notes	Winter/Spring 2009
Employer focus group	Conduct and review transcript and notes	Winter/Spring 2009
Partner phone interviews (4)	Conduct and review transcripts and notes	Winter/Spring 2009
Pre- and post-participation self-assessments	Input data and analyze results	Winter/Spring 2009
Training evaluations (Spring)	Review notes	Winter/Spring 2009
Hampden County Partner Group meeting notes	Review notes	Continuous
Student Support Coordinator monthly narratives	Review notes	Continuous

The focus of this report is to profile participants' experience in the pilot, to examine implementation findings and participant impact, and to provide recommendations for continued program improvement and replication. This final evaluation report is divided into several sections. Section I highlights the various components of the PYWC pilot. Section II examines the experiences of PYWC participants as well as findings from the competency-based self-assessment. Section III examines impact on programs and program practices. Section IV reviews current national efforts related to professional development system-building for out-of-school-time and youth development workers. The final section provides a summary of findings along with several recommendations for future cohort implementations and policy development.

Section I. Pilot Components

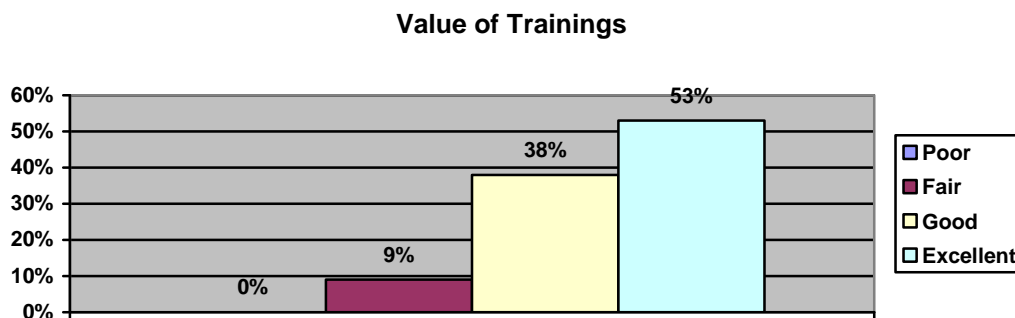
In this section we describe four major components of the PYWC: Training, College Courses, the Partner Group, and the Student Support Coordinator. The P21 PYWC combined 50 hours of trainings and 2 credit-bearing college courses. Two of the major support mechanisms for the PYWC were the Partner Group, which provided local voice, investment, and coordination; and the Student Support Coordinator who served as an advocate and primary liaison to participants, partners, employers, and Commonwealth Corporation.

Training

The P21 PYWC combined 50 hours of trainings. The first training, College 101, oriented participants to the pilot program. Additional training sessions included such topics as: Communication Skills, Youth Development Theory and the Latest Youth Brain Research, Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences, Conflict Resolution, and Youth with Special Needs.

Participants were asked to evaluate the trainings upon completion using a 1–4 Likert scale. NIOST researchers received and analyzed evaluations from eight of the training sessions (135 separate evaluations in total). In general, participants rated the trainings very highly (see Chart 1).

Chart 1



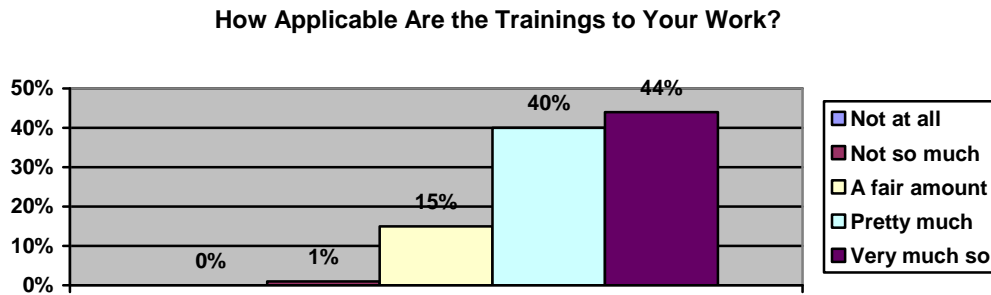
N=135

Participants had the option of commenting about the trainings on the evaluation form. Comments included:

- “Interactive learning with activities that are useful for work.”
- “Some things I needed help in and I learned a lot.”
- “Showed me that we need to involve youth more.”
- “I was able to learn new techniques for teaching; the trainings created a lot of thought.”
- “Helped me to target my approach to my work styles.”
- “Knowing that I am not alone and that other agencies are facing the same issues.”

Participants were asked to rate the applicability of the trainings (see Chart 2). In general, participants’ ratings indicated that the trainings were on target and applied directly to their work. Many participants found that their participation in group discussions helped them to overcome their fears of public speaking. Working in a group of their peers added a new level of professionalism to their work.

Chart 2



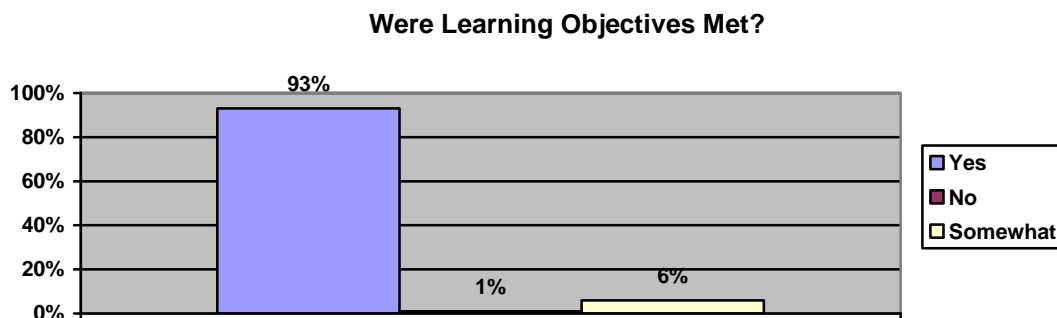
N= 135

Participants also offered the following comments about applicability:

- “The trainings gave me ideas that directly apply to my job.”
- “Learned I need to include youth in a supervisor’s meeting.”
- “Working together helped provide me with some useful ways to spark youth interest.”
- “I learned things that I can use with both customers and co-workers.”
- “This training has given me several ideas on how to empower the youth a little more than what we are currently doing.”
- “Being able to look to outside organizations about what youth can do.”

Participants found working in groups with their peers to be an extremely helpful way of bringing a new dimension to the material. They were able to process the new information from the perspective of their peers and share their experiences of working with youth. Several participants commented that working in groups helped them find their own voice, strengthen their beliefs, and be more open to others’ opinions and experiences. The majority of participants found role-playing to be the most helpful aspect of the training. This kind of activity allowed participants to develop their own strategies to incorporate what they learned in the trainings to fit the populations they served. Participants were in strong agreement that the trainings met their learning objectives (see Chart 3).

Chart 3



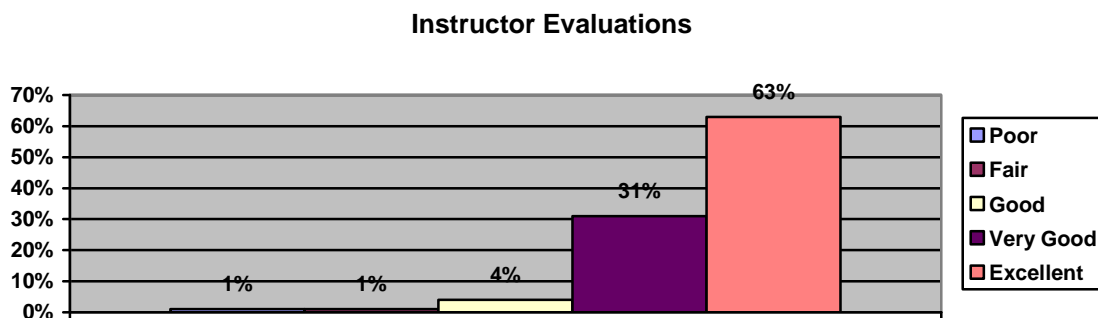
N=135

Participants commented on specific items that helped them meet their learning objectives:

- “Group participation and role play.”
- “Tactics presented for gathering youth opinions.”
- “Recognition of how youth may not understand everything you say but learn more by doing activities.”
- “Learning about individual learning styles, note-taking activities, and clustering.”
- “Learning that, although things may seem hard, they may not be un-achievable.”
- “Looking at conflict styles and learning how my style works with others.”

Participants also rated instructor effectiveness. The overwhelming majority of participants rated their instructors as “very good” or “excellent” (see Chart 4). Trainings led by regional instructors were more highly rated than those led by “outsiders.” Participants expressed that they were most appreciative of instructors from the local area who were best positioned and informed to understand the population and challenges they were facing back in their agencies.

Chart 4



N=135

Participants noted that the trainings offered new information and learning materials to aid them in their work. Most of the participants found the trainings relatively easy to understand and manage; the material was not overwhelming. They found the information supportive to their work. The material helped them to understand some of the obstacles programs face and to develop new ways to empower the youth in their programs.

Participants were asked to comment on how the trainings could be improved. Some of the most frequent comments were requests for additional written materials and suggestions to allow more time for group discussion. Other participants had specific suggestions for improving the training experience including:

- “Provide enough readings on the topics that are relevant and current.”
- “Allow more time for discussion during group exercises.”
- “Provide opportunities for the groups to change partners to be able to get to know and work with other group members.”
- “More information on gender and same-sex/single-parented families.”

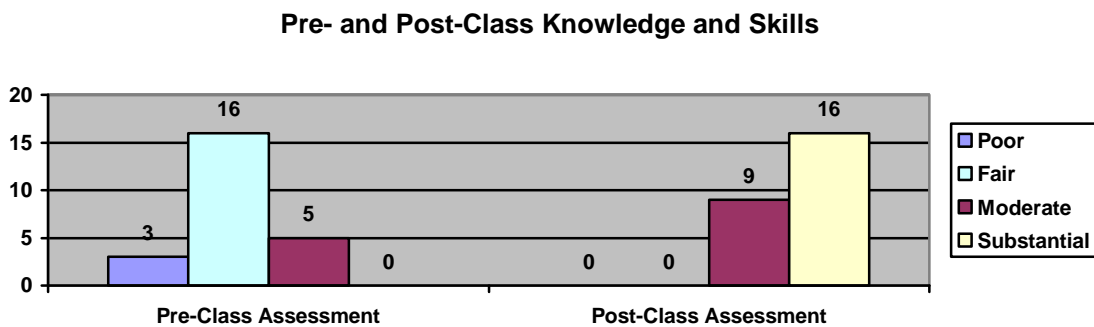
College Courses

The first college course, which began in April 2008, was Youth Development and Community Practice, taught by two instructors from Cambridge College. The class took place at Holyoke Community College. The goal of the course was to examine youth identity development along with theories and stages of youth growth. The objective of the class was to help participants use the concepts of youth development to further develop their knowledge, skills, and strategies in their current work.

