

# Recruiting, Retaining, and Engaging Older Youth in Out-of-School Time Programs

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## The problem...

**Recruiting, retaining and engaging older youth are well-known challenges!**

- ▶ Why is it hard to *recruit* older youth? Part I
  - A. Youth involved in other activities
  - B. Need to work for pay
  - C. Sibling & family responsibilities
  - D. Parents can't make them go

## The problem...

### Recruiting, retaining and engaging older youth are well-known challenges!

- ▶ Why is it hard to *recruit* older youth? Part II
  - A. Not cool with youths' peers to go
  - B. Youth assume it will be boring
  - C. Youth assume it will be like more school, especially if they don't like school
  - D. Program gets reputation as being for one kind of kid/group
  - E. Other

## The problem...

### Recruiting, retaining and engaging older youth are well-known challenges!

- ▶ Why is it hard to *retain* older youth?
  - A. Youth want to move on to other activities
  - B. Life changes - more family / work responsibilities, moving
  - C. Youth not developing relationships to staff, no personal connection to program
  - D. Youth don't find the activities engaging - get bored over time
  - E. Youth don't see the relevance of the activities to their future - don't see the activities as helping them

## Solutions

- ▶ What have you tried that was successful?
  - Why was it successful?
- ▶ What have you tried that was unsuccessful?
  - Why was it unsuccessful?

## Survey of PA programs

- ▶ **Main findings: Recruiting and retaining older youth can be done**
  - 29% were at least 90% full at the start and at the end of the program year
    - These are our high recruitment and retention programs (High RRT)
  - There were High RRT programs in:
    - Schools and CBO's
    - Urban, suburban, and rural areas
    - Safe and unsafe neighborhoods

## Best Predictors of High RRT

- **Career skills, internship, and/or workforce development**
  - High RRT programs were far more likely than low RRT programs to offer work-related opportunities (74% vs. 41%).
- **Most staff members had a college degree**
  - High RRT programs were far more likely than low RRT programs to report that most of their staff members had a college degree (88% vs. 52%).

## Recruitment vs. Retention

Features that attract youth early on may differ from features that keep them engaged

- ▶ Programs are more likely to be full *early* in the program year if they:
  - Hire older youth to work at the program
- ▶ Programs are more likely to be full *later* in the program year if they:
  - Have separate space for older youth
  - Provide case management to link youth to other services
  - Combine career programming with social programming (mentoring, social skill building, or service learning)

## What about Other Recruitment Strategies?

- ▶ High RRT programs reported using *fewer* recruitment strategies than Low RRT programs
- ▶ In multivariate analyses, none of these strategies consistently predicted High RRT
- ▶ Adopting one of these strategies is not guaranteed to boost enrollment

Strategies Used	Low RRT	High RRT
Posts fliers at school	90%	64% *
Outreach to parents	76%	67%
Outreach to social services in area	59%	56%
Outreach to schools	86%	90%
Street workers	20%	15%
Recruit peer groups to join together	59%	46%
Ask youth to recruit for program	95%	85%
Provide transportation	51%	64%

\* Significant difference

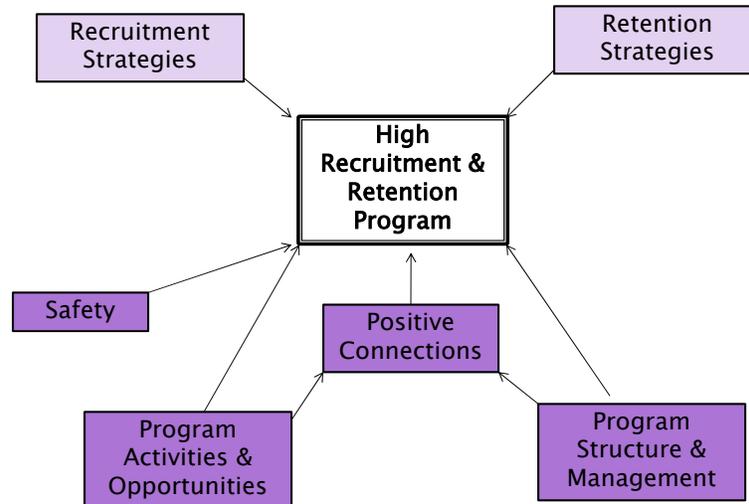
## What about Other Retention Strategies?

- ▶ Both low and high RRT programs engaged in many retention strategies
- ▶ There may be differences in *how* programs implement these strategies
- ▶ *Or* retention strategies may be necessary, but not sufficient

Strategies Used	Low RRT	High RRT
Pay youth to attend	23%	35%
Track attendance	95%	100%
Offer incentives	81%	90%
Outreach to youth who stop coming	79%	80%
Sanction youth who do not attend regularly	45%	40%
Allow youth to change their schedule	71%	78%
Offer leadership opportunities	92%	88%
Offer decision-making roles	88%	90%

\* Significant difference

## Categorizing R&RT Strategies



## Picture of Successful Programs

- ▶ **Programs offer engaging opportunities that**
  - Link youth to the real-world
    - Bring the real world in, send the youth out, show how what they learn will help them
  - Help them learn the social, workplace, and life skills they will need in the next phase of their lives
  - Help them develop trusting relationships with competent, caring adults
  - Are hands-on, active
  - Youth can't get anywhere else
  - Build many ways to connect with youth into the program structure

