IN MEMORY OF

Lynda Moore
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As is the case with any project of this nature, there are numerous individuals that have assisted us in formulating our ideas and helped us with the production of the manuscript. In particular, we would like to note that we have been greatly influenced by the contemporary works of Mark Smith and Tony Jeffs in the United Kingdom. We have learned a great deal from their writings as well as opportunities to interact with them personally. In addition, we are grateful for the leadership that Karen Pittman has provided to helping Americans better understand the concepts of youth work and youth development. We can think of no other person in the United States that has had a greater influence on shaping these topics as she has through her scholarly efforts.

From a historical perspective we also need to pay tribute to G. Stanley Hall, Jane Addams, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget. These individuals provided early inspiration for considering the unique challenges of youth. Our contemporaries over the years at the University of Northern Iowa have also helped us nurture and develop our ideas. In particular, we would like to thank Walter de Oliveria, Susan Hudson, Gordon Mack, Rheta DeVries, and Doug Magnuson.

Several individuals assisted us in the production of the manuscript. In particular we would like to acknowledge the support we have received from Karen Peterson, Terri Meehan, and Julee Jacobson. They were tremendously supportive of this effort, helping us to prepare the
document. All of these individuals are extremely competent, capable, and professional in the execution of their duties.

Lastly, we would like to thank the following family members and friends. The senior author of this project would like to thank his family members who have been very instrumental in his professional work. Susan, Carole, David, and I are a team and have shared in our quest to improve the quality of programs and service for children and youth. They have been a steady source of inspiration, energy, and continuous effort above and beyond the call of duty. In addition, the senior author draws a great deal of joy from his grandchildren, Hanna and Jake. They are simply the greatest! Lana Kowalski, Pat Kowalski, Kari Kowalski, Kevin “Bob” Roberts, Chris Guidry, and David Hirner, have provided the motivation, encouragement and spots of humor to their son and friend as this work has progressed. Their dedication, passion and work ethic have inspired continual growth. Stefanie Donnell, Debra Williamson, Bill Williamson, Bill and Lorraine Randall, Angie and Scott Whiteman, and Eric Knoblock have provided unfailing and unconditional love and support to the most junior author of the document. To all of these individuals we would like to extend our deepest gratitude and appreciation.

We have dedicated this book to the memory of Lynda Moore, secretary to the Director of the School of Health, Physical Education and Leisure Services at the University of Northern Iowa. Tragically, Lynda died during the preparation of this document. Lynda was a patient person in working with this and many other projects. She helped us organize the effort, provided social and emotional support, and dedicated herself to ensuring that we were able to organize our efforts. Lynda was particularly adept at solving problems on the computer. She worked tirelessly at making sure that we had the precise layout for our materials as well as assisting us in identifying alternative terms that ensured that we were effectively expressing our ideas. We will miss Lynda Moore. Our lives have been enriched by her, and her presence will continue to be with us in the future.
Can you imagine a community without Girls Scouts or the YMCA or Junior Achievement? For decades, these youth-serving organizations have enhanced the quality of life in communities across the country. These youth-serving organizations have dedicated professional staffs and thousands of volunteers. And each year, college students prepare to work in these organizations to “make a difference” in the lives of young people.

American Humanics, a national alliance including 70 colleges and universities and 18 of the largest youth-serving national organizations, is dedicated to recruiting, educating, and certifying professionals to lead nonprofit organizations. These college graduates are the professionals who dedicate their lives to the development of youth. The disciplinary fields of social work, sociology, biology, psychology, education, and others provide research and theories upon which the principles and ‘best practices’ are developed.

This text brings together the research, theories, and practices around youth development and utilizes the experiences and approaches tested by practitioners. A brilliant blending of theory and practice comes to life in this textbook. The richness of experience and the expertise of the three authors are evident throughout the text. The national organization of American Humanics recommends this textbook to the faculty at more than 70 campuses. We believe the material will enhance the educational experience of the 2500 American Humanics students to become tomorrow’s leaders in youth-serving organizations.
Of special note are the chapters on mentoring and ethics. Learning about both of these areas is critical to providing quality experiences and positive leadership. Utilizing Greenleaf’s work to shape the concept of youth professionals as leaders in the service of others broadens the awareness of leadership with a worthy purpose and mission. The central mission of American Humanics’ alliance and member partnerships is leadership in the service of others. Authors Edginton, Kowalski, and Randall have provided an excellent textbook and reference source for organizations and individuals working with youth. We recommend this book to our university programs and to the youth-serving national organizations in our alliance.