Course participation required small- and large-group discussions, enhanced by reading and videos. The class employed a “popular education” approach that encouraged participants to take the roles of both learner and teacher, drawing not only from the readings but also from their own personal and work experience. Participants completed the course with grades of A or B.

Participants were surveyed (23 matched sets for pre- and post-surveys returned) before they began and after they completed the class. Prior to taking the class, the majority of participants rated their skills in this course domain as “moderate.” Most participants reported “substantial” skill gains from class participation. Participants felt the instructor was well prepared, stimulated enthusiasm, encouraged critical and creative thinking, and provided an atmosphere in which participants could learn from one another. Additionally, they said that the class provided real-world examples that reinforced what they were learning. Almost all participants anticipated using the information they gained from class in their personal and professional lives (see Chart 5).

Chart 5



N=23

Participants increased their knowledge and skills related to working with diverse populations and to understanding and applying theory, principles, and practices. They commented on the practical uses of the information in their personal and professional lives:

- “I have developed a better understanding of adolescents as a result of this class.”
- “The information provided in the course is crucial to the services we provide to our youth.”
- “I felt that everything offered in this class was instrumental to our learning and was all valuable and applicable to youth work.”

- “The most valuable part of this class was the peer learning.”
- “I found everything very valuable because it made you think and brought many problems and ideas to light. I strongly feel the pilot is serving its purpose.”

Areas participants identified for improvement included updating textbooks and readings and increasing prep time for group presentations. One participant suggested reducing the number of ice-breakers to save time for more instruction/or group discussions in the class.

The second college class began in September 2008. Principles and Practices of Afterschool and Youth Programs was taught by an instructor from Cambridge College and was also hosted at Holyoke Community College. The objective of the course was to provide a combination of practical skills in program maintenance and knowledge about infusing academic goals with enrichment activities, community, and family supports.

Course content included small- and large-group discussions enhanced by readings and reflecting all aspects of curriculum design through journaling. Participants developed learning activities, drafted questionnaires, conducted interviews, and created teaching aids. In group work, participants were expected to draw from the readings as well as from their own work and personal experience. Grades for the class ranged from A to C+, with 15 participants earning A’s. The instructor did not administer surveys for this course.

Partner Group

The Hampden Partner Group was formed to provide local voice and investment to the design and management of the P21 PYWC pilot. The partner group met once or twice a month at one of the local career centers or at Holyoke Community College. The partner group worked closely with the Student Support Coordinator to address program concerns and participation issues, as well as to sustain positive relationships with employers. There were some initial challenges in launching the partner group. Planning the program and getting it off the ground took time. Also, some agencies initially resisted participation:

“It was also hard to get the buy-in from some of the agencies. However, by the middle of the program, definitely by the end, the participants were all really supported. But at the beginning, to get the agencies to understand that every Wednesday the staff would be out of office to attend a class or training...took some coordinating, and it was part of the challenge at the beginning.”

Partner Group Member

As the pilot progressed, the partner group provided a steady and informed sounding board for the Student Support Coordinator and the liaison from the Commonwealth Corporation. Working with any collaborative team such as the partner group can bring challenges. Organizations with a variety of missions and activities needed to work together to achieve the pilot goals. Despite some limitations, having the pilot guided by a diverse collaboration of local organizations was probably the best way to give credibility to the P21 credential and to include the perspective and experiences of the provider community. It also offered a critical forum for the partners to learn about one another’s work and to develop the necessary trust to move forward together on additional professional development work in Hampden County.

Student Support Coordinator

The Student Support Coordinator was contracted for 14 hours per week and worked as an advocate and primary liaison to participants, partners, employers, and Commonwealth Corporation administrators. Initially, the coordinator found it challenging to define her role as an advocate for the participants while also reporting directly to the employers and partners. However, once the trainings were underway, the participants quickly recognized her role as an important asset and established strong relationships. The coordinator attended all classes and trainings and was generally available to provide one-to-one assistance, and be a resource for employers. Monthly narratives developed by the coordinator reported on attendance, contacts with employers and project partners, project accomplishments, challenges, and general feedback. These summaries were instrumental in keeping partners informed about the pilot implementation progress as well as keeping participants on-track.

The coordinator met weekly with participants and was available to them by phone or email throughout the pilot program. She attended all trainings and classes, kept track of attendance and homework assignments, provided academic support, gave one-on-one assistance with writing, and clarified assignments as needed. Additionally, she updated employers through weekly emails, providing them with training and class topics and with updates about their employees. Many participants, employers, and partners found the role of student coordinator to be essential to the success of the program:

“I think that having her there motivating us and reminding us...she kept us on track constantly about announcements, about paperwork and homework. It was great to have someone that we were able to turn to when we had questions, doubts, or were a little scared about the whole thing.”

Pilot Participant

“She was really the key person in this, keeping everyone in the loop and up to date. She gave weekly reports to all the partners. She was a confidant and a liaison. If you were to replicate or duplicate the program, you need someone like her in there.”

Partner Group Member

Attendance

The Student Support Coordinator, who kept a weekly attendance record, reported that attendance rates remained high among the pilot participants. Participants kept up with their work assignments and continued to be enthusiastic about the program.

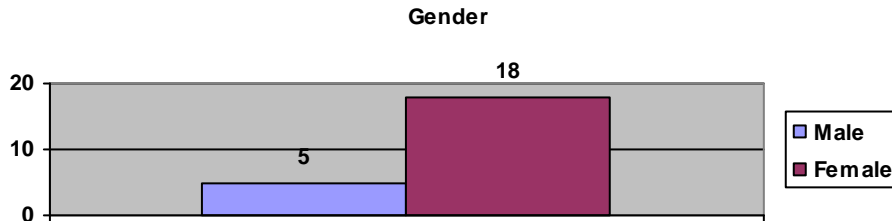
Section II. Experiences of P21 PYWC Participants

The following section provides background on the PYWC participants and examines their experiences related to change in knowledge, skills, competencies, practices, and awareness of a youth worker professional peer network (research question 1). We also examine the evidence for variation in experience by participant characteristics such as gender, language, educational background, and work experience (research question 3).

Participants

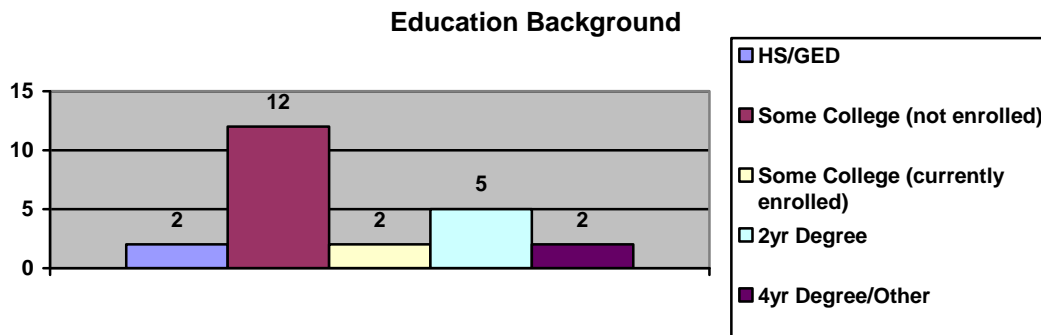
Twenty-three (23) participants completed the PYWC in January 2009. Participants from a variety of backgrounds brought a rich array of youth work experiences to the pilot. Of the 23 participants, 18 were female and 5 were male (see Chart 6).

Chart 6



Most participants' primary language was English (70 percent). Participants' backgrounds in higher education varied. Two participants had completed high school or attained a GED. Twelve participants reported having some college experience but were not currently enrolled. Two participants reported that they were currently enrolled in a college program. Five participants reported they had earned an associate's degree; two participants had earned a bachelor's or other degree (see Chart 7).

Chart 7



All participants reported that the primary age range of the youth they served was 14–21 years. Several participants also reported working with a wider age range in their programs; some programs started as young as five years and others served youth up to age 23.

Participants brought an array of experiences as youth workers to the pilot group. The majority of participants reported that they had worked in the field for more than six years; six participants reported that they had worked for more than 15 years in the field.

Competency-Based Self-Assessment Tool

As part of the PYWC pilot, participants completed a competency-based self-assessment survey prior to training to help program developers understand participants' experiences with training and professional development opportunities. The self-assessment also was designed to help participants gauge their own skill sets. Fourteen participants completed the post-training self-assessment. Pre- and post-test analysis reflects the assessments gathered from these fourteen participants only.⁴

Eight competency areas associated with high-quality youth work drive the structure of the self-assessment and provide the framework for credential content. The pilot included an interactive process with local partners and participants to assure that selected competencies and indicators were on target, taught so that they addressed the actual work of participants, and supported on the job. Each competency has one or more specific indicators to identify behaviors and skills that demonstrate mastery. The 16 indicators used in the self-assessment are reflected in this report.

Participants were asked to consider their levels of skill and knowledge for each indicator. The ability/response levels were: Beginning, Developing, Advanced, Unsure, or Not Applicable.

Evidence of Skill Change from Pre- to Post-Assessment

In the pre-training self-assessments, across all indicators, most participants rated themselves as Developing. Responses to the post-assessment showed a mixture of positive and negative change in scores (Table 3). In several competency categories, responses reflected either no change or a negative change from the pre-assessment score. Self-assessments that showed decreases in skill level at post-assessment may be due to participants' having over-estimated their skill levels at pre-assessment. Also, given that the pre-assessment was administered early in the program start-up, unfamiliarity with the framework and its application to daily practice may have made it difficult to identify accurate baseline ratings. In several instances, participants initially rated themselves as "Advanced" in a particular competency on the pre-assessment, so they had no room for improvement on the post-assessment. However, in each competency, more participants viewed themselves as "Advanced" on the post-assessment than on the pre-assessment. A few participants who originally rated a competency as "Not Applicable" or "Unsure" apparently re-evaluated how the competency related to their work, because they changed their responses to indicate applicability and a rating.

⁴ Assessments were retrieved electronically on April 13, 2009.