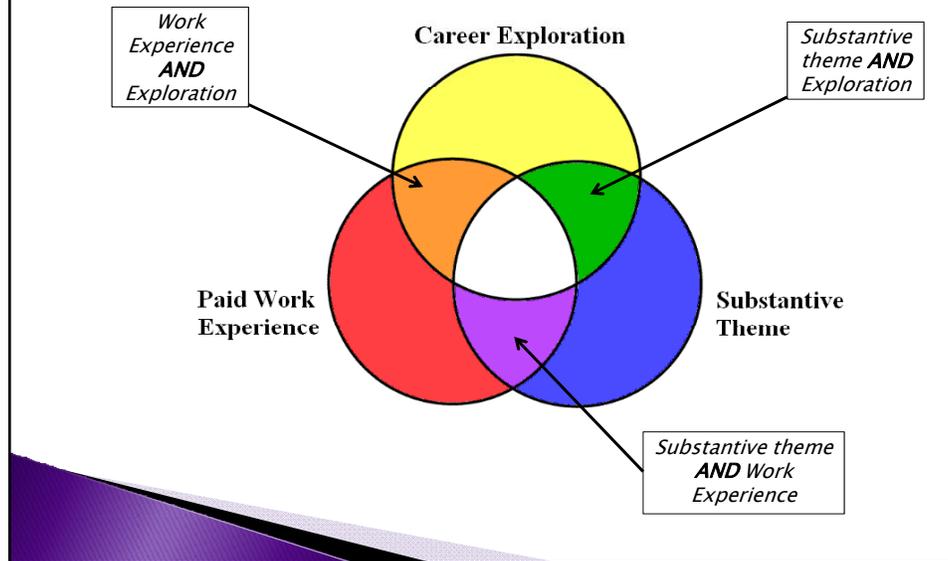
## Examples of Effective Recruitment and Retention Practice

- ▶ Lorri Bland  
*The School District of the City of Erie*
- ▶ Janet Tate  
*Bethlehem Area School District*
- ▶ Other Examples from Participants
- ▶ Questions?

## Career Programming Study

- ▶ Detailed information from 26 experienced OST programs serving low-income MS & HS students
  - Director interview, site visit for program observation, and youth survey
- ▶ Goals
  - To understand how OST programs are implementing career programming
  - To understand which career-related programs and activities youth find most (and least) engaging
  - To identify barriers to successful career programming
    - And the resources, creative solutions, and system-level supports to help programs overcome these barriers.

## What is Career Programming?



## Why Might Career Programming Engage Older Youth?

- ▶ Often encompasses components identified in recruitment and retention literature
  - Clearly preparing youth for next phase of their lives
  - Connection to the real world
    - Sending kids out to work
    - Bringing in real world experts and professionals
    - Doing work that improves communities (working to renovate buildings, beautify public spaces, teach younger kids, teach adults, provide services or products)
  - Pay as an incentive sometimes
  - Often hands-on, active learning
  - Focus on exploring own interests, identifying own skills (individualized)

## Characteristics of Engaging Programs

- ▶ Youth see clear link between what they are doing and careers
- ▶ Can engage youth in each type of programming
  - *How* program is implemented matters more
  - Strong instructional strategies, hands-on, challenging
- ▶ “Tight” focus
- ▶ Duration: Shorter?
  - Summer and short, tightly focused school-year programs
  - Innovative models that include stability, mentoring, relationships, & scaffolding of experiences?
- ▶ Substantive, high-school programs: Rely heavily on staff or subcontractors with a lot of substantive knowledge
- ▶ Youth like to get paid, but several of the most engaging programs are not using cash incentives

## Characteristics of Engaging Activities

- ▶ Clear learning objectives
- ▶ Solid lesson plan & sufficient time to complete activity
- ▶ Ample materials
- ▶ Hands on component
- ▶ Challenging content
- ▶ Delivered by staff with instructional skills and substantive knowledge to do good job
- ▶ *Findings in line with education research on effective teaching strategies*

## Examples of Effective Strategies to Engage Youth

- ▶ Janet Tate  
*Bethlehem Area School District*
- ▶ Lorri Bland  
*The School District of the City of Erie*
- ▶ Other Examples from Participants
- ▶ Questions?

## What Do Youth Say They Like & Want?

<i>Type of career-related activity</i>	<i>Very glad they did it</i>	<i>Definitely want to do it</i>
Paid to work at the program, placed in internship or paid job	71-79%	54-63%
Tutored, helped, or taught a younger kid	75%	40%
Did activities to learn what jobs match my skills and interests	62%	49%
Served on a youth council, advisory group, or other decision-making group at the program	59%	26%
Matched with an adult mentor (who does not work at the program)	58%	21%

## Lessons for Substantive Program Design

- Pick content that *really* motivates them and identify related careers. For example:
  - Video Games: Developing games, software, “apps”, graphic design
  - Sports: Coaching, outdoor education, physical therapy, sports mgmt
  - Music: Record production, sound mixing, writing, management
- Make the link to careers explicit
  - Have experts explain to them how the skills they are learning are applied in real jobs
  - Help them explore different careers that rely on these skills
- Use substantive experts to teach “world class” content
- “Begin with the end in mind” (Covey)
  - Think carefully about the youth outcomes you want to improve, or the learning objectives of your program – pick just a few to focus on
  - Short-term outcomes: social/emotional; 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills; work readiness; occupation-specific skills
  - Design your units and lessons so they achieve these outcomes

## Full Reports & Contact Information

- ▶ Recruitment & Retention Report  
<http://www.psaydn.org/Documents/2010PractitionerGuideforOlderYouthRetention.pdf>
- ▶ Career Programming Report  
<http://www.psaydn.org/Documents/PSAYDNCareerProgramming.pdf>
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