Table 3. Change in Competency Scores from Pre- to Post-Assessment

<i>Item</i>	<i>Direction of Change</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Direction of Change</i>
Plan and implement activities that are balanced, multidisciplinary, and appropriate for various ages and learning styles (Activities and Curriculum)	+	Offer youth opportunities for leadership (Activities and Curriculum)	+
Provide activities that help youth build work readiness skills and the ability to make good decisions about career opportunities (Activities and Curriculum)	-	Help youth understand and value personal choices and help youth to act on their own convictions (Building Caring Relationships / Behavior Guidance)	+
Demonstrate ability to establish clear boundaries, rules, responsibilities, and consequences with youth (Building Caring Relationships / Behavior Guidance)	-	Know agency standards of personal and professional boundaries (Professionalism)	+
Catalog personal professional development experiences regularly (Professionalism)	-	Develop and implement a set of connected thematic activities (Program Management)	-
Connect program activities to intended program and youth outcomes (Program Management)	n/c	Engage in activities and conduct that build youths' decision-making and communication skills (Building Leadership and Advocacy)	+
Provide youth with decision-making and leadership opportunities (Building Leadership and Advocacy)	+	Communicate regularly with parents and guardians in a manner that makes it easy for them to be informed about program activities and changes (Families and Schools)	-
Plan and implement activities that engage parents and families of youth (Families and Schools)	-	Demonstrate knowledge of PCEMS (physical, cognitive, emotional, mental, and spiritual) development of adolescents at different ages and stages of development (Child and Youth Development)	+
Understand the communities (ethnic and racial composition, economic structures, political forces, assets and risks, etc.) of families served by the program (Cultural Competence)	+	Provide programming that is relevant to the cultural representation of youth and community (Cultural Competence)	-

N=14

The indicators showing the highest mean change from the pre- to the post-assessment are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Highest Mean Change Across All Indicators

Skill Area	Pre-Assessment Mean Score	Post-Assessment Mean Score	Mean Change
Demonstrate knowledge of PCEMS development of adolescent at different ages and stages of development (Child and Youth Development)	2.00	2.79	.79
Plan and implement activities that are balanced, multidisciplinary, and appropriate for various ages and learning styles (Activities and Curriculum)	2.21	2.86	.65
Offer youth opportunities for leadership (Activities and Curriculum)	2.38	2.93	.55
Help youth understand and value personal choices and help youth to act on their own convictions (Building Caring Relationships / Behavior Guidance)	2.36	2.86	.50
Provide youth with decision-making and leadership opportunities (Building Leadership and Advocacy)	2.43	2.86	.43
Engage in activities and conduct that build youths' decision-making and communication skills (Building Leadership and Advocacy)	2.43	2.79	.36

N=14

The cohort of pilot participants came from a variety of youth-serving organizations and experiences. There was a wide range in self-assessment ratings: while some participants showed little change from pre- to post-assessment, others reflected positive change in all of the indicators. These indicators with the highest change fell in the competency categories of: (a) Child and Youth Development; (b) Activities and Curriculum; (c) Building Caring Relationships/Behavior Guidance; and (d) Building Leadership and Advocacy.

Comparative Change across Subgroups

Although the group of participants who completed both pre- and post-assessment is small (N=14), notable differences among subgroups appear in the findings. All but one of the post-assessment respondents was female, so we are unable to examine gender differences between pre- and post-assessments. However, the group of 14 participants can be separated by language and amount of higher education to examine differences in their pre- and post-assessment ratings.

Native English-speaking participants were more likely to rate themselves lower in the post-assessments than non-native speakers. Native English speakers rated themselves with lower post-assessment scores in “Plan and implement activities that are balanced and multidisciplinary,” “Provide activities that help youth build work readiness skills,” and “Provide programming that is relevant to the cultural representation of youth and communities.” They gave themselves much improved ratings in “Offer youth opportunity for leadership” (.77) and “Demonstrate knowledge of development of adolescence” (.67). Non-native English speakers showed positive or no change in all competency areas other than “Demonstrate ability to establish clear boundaries, rules, responsibilities.”

Participants with college degrees reported improvement in 11 of the 16 competency skill strands. Participants without college degrees showed less improvement on the post-assessments and noted negative change in eight of the 16 competency indicators:

- Provide activities that help youth build work readiness.
- Catalog personal professional development experiences regularly.
- Develop and implement a set of connected thematic activities.
- Connect program activities to intended program and youth outcomes.
- Communicate regularly with parent and guardians.
- Plan and implement activities that engage parents and youth.
- Understand communities of families served.
- Provide programming that is relevant to the cultural representation of youth and communities.

Years of experience in the youth work field also seemed to impact self-assessment rating. Participants with more years experience in the field were much more likely to report positive skill gain on the self-assessment than participants with less experience. While this data represents a small sample of participants, it is worthwhile to know that the tipping point for association between years of experience and positive skill gain was approximately five years.

Employer Perspectives on Competency-Based Skill Change

Employers were asked to respond to a short survey regarding competency-based skill level changes they observed in their employees who participated in the pilot. They were asked to rate the level of change with the following options: no change, some improvement, much improvement, or not applicable. Surveys for all pilot participants (23) were mailed to supervisors (preceded by an e-mail inviting them to participate in the survey). Non-respondents were contacted twice by e-mail and sent another copy of the survey. Fourteen surveys (for 14 participants) were returned. The following information is based on those responses.

On average, employers reported having directly supervised participants for more than two years. All employers who responded to the survey reported they directly observe the participant's work at least once a week; 71% reported observing more frequently. In general, employers reported seeing moderate to significant changes in each of the competency-based indicators. The greatest improvements were reported in three competency areas: Activities and Curriculum, Child and Youth Development, and Program Management (see Table 5).

Table 5. Percent of Employers Reporting Change in Competency-Based Skills

Competency	No Change	Some Improvement	Much Improved	Not Applicable
Planning and implementing youth activities and curriculum	7%	15%	64%	14%
Building caring relationships and providing behavior guidance to youth	14%	43%	43%	
Understanding and applying principles of child and youth development	7%	28%	64%	
Demonstrating an understanding of the cultural backgrounds of the youth being served and providing activities relevant to those backgrounds	21%	22%	57%	
Performing tasks in a professional manner and making efforts to grow professionally	7%	50%	43%	
Managing and connecting program activities with intended outcomes	23%	15%	62%	
Providing opportunities for youth to develop communication, decision-making, and leadership skills	14%	50%	36%	
Communicating regularly with parents/guardians of program youth	29%	21%	36%	14%
Planning and implementing activities that engage family and community members	29%		50%	21%
Connecting with and utilizing community resources/colleagues/partners to access the services needed for young people	36%	27%	27%	7%
Youth workers' level of enthusiasm for their work	21%	26%	43%	

N = 14 Supervisors

In some instances the employers indicated no change in performance. Several commented that their employees were already at a high level of performance prior to the program, so they could improve only marginally.

Interview Findings

Data for this section were collected through 15 interviews conducted with pilot participants and employers. A review of the responses to the interview questions suggests three major themes related to participant impact: increased confidence, personal and professional transformation, and commitment to the field.

Increased Confidence

Several employers commented that employees who participated in the pilot gained new confidence in their abilities:

“Her confidence level has improved since completing the P21 pilot program, and her enthusiasm to continue with her formal education has been greatly affected.”

Employer

“Staff have become more confident in what they do, and that comes through to the agency. They are more willing to take the lead in projects and ask how we can do things better. They are no longer settling for things to be the way they were, but now ask how we can do things better.”

Employer

One employer noted that her employee was now in a position to be groomed for a program management position:

“I have seen my employee grow professionally, and she is currently learning the job duties of the program director and has the confidence to take over the duties when needed.”

Employer

Personal and Professional Transformation

For some participants the experience of the pilot was transforming—personally, professionally, or both. Employers noted increased levels of enthusiasm. Several participants commented on how participation helped them redefine their work identity:

“Interacting with other professionals, I was able to become more secure of myself, learn new things that I’m capable of doing that before I was afraid of. Even through I was out of my comfort zone, I was able to do it, and that was so rewarding.”

Pilot Participant

“It is about empowering the clients we work with—the course empowers the participants in the class to dig deeper, to move a little bit further. Instead of staying stagnant with maybe a decision that has been made about a client...they will actually probe a little deeper to find the best services.”

Employer

“Sometimes you work and you have a title, and people tell you this is your job, your job title, and sometimes you work just because of the title. I understand that my job is not just a title, and the program gave me an insight of how I can do a better job and be a better person instead of just a title.”

Pilot Participant

Commitment to the Field

One of the goals of the pilot was to support the building of a stable work force for the youth worker field. Participants commented that their perception of their work grew from narrow identities as workers in individual silos to broader identities as members of a professional field with many career paths. For many of the participants, the pilot program provided an opportunity to reflect on the reasons they started working in the field and to affirm their commitment to stay.

“The program has refreshed my perspective about my work. I just know that this is something that I want to do even more than I ever thought.”

Pilot Participant

“I love what I’m doing. With the pilot, it helped me know that I really love what I’m doing and I see myself continuously working with youth. I don’t see myself in another place.”

Pilot Participant

“The program made me look at myself, evaluate myself, and ask, ‘Why am I doing this?’ I had not really stopped to think about it before...but it helped me understand my role. It was a tremendous help.”

Pilot Participant

Section III. Impact on Programs and Program Practices

A major expectation of the PYWC pilot was that programs and program practices would be positively affected as an outgrowth of the benefits experienced by participants. One of the motivations for developing the P21 pilot was to strengthen partnerships and increase cross-utilization of resources. The following section investigates in what ways employee participation in the PYWC affected programs and program practices (research questions 2 and 5).

During interviews, employers commented that participation in the pilot had a positive impact on their agency. Several employers expressed their expectation that these positive effects would grow and compound over the long term.

Several employers mentioned the increased and consistent ability of staff members to connect with and use the services of other organizations. Through collaboration with other regional agencies, programs are better able to serve youth and families in the community.

“P21 participants are thinking outside the box. They are connecting with other agencies. I know they knew of the other agencies in the community, but we are all so busy they never really knew what they did or how they served our community. Now they are working with these other agencies to help the people we serve, and it’s great. The enthusiasm is amazing.”

Employer

“I’m getting phone calls from different community-based agencies and other programs because now we are out there. The whole group who was there at P21,

we worked together, and now there is this whole group of people who know about my program and I know about theirs. And I understand now what they do, the value and the skills that they have. And it is a good thing.”

Pilot Participant

“The networking was amazing. People from different agencies started to collaborate and work together on projects, working with youth. It was not just the collegial feeling, but it went beyond that to actually working together and pooling resources.”

Student Support Coordinator

“One of the things that I observed was that not only does it help the participants as individuals but it brought our local agencies together. There are national connections for many of these people. They have friends. But it is much easier for someone from DYS to pick up a phone and call the Career Center because there is the person who is really going to do them a favor. And this is something that is not measurable.”

Partner Group Member

In order to sponsor staff participation in the pilot, employers had to shift program work schedules and staff commitments. Employers rearranged staffing schedules or functioned with a reduced workforce to allow pilot participants to attend class. Employers were also stretched to schedule time to meet with participants to offer feedback and advice on projects. At times, other staff members would complain about extra workloads while participants were in class.

“It was tough in the beginning for us, not because we couldn’t handle the extra work but because we would forget, but once we got into the swing of their new schedules, it was fine.”

Employer

“We were fine, but some of the other staff at first squawked about it, picking up the extra workloads, but more because of jealousy of not being selected.”

Employer

A professional development effort that, like PYWC, requires a high level of employer commitment is likely to have ramifications on organization work schedules and staffing dynamics. Positive effects such as organization networking must be weighed against the structural and human resource adjustments that agencies must undertake.

Another aspect of the pilot model which seemed to have a positive effect on transferring learning back to programs was participation of multiple staff from one employer. For those who participated as the only representative of their organization, they found more challenges to bringing change back to the program. Although they feel that they can help to make changes, the process appears much slower:

“You can make changes but it will be a slower process and you may meet more difficulties in trying. If there was more than one person from your program it would be more beneficial.”

Pilot Participant

“Every time I come to a training or class something clicks and you bring it back to work, you become the voice of the class and it would be nice to have other people from work who could have that voice.”

Pilot Participant

Section IV. P21 and the National Effort for Professionalizing the Youth Worker Field

The P21 PYWC is one of several efforts across the country focused on professional development for out-of-school-time and youth development workers. In this section, we consider the broader professional development context in which the PYWC was taking place (research questions 4 and 6).

The Next Generation Youth Work Coalition brings together individuals and organizations dedicated to developing a strong, diverse afterschool and youth development workforce that is stable, prepared, supported, and committed to the well-being and empowerment of children and youth (Starr, Gannett, Garza, Goldstein, & Yohalem, 2008). The national coalition has brought heightened visibility and new momentum to the development of a widely recognized and accepted credential for youth workers.

Significant activity related to credentialing, compensation models, and core competencies is currently taking place across the country in a variety of locations including Illinois, Missouri, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Vermont, New York City, Baltimore, Long Beach, and San Diego. Similar to the P21 PYWC experience, The Center for After-School Excellence at The After School Corporation (TASC) in New York City has developed credit-bearing college programs for frontline youth workers along with scholarships and other educational supports. In partnership with City University of New York (CUNY) the Center has developed professional certificate programs at four CUNY campuses. Certificates are typically a year-long series of courses, and credits can accumulate towards a college degree. Certificates are offered at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Many afterschool and youth development worker employers have committed to preferential hiring for certificate completers (Center for After-School Excellence, 2009). First year evaluation results show that overwhelmingly participants felt they had improved their academic abilities; and increased their knowledge of working with youth. A majority of the community organizations that partnered with the Center said they would continue to encourage employees to enroll and many expressed interest in a program expansion (Center for After-School Excellence, 2009).

The P21 youth worker credential, as a statewide effort to improve the lives of youth through the education of youth workers, aligns with the national effort to create a stable workforce for the out-of-school time and youth worker fields. The P21 initiative has a high level of buy-in from

state-level stakeholders. With significant outreach across the state to commissioners and regional groups, a vision for launching additional cohorts can be realized. Through the work of P21, a recognized portable credential seems viable. While the credential might need to be altered slightly to fit the needs of each region, the core focus on academic work combined with community-based training, all informed by a set of widely accepted competency areas, would meet established credential goals. Commonwealth Corporation's collaborative approach, which includes working with local and regional stakeholders to support a PYWC process, may be the most effective strategy to ensure sustainability and statewide participation (Hall, 2008, p. 10).

When asked about the role of the pilot in this broader effort to establish a statewide and/or national credential, one employer commented:

“This program should not just be a one-time pilot; it needs to be continued to enhance and grow the field. We are all working for the same goals, but sometimes it's like we work in silos, and networking at the different agencies makes a difference.”

Employer

Section V. Summary of Findings and Recommendations

There is broad agreement across all levels of the P21 PYWC pilot that the credential experience was a great success. The PYWC pilot project intended to improve program quality by strengthening partnerships among agencies and developing the skills and knowledge of youth workers through connection to higher education and quality professional development experiences. Findings show that participants were continuously encouraged, supported, challenged, and inspired by the trainings, college classes, peer engagement, and portfolio development. Relationships built with peers in other local agencies improved practice and expanded resources for addressing work challenges, both at the worker and organization level. Transfer of learning back to the workplace was evident through supervisor statements.

The attendance and retention in the PYWC was very strong. In addition to the \$1,000 stipend, participants benefited through increased connection to peer organizations in the county, substantial learning resources distributed through the trainings and college courses, and transferable college credit. Adjusting work schedules and personnel were continual challenges for employers, but these were overshadowed by employers' reports of positive change in employee practices and noticeable competency-based skill improvement.

For some participants, change related to competency-based skills was less evident. The findings suggest that participants without college degrees and less experience working in the field showed less improvement on the post-assessments. One possible interpretation of the finding is that participants with more college or work experience may have had exposure to the conceptual and theoretical aspects of the credential content, which positioned them to experience the PYWC and competencies in a different way. Follow-up with specific sets of participants, such those with no college degree, may shed some light on the self-assessment results. Decreases in skill levels in particular competency areas also may be due to participants' over-estimation of their skill levels on the pre-assessment.

The list of accomplishments in Hampden County is rich:

- A working partnership among the Commonwealth Corporation, Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Achieve Boston, and the Medical Foundation to inform the implementation of the Hampden County pilot and to sustain interest and energy toward building a system of statewide professional development.
- Implementation and completion of a credential program endorsed by the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development.
- A cross-county leadership group (Hampden Partner Group) collaboratively guiding a regional professional development credential.
- A robust program retention record, with 23 of original 25 participants completing the credential.
- Development of a competency-based curriculum consisting of a series of trainings, two college-level youth development courses, and a participant portfolio.
- Employer participation from 11 diverse employment sites.
- Development of a multi-participant team model, in which one employer sent more than one employee, to enhance transfer of learning back to the worksite.

At the completion of the pilot, the evaluation findings suggest the following programmatic and policy recommendations as the Commonwealth Corporation looks to develop new PYWC cohorts in other communities.

Programmatic Recommendations

1. Consider adjusting program schedule. We heard comments both about decreasing the length of the credential and about providing additional time to adjust for weather cancellations and similar problems. Both suggestions should be considered when determining the schedule for the next credential pilot.

2. Promote multi-participant team enrollment. Those staff members who participated along with colleagues from the same employer described the multi-participant team model as a real asset. Participants indicated that transfer of knowledge back to programs was enhanced and that they did not experience the occasional isolation felt by participants who attended alone.

3. Prepare and support employers for challenges related to work schedule and personnel adjustments. Despite knowing up front that they would need to adjust work schedules and coverage, employers still struggled to arrange release time for participating employees. Providing an employer network group and including best practices from the Hampden pilot may be helpful to employer groups in other communities.

4. Provide a Student Coordinator. Experience from the SAYD pilot in Boston and the Hampden County PYWC pilot affirms the importance of including a local Student Support Coordinator. The coordinator played a critical role in keeping participants engaged and on track with PYWC requirements, as well as providing vital communications to the partner group and employers.

5. Arrange local facilitation for courses and trainings. Participants gave positive feedback on all training facilitators; however, they seemed most appreciative of quality local instructors who understood the populations and challenges participants were facing.

6. Cross-walk training and college course content with competency framework. A detailed process of cross-walking the training and college course content with the competency framework would reveal the specific connections between the two. The competency strands, as manifested in the course content, must be transparent to participants, instructors, and employers in order to cultivate the highest level of knowledge transfer. At the time of the first self-assessment most of the participants may have been seeing the competency framework for the first time. A later pre-assessment period and a more comprehensive overview for participants of the embedded competencies in all components of the PYWC may enhance the usefulness of the pre- and post-assessment tool.

Policy Recommendation

7. Build on PYWC success by establishing additional PYWC cohorts as part of a larger vision to support statewide collaboration on and expansion of the PYWC model.

- The PYWC pilot showed strong positive results for workers, employers, and participating agencies. We frequently saw evidence that participants brought course and training content and knowledge back to their programs. The resources, activities, and networking opportunities strengthened their relationships to and understanding of youth in their programs and solidified their commitment to youth work. The P21 PYWC pilot has brought new levels of partnership among organizations and agencies in Hampden County. Organization leaders reported that their staff were working together in new ways and more effectively utilizing cross-agency resources. It would make sense to build on the successful experience of the PYWC and support the development of new cohorts in “credential ready” communities. Lessons learned from SAYD and PYWC can inform local strategies and continued implementation of the PYWC.
- Commonwealth Corporation is poised to explore in association with others, statewide collaboration and expansion of this model that is working for the PYWC targeted population. Additionally, there is opportunity to partner with those who work with other youth serving state agencies to share the model and support replication in a way that allows incorporation of workers serving populations from a broad range of ages including early education through young adults. Strong consideration could be given to how the findings and successes of the PYWC pilot could attach to and enhance existing work and support goals in other youth serving agencies. On-going work with Achieve Boston may identify opportunities to support making the PYWC model accessible across the state and integrated with other related statewide initiatives.
- Identify sustainable sources of public and private funds. Employers are unlikely to fully fund local implementation of a credential program, but they may be able, through their existing professional development investments, to engage in a co-funding partnership. Innovative efforts should be taken to engage key stakeholders—including public departments, state agencies, United Ways, and youth-serving organizations—in a conversation about strategic financing that

might include scholarships, bonuses, stipends, and compensation increases. All these together could contribute to formation of a reliable and stable funding system to strengthen the out-of-school time and youth work workforce.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interim Report

Appendix B – Additional Information on Achieve Boston and SAYD

Appendix C – Glossary

Appendix D - Achieve Boston Competency Framework

Appendix A – Interim Report

**P21 Professional Youth Worker Credential Pilot
Interim Report
September 2008**

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P21 Professional Youth Worker Credential Pilot
Interim Report
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P21 Professional Youth Worker Credential Pilot

Interim Report

September 2008

Introduction

This report provides a qualitative interim evaluation of the first phase of the P21 Professional Youth Worker Credential Pilot. The P21 Professional Youth Worker Credential Pilot (PYWC) is part of the Massachusetts statewide Pathways to Success by Twenty-One (P21) initiative. P21 is a statewide effort to improve the future prospects for vulnerable youth ages 16-21 across Massachusetts – including those who are in school and those who are out-of-school and unemployed. The P21 Initiative seeks to foster greater collaboration between state-level youth-serving agencies, while simultaneously helping local and regional youth-serving systems better coordinate services to vulnerable youth. P21 envisions a youth system for the whole state that is efficient and effective in ensuring that all youth have the tools and supports necessary to be productive citizens by 21. To assist in achieving this vision, P21 is a workforce development initiative that includes professional development for front-line staff serving vulnerable youth.

The P21 PYWC is part of the Unified Staff Development Strategy of P21. Unified Staff Development is one of the nine strategies in the P21 initiative. Through Unified Staff Development, P21 seeks to (1) improve program quality by strengthening partnerships that increase the use of resources within a region or community, and (2) create a common approach to recruitment and professional development for P21 partner staff.

The P21 PYWC pilot is a training and credentialing approach for 25 front-line youth workers who are committed to professional growth, seek academic advancement, and plan to stay in the youth service field. The P21 PYWC combines 50 hours of trainings and 2 credit-bearing college courses to create a common, competency-based curriculum for youth workers from P21 partner agencies within Hampden County, Massachusetts.

The mission of the P21 PYWC pilot is two fold: (1) improve program quality by strengthening partnerships to better utilize community resources that already exist in Hampden County; and (2) develop a common approach to recruitment and professional development through education and the advancement of a core competency-based approach specific to the needs of Hampden County that focuses mainly on vulnerable youth.

The pilot is based on a credential model developed by Achieve Boston and addresses eight competency areas for youth workers. The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development and Commonwealth Corporation jointly issue the credential. The pilot includes an interactive process with local partners and participants to assure that selected competencies and indicators are on target, taught so that they address the actual work of those participating, and are supported on the job. The Commonwealth Corporation, working with support from the Hampden Partner's Group, manages the P21 PYWC pilot. The Medical Foundation oversees the selection of instructors and training leaders, provides direct instruction, and works with the

Project Coordinator and Student Support Coordinator to implement the pilot project and support pilot participants.

Motivation for employer involvement includes the opportunity to cultivate particular staff, reduce the likelihood that staff will leave, and to take part in a unique, professional development program. Criteria for youth worker participation in the P21 PYWC pilot includes:

- Position in direct-service, program-level with leadership potential;
- Proven interest in serving youth and an expressed desire to stay in the field;
- No college degree or a 2 or 4-year college degree in unrelated (to Youth Development) field.

Participants for the pilot were chosen from a pool of 50 applicants. A thorough recruitment process conducted by the Hampden Partner's Group included an application with essay (Topic: Motivation to Participate) and a Memorandum of Agreement signed by participating employers. Some employers also submitted a letter of recommendation. The pilot began in December of 2007 with a cohort of 25 participants. At the time of this report, 24 participants continue in the pilot. A part-time (14hrs/wk) Student Support Coordinator began work in December, and is available to assist participants and employers.

The P21 PYWC Pilot Evaluation

An evaluation of the P21 PYWC pilot is being conducted by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) at the Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College. Evaluation activities by NIOST began in August 2008. The major research questions shaping the evaluation are:

1. What are the experiences of P21 PYWC participants related to change in knowledge, skills, competencies, practice, and awareness of a youth worker professional peer network?
2. In what ways has participation in the P21 PYWC impacted programs and program practices?
3. How does the impact/experience of the P21 PYWC program vary by student characteristics (such as employment and education background) and preparation, program/employer support, and program characteristics?
4. What do the "impact findings" (see research question 3 above) suggest related to future P21 PYWC implementation and sustainability as a statewide youth worker sector initiative?
5. In what ways has participation in the P21 PYWC stimulated cross-agency resource sharing and cross-agency collaboration towards coordinating the delivery of services to vulnerable youth?
6. How does the work through P21 PYWC fit into the national effort for professionalizing the youth worker field?

Information collected through the evaluation is expected to: (1) inform strategies and actions towards program improvement and development; (2) suggest preliminary outcomes related to changes in staff skills and knowledge, and impact on program practices; (3) and examine use of

cross-agency networking and resource sharing. It is hoped that this report will contribute to a deeper understanding of how the professional development pilot program can improve program quality.

This first Interim Report focuses on Research Questions 1, 2, 4, and 5. Further investigation and analysis will help to contribute to discussion of the remaining questions in a final report which will be produced in March 2009.

NIOST has conducted the following evaluation activities since beginning work on this pilot project in August 2008 (see Table 1):

Table 1

Evaluation Activities and Data Resources
▪ P21 Professional Development Committee Meeting notes - Review
▪ Participant training evaluations - Review
▪ Participant focus group notes (conducted by Commonwealth Corporation) - Review
▪ Student Support Coordinator monthly narratives - Review
▪ P21 course evaluation notes - Review
▪ Focus group with P21 pilot participants – Conduct and review notes
▪ Focus group with P21 Professional Development Committee members – Conduct and review notes
▪ P21 training (August 2008) - Observe
▪ Employer phone interviews (3) – Conduct and review notes
▪ Interview with Student Support Coordinator

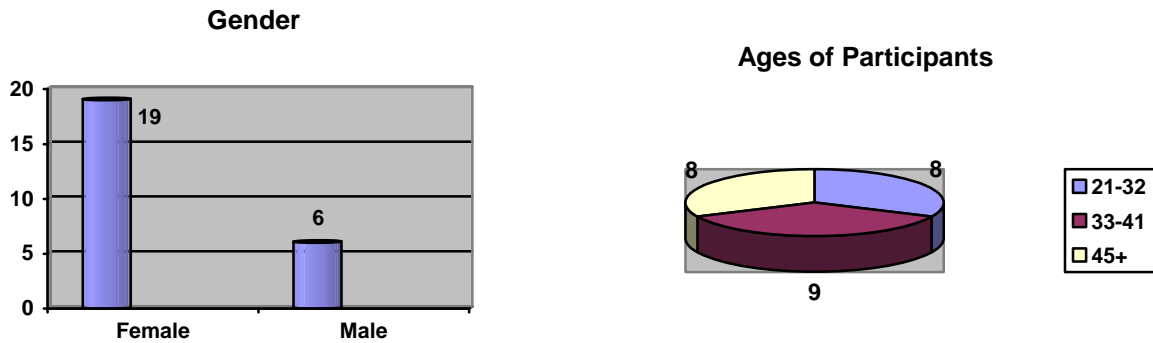
The focus of this report is to profile participants experience in the pilot to date, to examine early implementation findings and participant impacts, and to provide recommendations for continued program improvement. This Interim Report is divided into several sections. Section One of the report describes the pilot participants. Section Two looks at preliminary findings related to pilot implementation. Section Three highlights preliminary findings related to participant experience. Section Four examines employer participation and cross-agency work and Section Five presents several recommendations for continued program improvement and a brief summary.

Section One: Participants

Twenty-five participants were selected by participating P21 agencies to begin the pilot. Participants represent a variety of backgrounds and bring a rich array of youth work experiences with them.

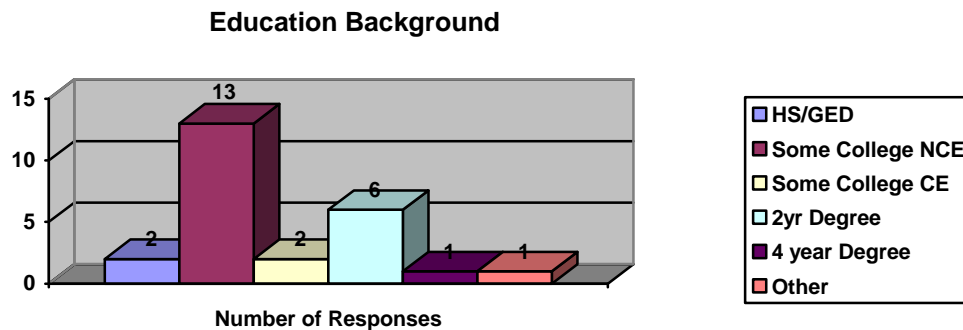
Of the 25 participants, 19 are female and 6 are male. The mean age of participants is 37(see Charts 1a and 1b).

Charts 1a and 1b



The primary language spoken for most participants is English (72%). Background in higher education varies among participants. Two (2) participants completed high school or GED. Thirteen (13) participants report that they have some college experience but are not currently enrolled. Another two participants report that they are currently enrolled in a college program. Six (6) participants report earning a 2-year degree and 1 participant reports having completed a 4-year degree (see Chart 2).

Chart 2

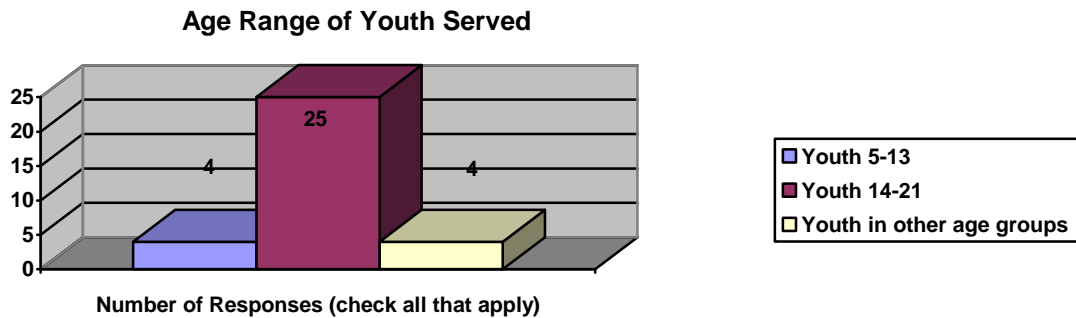


Participants vary in their job titles and services they provide to youth. Job titles include:

- Teacher
- Case Manager
- Program Manager/Program Director
- Career Counselor
- Case Historian
- Child Care Worker
- Youth Specialist
- Administrative Worker

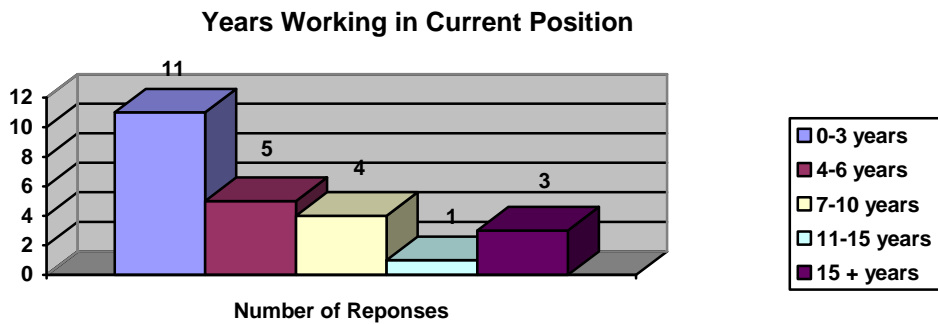
All participants report the primary age range of youth they serve as 14-21 years. Several participants also report working with a wider range of youth ages in their programs, starting as early as 5 years and continuing through 23 years (see Chart 3).

Chart 3



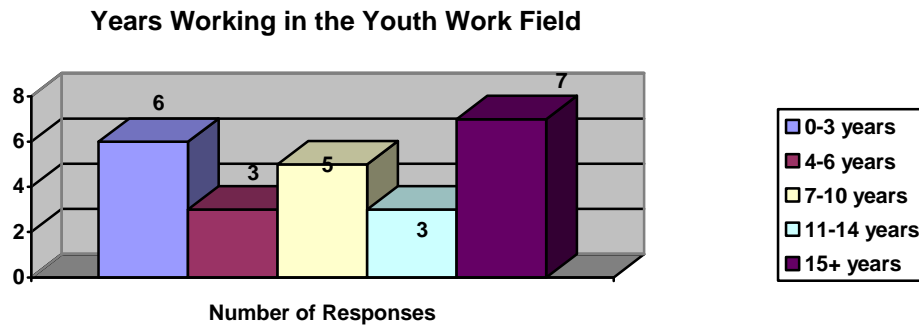
Eleven participants have been in their current position for 3 years or less. Five participants have been in their positions between 4 and 6 years, four participants between 7 and 10 years, and one between 11 and 15 years. Three participants have been working in their current jobs for more than fifteen years (see Chart 4).

Chart 4



Experience working in the youth work field varies, also. The majority (15) of participants has been working in the youth work field for more than six years, and 7 participants have been working in the field for more than fifteen years (see Chart 5).

Chart 5



Section Two: Preliminary Findings on Pilot Implementation

Information for this section was gathered from participant training evaluations, course surveys, and Student Support Coordinator monthly narratives. At the time of this report, the participants have completed the majority of the trainings, completed their first college course, and will be starting their second college course shortly.

General Trainings

Participant evaluations from the trainings generally indicate that the information gained was both inspiring and welcomed. Participants report that they gained substantive knowledge that could be brought back and used in their programs. This material helped them to understand some of the obstacles programs face, and to develop ways to empower the youth in their programs. Participants like the creative ideas that were presented by training leaders, and can draw upon the information given to develop their own strategies or projects specific to the population of the youth in their program.

Participants found working with their peers in groups to be an extremely helpful way of digesting the material presented, gaining insight from hearing different perspectives, and learning about the experiences of their peers. Several participants commented on how working in groups helped them to be open to other opinions, suggestions, and ideas.

Participants were asked to rate each training using a Likert style scale with one being “not at all valuable” and five being “very valuable.” The overwhelming majority of participants rated the trainings between a four and five indicating they found the trainings to be very valuable towards their professional development. The following quotes are a sampling of responses to the question of what was “most helpful”:

- “Being able to interact with the group and listening to all their concerns was very helpful.”
- “The ability to face challenges and not feeling stuck, and learning that it’s okay to try new things.”

- “Tactics presented to get youth to open up and get their views and get them involved.”
- “Knowing that I am not alone and that other agencies are facing the same issues.”
- “It’s the dynamics of the group. Constant movement and interactions.”
- “Being able to look to outside organizations about what youth can do.”
- “The resources that I learn about from my peers.”
- “Sharing information and realizing how many areas of professional development we have.”

Participants were also asked to offer comments on how the trainings could have been improved. Some of the most frequent comments received were requests for additional written materials and more time for group discussion within the trainings.

Other participants had specific suggestions for improving the training experience including:

- Provide readings that are more updated and connected to the work they do.
- Provide more time between the group projects.
- Reduce the amount of group projects to reduce stress.
- Provide opportunities for the groups to change partners to be able to get to know and work with other group members.
- Reduce the amount of homework to more manageable levels to allow for outside commitments, balance work/school/life.

College 101 Training

Although categorized as a training the College 101 prep course was designed specifically to assist the participants in preparing for the two college credit-bearing classes. The requirements and responsibilities of college-level work would be challenging for many of the participants, in particular some without previous higher education background. The training was designed to help participants develop strategies in time management to help balance the demands of college classes with work and home life. Additionally, the College 101 training helped prepare the participants by providing instruction and practice in writing, studying skills, and note-taking. Within the training, participants were able to identify their learning styles and how to use “clustering” as a writing aid.

Participants were asked to rate the value of the training. The overwhelming majority of participants found the training to be very helpful for their transition into the college-level class. When asked for specific feedback to identify what they found to be the most helpful, the participants responded:

- “Helped ease into the academic work and helped me to see that I can do it.”
- “This is an area that I really need help in and I learned a lot.”
- “I found out how to be organized and how to take precise notes.”
- “Getting the information explained to you very detailed was very helpful.”
- “Hand-outs, class discussion, visuals, diagrams were most helpful.”
- “I found the writing session very helpful, hope to have more of it.”

Participants were asked to comment on specific ways the training could be improved. One participant suggested the College 101 training be divided into two trainings to allow more time to focus on the two major subtopics. Other participants recommended that more time be spent in the writing skills portion of the training with a specific emphasis on grammar.

College Course

The first college course began in April and was taught by two instructors from Cambridge College and titled: Youth Development and Community Practice. Class was hosted at Holyoke Community College. The overall goal of the course was to examine the identity of youth along with theories and stages of youth growth and development.

Course participation required small and large group discussions, enhanced by reading and videos. The class employed a “Popular Education” approach which encouraged students to take on the role of both learner and teacher, drawing from the readings as well as their own work and personal experience.

Participants were surveyed following the completion of the class. Most participants reported that their skill gain from class participation was “substantial.” Almost all students anticipated using the information they gained from class in their personal/professional situations. Students expressed overall high satisfaction with the instruction and methods of the course. Areas students identified for improvement included: updating textbooks and readings; and increasing prep time for group presentations.

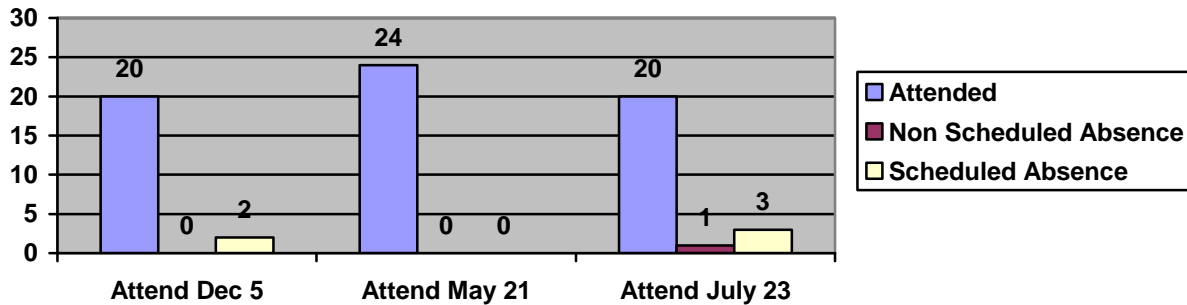
Attendance

The Student Support Coordinator reports that participation remains high among the cohort group in the pilot. Participants are keeping up with their work assignments and continue to be enthusiastic about the program. Attendance is monitored through a weekly attendance record maintained by the Student Support Coordinator.

Three attendance points are plotted in the following chart: (1) December 5, first date in attendance record (N=25); (2) May 21, randomly chosen date in middle of attendance record (N=24); and (3) July 23, last date in attendance record reviewed by evaluation team (N=24). Average attendance based on the three points is 88% and only 1 non-scheduled absence across the three dates (see Chart 6).

Chart 6

P-21 PYWC Attendance



Pilot Implementation – Strengths and Challenges

Pilot initiatives such as the P21 PYWC pilot continuously face challenges in project implementation in efforts to successfully support participant needs and further project goals. At the same time along the way significant milestones and strengths can be identified which help secure steady progress forward. In the following section we highlight some of the significant strengths of the P21 initiative that have contributed to its present success as identified by project leaders. Articulation of these strengths provides insight into some of the foundation components that similar professional development initiatives may wish to adapt. Significant project challenges are also highlighted.

Strengths

- Partnership between the Commonwealth Corporation, Achieve Boston, The Medical Foundation, and Holyoke Community College.
- Credential endorsed by the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development.
- An active leadership group (Hampden Partner’s Group) engaged in the design and development of the pilot, communication and interaction with and support for participating employers, and recruitment design and implementation.
- Student Support Coordinator actively engaged with employers and participants.
- Employer signed MOA solidifying participating employer role, responsibilities, and support.
- Diverse training facilitation.
- Team (multiple employees from one employer) participation.
- Balanced content of training trainings and college courses.
- Strong project coordination and documentation.
- Established competency-based framework.

Challenges

- Wide backgrounds with regard to academic experience.
- New and or expanding partner relationships in Hampden County.
- Piloting an innovative model (depth and breadth) for professional development and system-building.
- Transfer of learning back to worksites.
- Employer support strategies for training participants.
- Working simultaneously on implementation activities and continuous program improvement efforts.

As part of the evaluation process we will continue to observe the impact that these early-identified strengths and challenges have on the ultimate success of the P21 PYWC pilot project and will be revisited in the final report. Lastly, this section discusses several components of the P21 PYWC pilot that offer the opportunity for continuous discourse on program improvement strategies.

Time Commitment

The requirements for the P21 PYWC pilot are clearly more comprehensive than the standard professional development experiences offered to youth workers. The 14 month commitment from participants and employers is demanding. Many participants continue to struggle to find the right balance of time to complete class work with home, jobs, family, studying, and paper writing. Time management continues to be one of the greatest challenges.

“It’s not been easy for me to manage the class work, papers on top of work, the youth and staff and also discovering myself. I’ve been through other year long trainings, but this is more intense.”

Pilot Participant

In the case where several participants come to the pilot from the same employer, there can also be added stress on the employer to balance the needs of the employee participants and the programs.

“The program is long and it’s been great that the staff are participating in the program. They’ve all been really happy. Overall it has been a positive experience for our agency. And overall we’re really happy that our staff members are participating in the program. But it has been a long program and coverage for multiple people has been challenging at times... it is [also] taxing on them because they have to go to school and then come back and catch up what they have missed. It is intense.”

Pilot Employer

Group Work

Group work can be both rewarding and challenging. It is not unexpected that a course focusing on Youth Development principles and competencies would value group exercises and group project work. It is clear from survey results and training reviews that participants value learning from each other and participating in group discussions that draw out shared experiences.

However, completion of group work that requires participation/meeting outside of scheduled class time is another potential barrier to consistent and full participation. Participants reported difficulty in having enough time and multiple scheduling problems around completing group project work. Participants liked the positive aspects of working in groups and working side-by-side with class peers, however scheduling times outside of class to meet was often difficult and added additional stress to the experience.

Student Support Coordinator

The addition of a Student Support Coordinator created a grounding link between the participant experience, the employers, and partner group. Her role is to serve as the primary contact for pilot participants and be available at every class, provide one-to-one assistance, and be a resource for employers. Monthly narratives developed by the Coordinator report on attendance, contacts with employers and project partners, project accomplishments, challenges, and general feedback. These summaries are instrumental in keeping partners informed about the pilot implementation progress as well as keeping participants on-track. Many participants comment on the helpfulness of the Coordinator role: having someone very accessible to answer questions, talk to about ideas, or review the details of a training has been important.

“The role that [the Coordinator] has played has been very significant in terms of getting me back to work...you can just e-mail [the coordinator] and ask a question and she would give you back all of the information that went on in class and give you more ideas that could be put into practice. That has been great and has been very significant.”

Pilot Participant

As a pilot it made sense to infuse as many support resources as possible into this initial implementation. Project leaders will need to weigh the long-term cost/benefit of providing this support role, and consider alternative models of support that could be made available to students and offer them a similar sense of personal support and connection.

Section Three: Preliminary Findings on Participant Experience

Through a focus group with participants and review of training and course feedback notes, the researchers examined participant experience to date and early evidence of participation impacts. There is a general agreement among the participants that this program has been interesting, exciting, and challenging. Overall satisfaction rating of the pilot is very high and participants regularly feel the goals of the trainings are met, the content of the material helpful and relevant to their work, and the instructors are well qualified.

One aspect of the pilot that is reported as the most powerful for the participants is the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions with peers. Participant's comments reflect how helpful it is to hear their peers talk about situations similar to their own and learn new ways of approaching certain issues. Additionally, since the commencement of the pilot, several of the participants have commented on how they are able to utilize the services offered by other organizations and use each other as a youth development resource.

“Just the resources here within the room itself, meeting all of the other participants has been amazing. I feel like we are starting to come together. Referrals are going back and forth and I find that so wonderful, because no one is just an island on their own. Everyone used to be worried about their funding and not wanting to share it. I have always had that mentality that we have to share because it is for the betterment of the youth – our future. All of a sudden we are coming together and it shows in the youth that are being referred. I can pick up the phone and send someone to the other programs or my classmate calls me with referrals. What a difference. It is amazing.”

Pilot Participant

“Sometimes you work in one place or with people and you think you know everything, and then you wonder what this person is going to tell me that I don’t know. I was surprised because there is a lot of stuff that you can learn about from others about what you are not doing in order to do your job better.”

Pilot Participant

“We now see each other in a different way. Basically we see everyone in a different way through our experiences. It is because you don’t know what exactly their job is – when someone talks to you about DYS you think about a juvenile who is in trouble – but you really don’t know. You don’t know the experiences that youth may be having at different programs. You see everything different and start respecting them in a different way, as professionals.”

Pilot Participant

For some participants the experience in the pilot has already been transforming both personally and professionally. A few participants commented on how they have grown more confident in their ability. The credential process has provided participants with an opportunity to look at their strengths as individuals and provides them with the confidence to take on more leadership roles in their organization.

“I really look inside myself and pull out things I didn’t think I had and realize that I am doing much better than I thought I could. I can give youth more that I ever thought I could, I have more patience and I feel different.”

Pilot Participant

“For me, it was not what I expected at all. I thought I would come in and it was just going to be a bunch of work. You are going to study, turn in your assignments. I didn’t think it was going to be as active as it was. If it keeps you active, it keeps you interested. It gives you different views, different ideals, different ways to approach some of the same situations you may have been presented with in the past. As [someone else] said, since your whole approach is different, your results are going to be different. If you are in a better place with yourself, because you have a better understanding, you are going to allow your light to shine on whoever else you are working with.”

Pilot Participant

“I think that it is an amazing program that pushes you out of your comfort zone. It makes you challenge yourself and think different about yourself – your strengths and weaknesses. It betters you as a youth work, which I think it is a great opportunity.”

Pilot Participant

There is frequent evidence that participants are intentionally looking for ways to bring course and training content and new knowledge back to their programs. The tools, activities and networking have strengthened their relationships and understanding of youth in their programs. Participant comments include:

- “There has not been a time when I left class not feeling that I learned something that I could bring to work.”
- “Every time I come to a classroom training, something clicks and you bring it back to work.”
- “Some of the activities that we did from taking trainings and also from the college course, I was able to bring back and use it with the youth that I work with.”
- “My employer came up to me and asked about what we were doing in class. They received an email from [the coordinator] and they could see that we were bringing a lot back to work, bringing more to the table than we normally would.”

Additionally participation in the P21 PYWC pilot has helped define career pathways for several of the participants. Prior to enrolling in the pilot, some of the youth workers were unsure of options or alternative ways they could provide services to youth.

“One thing that this class has done for me is that it really directed me -- tunneled and focused my future on where I want to go. I don’t think that when I was working on the floor I thought – oh the next logical step is to be an employer – but I don’t want to be that anymore – I see myself going in a totally different direction [in youth work] then I wanted to go in January.”

Pilot Participant

The notion of providing a positive role model is an important aspect of youth development work. Pilot participants have noticed how youth in their programs have been observing and taking an interest in what they are doing in classes and feel good that they can lead by example.

“When I leave for school with my book bag, the kids laugh saying “he’s going to college” and are all joking around. When I come back, they ask what I learned today. I can then sit down and talk to them and it makes them think that school is important because I’m going to school and already have a job.”

Pilot Participant

“Wednesdays I am in school, so they have to come in later and they are happy that they can come in a little later, but they see that I am going to school and I

bring some activities back to them...it does give them a positive image about school when they see that I am going.”

Pilot Participant

Some aspects of the cohort model have worked very successfully for P21 PYWC, including group identification and close learning relationships. Also, in the P21 PYWC pilot, sets of multiple staff from one employer are participating. For those who attend as the only representative of their organization, they find more challenges to bringing change back to the program. Although they feel that they can help to make changes, the process appears much slower:

“You can make changes but it will be a slower process and you may meet more difficulties in trying. If there was more than one person from your program it would be more beneficial.”

Pilot Participant

“Every time I come to a training or class something clicks and you bring it back to work, you become the voice of the class and it would be nice to have other people from work who could have that voice.”

Pilot Participant

Support from employers and employer organizations seems to be a critical “enabler” for pilot participants. Most participants felt they had strong support for participation, although it was not universal. Completing class assignments and implementing new skills and knowledge back at the program site all need to be balanced against performing regular work tasks and responsibilities. For those who felt they had strong support, it has been an important component to their successful progress.

“Support has to come from the employer because there are times when we may have a project that we were working on during the class and if we didn’t have the support from the employer it would have been impossible for us to actually complete the task. Certain things needed to be done during business hours and if the employer did not allow that it would not only cut in to the time outside of work with family and stuff, it would have been harder to complete the tasks. I think support form the employer is a must. It is something that we definitely needed.”

Pilot Participant

Section Four: Employer Participation Experience and Cross-Agency Work

Participation Experience

There are multiple employers with staff participating in the P21 PYWC pilot (see Table 2 below). Employers fulfill multiple roles in the pilot. Employers serve as part of the leadership team guiding project implementation. Employers also identified participants to enroll in the pilot

project and provide a variety of on-going supports to pilot participants including: rearranging staffing schedules to allow for class participation; talking with participating staff about their experiences; and offering feedback and advice on class projects. Personal and professional support for participating staff can vary, although most evidence suggests that employers and employer representatives frequently strategize to support pilot participant’s work and class needs. In some cases, employers have supported staff working on class projects and homework during employment hours.

Table 2

Employer	Number of Participants
Department of Youth Services Vendors	
RFK Children’s Action Corporation	1
Center for Human Development, Terri Thomas Girls Program	3
Center for Human Development, CAP	2
Gandara Center, Gandara Group Home	1
Department of Youth Services Core Staff	3
CareerPoint	4
The Care Center	3
New England Farm Worker’s Council	3
FutureWorks	2
MCDI Inc.	1
Holyoke Public Schools	1

Participating employers report that there are many recruitment and retention challenges in the field which contributed to their motivation for involvement in the pilot. Many staff working with participating employers have little or no college background. Programs are under funded and remuneration is typically low, yet professional development is still an important work component. They explain their on-going interest in encouraging staff to participate in training and further education. The pilot is an opportunity to involve some staff in a unique professional development experience which staff will hopefully “internalize and be motivated and continue” to be satisfied in their work. Long-term professional development has not been the traditional approach for participating employers. More typically staff attend “one-shot” trainings which employers agree are not the “best model.”

Employers observe that leadership and decision-making for the pilot initiative has been very inclusive. While inclusive strategies can often slow decision-making down it can also assure that all voices are being heard and diverse opinions contribute to group actions. Employers seem very satisfied with the leadership strategies so far and see the inclusive process as an actual strength.

“I believe [strategy of inclusion] can be and I would argue that it has to. I would suggest that if it’s well facilitated, the things that need to take longer probably

need to take longer because we haven't worked them through. We want to come out of this owning the process. If [someone] and I disagree on something it is better that we fight it out now than if we fight it out during the process. That way we can come to a good, honest debate, decide on a resolution, and then move forward together."

Pilot Employer

"I think of the inclusiveness as a strength and a challenge. Things do take longer – but I think it is definitely worth doing. I have never been so well heard. I think that kind of keeps you invested."

Pilot Employer

Employers and employees point to the positive impacts of program participation they have observed. Some participating staff show a new level of enthusiasm and professionalism in their work, mainly because they for the first time see themselves as professionals.

"There is the enthusiasm and also the professionalization of the workers. They see themselves as professionals. They are doing some great work. They are getting a language for it, they are getting literature about it, and they are seeing other people like them doing the same kind of work."

Pilot Employer

"As the workers get more education and they know more, they get more empowered, take more initiative, making more decisions, and people see that and respond to it. I think it works that way. Over time, we are demanding more. This is what we do. I think the credentials, naming the competencies and giving language to the things that they do – is really important."

Pilot Employer

One employer recalls during an interview a specific interaction that demonstrates how the participating staff member has grown. Another employer suggests that problem-solving skills have changed.

"We [agencies] have been impacted and I think that long-term impact is going to be even greater...for example one of the students who wanted to participate in a field trip came to her teacher [a pilot participant] and this time she did not do the work for them, she gave them the tools, told them what to do, and how to do it and who to go to. The students came and lobbied for themselves and did the proposal and the requests. She let the young people advocate for themselves which is really cool to see. In the past she would have served as a bridge between the students and me but, now she just facilitated the process and let the students do the lobbying themselves."

Pilot Employer

"The course empowers the students in the class to dig a deeper, to move a little bit further, instead of possible staying stagnant with maybe a decision that has been

made about a client. Instead, they will actually probe a little deeper to find the best services... they are taking the initiative to problem-solve.”

Pilot Employer

Cross-Agency Work

One of the motivations for developing the P21 PYWC pilot was to strengthen partnerships that “increase smart use of resources within a region or community.” Progress towards this goal seems to be taking place. According to employers, coordination of services between agencies has historically not been strong. Several employers have never worked jointly at the staff level. Bringing a variety of staff together in the pilot has created opportunity for knowledge exchange and resource sharing between agencies. Several employers and employers echo the added value the pilot experience has brought for seeking out opportunities to work across agencies and to more consistently connect with staff and services from other agencies.

“We use the word networking, but it is more than networking. When we get four people who work for different employers, let’s say – and you get them talking – working on a project. You hear them say ‘oh you can’t do that, because in our place we do this...’ and then people ask what that means. There is a lot of transfer. More than just I know so-and-so and I can give her a call. It is that I know so-and-so and she said you can do this. The network is a step-up; it is an exchange of knowledge beyond just having a go-to person.”

Pilot Employer

“Where there wasn’t a relationship, there now is and where there was, it is now stronger. I would say that at the [pilot participant] level, the relationships are even stronger now. It is more than just knowing the people and their programs; they now know what makes them tick. They are now calling up to their support people – if someone makes a bad decision or has a bad situation, they are getting calls from classmates offering their help and suggestions.”

Pilot Employer

Section Five: Recommendations for Continued Program Improvement

As the P21 PYWC pilot continues there are several recommendations that can be made based on the comments from training/course evaluations, focus groups, and interviews. Some of these recommendations could contribute to immediate changes while others may apply more to implementation of future initiatives.

- 1. Promote multi-staff team enrollment in pilot initiative and provide support for full engagement of teams at employment site.** Strong consideration should be given to having at least two participants from one organization participate in the credential when possible. Participants strongly indicated that transfer of knowledge back to programs would be enhanced and timelier through a team approach. Some employers may also need help in thinking through how best to engage teams back at the program site, and harness the fullest possible benefits of team participation.

2. **Continue to provide the necessary communication and technical assistance to help employers support pilot participants.** Based on a review of monthly Student Support Coordinator reports, sometimes monthly communication with employers is limited to attendance issues. Since employers show strain related to managing staff time loss, it may be helpful to increase communication with and between employers around these concerns and to share potential strategies for managing staff time. Funding to help offset costs for staff replacements during class and training times could be a helpful solution. Additionally, offering supportive employer trainings/forums and related materials could be useful.
3. **Arrange local facilitation for courses and trainings.** Participants reported positive feedback on all the training facilitators, however they seemed to most appreciate instructors from the local area who were best positioned and informed to understand the population and challenges they were facing back in their agencies.
4. **Rotate in-class workgroups to promote broader learning experiences and cross-agency relationships.** Some participants expressed that often group work is limited to one “home group” rather than frequently adjusting group make-up. Participants suggest their learning experience would be enhanced if they had the opportunity to rotate group work experience with many members of the class. This would also help them to gain a deeper understanding of the services and work done at other programs/agencies.
5. **Supplement existing College 101 Training with additional language support.** Participants feel additional language and writing support for grammar/word usage would be a great help to prepare for written assignments. Many participants feel stressed during writing assignments because of the length of time they have been out of school. Additionally, many youth workers who are bi-lingual indicated that they could benefit from the added support and background.

Summary

Realizing the considerable role that professional development can play in the quality of services offered through youth development programs, the findings from this evaluation can be helpful in refining the credential program content and process. At the time of this report a substantial part of the credential has transpired and there is strong evidence that participants and employers have benefited from participation. Participation enthusiasm remains high from both participants and employers. Participants regularly point to the opportunity to network and connect with peers as a particular strength of the program, and employers regularly observe participants bringing classroom learning back to the program. Employer commitment and participant support in the form of a Student Support Coordinator are agreed upon prerequisites for success.

Implementation of the P21PYWC pilot has brought new levels of partnership between organizations and agencies in the community. Organization leaders report that their staff are working in new ways together, and more effectively utilizing cross-agency resources than before. It will be important to document what type of system-building activities sustains these new relationships.

There is often in any field a great divide between theory and practice. In constructing the P21 PYWC leaders bring together the best of two worlds, classroom and practical training, with the goal of inspiring a transfer of learning that helps to improve the quality and delivery of services to young people across the community. For the P21 PYWC pilot and other similar initiatives such transfer of learning may be best supported by:

- Learning experiences focused on knowledge and skills.
- Increased personal and professional aspirations.
- Promoting the discovery and application of knowledge through high quality research and writing.
- Openness and respect in an inclusive learning community.
- Encouraging and supporting greater collaboration between participants.
- Identifying and supporting emerging leadership.¹

Evaluation activities will continue to observe and document the activities and progress of the P21 PYWC pilot as it moves through its final stages. We expect findings to continue to inform the implementation of the pilot and contribute to current national discussion on professional development approaches for youth workers.

¹ Background information on Knowledge Transfer Strategy taken from University of Portsmouth's Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy, Academic Council, April 2004.

Appendix B – Additional Information on Achieve Boston and SAYD

During the spring of 2002, a group of organizations, with seed funding from the City of Boston, came together to plan a professional development system for afterschool providers and youth workers throughout Boston. Achieve Boston's mission was to improve the overall quality of afterschool and youth programs by developing a plan for a professional development system in which program staff at all levels would have access to comprehensive training and educational opportunities that enable them to strengthen their skills, develop their knowledge base, and advance along their chosen career path. The Blueprint for Action: Professional Development System for the Out-of-School Time Workforce was produced and disseminated in January 2005.

Achieve Boston's competency framework represents an integration of the competencies for both after-school and youth work. Eleven competency areas are further distinguished into particular topics, and issues of inclusion and special needs are addressed throughout the framework.

The School-Age Youth Development (SAYD) pilot was launched in January 2007. The SAYD is a competency-based credential which included a three-part sequence of college coursework, community-based training, and direct field experience. The timeframe for completing the credential was 18 months. At the end of the 18 month period participants had: (1) completed three credit-bearing college courses; (2) completed 45 hours of community-based training; and (3) demonstrated skill gain through on-site observation and a portfolio presentation.

Each SAYD participant was sponsored by his or her employer. Sponsorship included recommending the employee for participation and committing to paying a \$1000 one-time salary bonus to the employee on the condition that he/she remained employed by the sponsoring organization six months after completion of the credential. Twenty-nine school-age and youth development workers began the SAYD in January 2007 and 12 of those workers completed all requirements and were issued the credential.

Appendix C – Glossary

Achieve Boston – See Appendix B

Commonwealth Corporation – The Mission of the Commonwealth Corporation in Boston is to build upward mobility pathways for Massachusetts youth and adults to prepare for high demand careers, in concert with state and regional partners. The Commonwealth Corporation is staffed by educators, facilitators, researchers, youth development experts, career counselors, and industry specialists who work with local and regional partners to solve workforce challenges. Commonwealth Corporation, as the lead agency on the PYWC, worked with program staff and regional partners to co-design and manage the P21 PYWC program to successful completion and supports ongoing and overall program evaluation activities.

The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) – EOLWD provides unemployment assistance, labor market information, and workforce training for Massachusetts. EOLWD's divisions include the Department of Labor and divisions of Unemployment Assistance, Career Services, and Apprentice Training. Also under its auspices are the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board, which helps the state's governor develop a strong workforce through education and economic policy, and the public/private coalition Commonwealth Corporation. EOLWD co-awarded the P21 credential with the Commonwealth Corporation.

Hampden Partner Group – The group consisted of stakeholders (employers and other partners) from the youth serving agencies in the region (i.e., state agencies and local community-based organizations) and provided regular guidance and consultation on implementation of the program and support for participants. The group met monthly facilitated by a Commonwealth Corporation representative.

Health Resources in Action (formerly known as The Medical Foundation) – Health Resources in Action is a nonprofit organization based in Boston, Massachusetts dedicated to promoting public health and advancing medical research. In partnership with federal and state government agencies, academic and research institutions, and nonprofits and communities throughout the country, Health Resources in Action's staff use innovative approaches to solve critical public health issues and to create healthier, more vibrant communities. Health Resources in Action, skilled in asset-based youth development principals and training delivery, oversaw the selection of instructors and training leaders and also provided direct instruction to participants.

Student Support Coordinator – The Student Support Coordinator position was a part-time (14 hours/week) regionally based coordinator supported and managed by the Commonwealth Corporation, who assisted with program implementation and provided on-going support to pilot participants and employers.

Appendix D – Achieve Boston Competency Framework

* competencies used in PYWC

1. Activities/Curriculum *

Activities and curriculum builds upon the importance of a well-balanced structure where activities promote life skills and enhance the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development of all children and youth, including those with special needs.

2. Building Caring Relationships/Behavior Guidance*

Building caring relationships with children and youth includes promoting teambuilding, active listening, and a variety of communication strategies. Understanding acceptable and appropriate behaviors in a variety of situations and cultural contexts is a learned skill. Children and youth develop this understanding and feel more secure when consistent limits, appropriate consequences, and realistic expectations of their behavior are clearly and positively defined.

3. Child and Youth Development*

To provide a program that meets the multiple needs of children and youth, practitioners must understand comprehensive child and youth development, including developmental stages, children and youth with special needs, competencies, and positive youth outcomes.

4. Safety/Health and Nutrition

Understanding how to maintain personal health and safety, prevention information, crisis intervention, CPR and First Aid.

5. Cultural Competence*

Understanding differences and inclusion principles and techniques.

6. Environment

A carefully planned learning environment fosters children and youth's involvement and development in all areas. Such an environment includes physical and human qualities that together promote self-esteem, social interaction, and community values, and address physical and mental boundaries while promoting cultural awareness and inclusion.

7. Families and Schools*

Creating and sustaining relationships with families, teachers, and other school personnel is essential to enhancing the quality of after-school and youth services. Coordination and information sharing among schools, families, and after-school providers/youth workers helps to create a supportive learning environment.

8. Professionalism*

Understanding one's role in the organization, professional boundaries, and professional advancement.

9. Program Management*

Having an accountable practice of program management enhances quality and promotes efficiency.

10. Workers as Community Resources

After-school and youth workers can serve as a resource to children, youth, and families. They also must know how to identify community resources and partner with other organizations to most effectively serve those in their programs.

11. Building Leadership and Advocacy*

After-school and youth workers serve as a connection between families, schools, communities, children and youth. They can play a natural role as community leaders speaking out on behalf of the importance of quality after-school and youth services and can influence public policy by sharing their expertise. They can also help children, youth, and parents or family members build their own leadership and advocacy skills.