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One’s youth is a distinct stage of one’s life. In many ways youth live in a separate world: a time and place with its own culture which provides significant opportunities for individuals to craft their identities, learn necessary life skills, expand their horizons, find their vocation, and develop the foundations for their adult life. Often the social gap between adults and young people makes it difficult for youth to learn from the experiences of their elders. Youth work represents an opportunity to bring young people and adults together—collaborative efforts that provide meaningful and insightful experiences for all involved.

This is an exciting time to explore youth work and youth development. Increasingly, the topic, as well as concerns and issues, are a part of national consciousness and woven into our social fabric. American society is involved in an ongoing public discussion regarding youth, wherein attention is being directed toward understanding the needs and challenges faced by youth today. We are redefining, in a positive way, our perceptions of the contributions youth make to our ever-evolving culture. Further, significant efforts at focusing greater attention on the needs of youth, as well as enhancing the delivery of programs and services at the local, regional, state, and national levels, has occurred.

The literature of youth work and youth development is located in many disciplines and professional areas of study. Our effort is directed at creating a mosaic that portrays youth work and youth development as an emerging force in American society. Our focus is primarily directed toward assisting individuals in understanding the context of professional practice as related to youth work and youth development. We have borrowed heavily from exist-
ing frameworks in Europe, especially the United Kingdom, and from the emerging body of knowledge that is found in the efforts of philanthropic organizations and think tanks which have devoted a great deal of energy to studying the topic.

Our intention is to provide an introductory overview for the professional practice of youth work in the United States. There is little in the way of distilled information with a professional focus on the topic of youth work and youth development.

As such, we have crafted a document that provides basic information regarding the status of youth and youth work in America today. Among the topics covered in this book are ones dealing with adolescence as a life stage, historical perspectives, key terms and definitions of youth work and youth development, approaches and orientations to youth work, program and leadership strategies, ethics, multiculturalism, policy formulation, professional career development, and challenges and issues.
INTRODUCTION

Youth are our most important asset (Edginton, 1997, p. 15). Often they represent and reflect our hopes, aspirations, and dreams for the future. Youth reflect and mirror many of our most cherished beliefs, values, and ideals. Yet, at the same time, today’s youth create and advance fresh new perspectives that dramatically influence our culture. Youth have few preconceived notions; they approach the world with an innocence that enables them to see the world in a new and different light. “Today’s youth will have a significant role in bringing about changes in technology, demography, economy, and politics” (Boyle, 2000, as cited in Delgado, 2002, p. 3). Major investments of time, capital, and commitment must be made in youth in order to nurture their development in the aforementioned areas (Haveman & Wolfe, 1994, as cited in Delgado, 2002). Without question, youth represent a complex social, cultural, political, and economic phenomenon; a prime force in American society whose aspirations require our best efforts.

Youth workers and youth service organizations have begun to play a more prominent role in American society. “The issue of promoting developmental opportunities for our nation’s youth is not new” (Villarruel, Perkins, Borden, & Keith, 2003, p. ix). However, it is challenging to describe the efforts of youth workers and youth work organizations in a precise fashion. Multiple philosophies, orientations, and even assumptions concerning youth abound. Youth work and youth service organizations are found in nearly every sector of our society. It has become increasingly highly organized, complex, sophisticated, and evident in communities across America. Further, little is understood
regarding the interaction, in the social context, of youth culture and the professional practice of youth workers and youth organizations.

The term youth development and the ideas and practices associated with it have emerged from the field of youth work, but they have extended beyond practice to influence local, state, and national decision makers in the public and private sectors (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004, p. ix). Further, they suggest that youth development has risen from practice and that “practice seldom follows theory.” Hahn and Raley (1998, p. 387) have raised the question of whether or not “there is a youth development field”. These authors recognize that youth work is practiced in a variety of settings, but voice the question as to whether or not this work forms a profession. They ask “is youth development a profession, or simply a convenient organizing concept describing the field of specialized workers who have deeper and clearer ties to other professions?” (Hahn & Raley, 1998, p. 388). These authors conclude that there is greater need for definition and the strengthening of the field’s theoretical knowledge base.

This book is an effort at more effectively identifying the theoretical knowledge base as well as that knowledge base that is found in professional practice. We seek to more effectively define, clarify, organize, and extend the current body of knowledge that is available for the practice of youth work. Further, we seek to provide background information concerning the status of youth in American society and the challenges and issues faced by youth today. This introductory chapter provides an overview of youth culture today.

DEFINING YOUTH CULTURE

Youth culture is defined as the unique symbols, beliefs, and behaviors that represent young people within society (Outhwaite & Bottomore, 1994). The idea of youth culture includes the different norms, rules, and regulations that encompass the grouping of youth. How, what, when, where, and whom may interact with youth is part of the youth culture. There are various actions and reactions that occur specific to the youth culture.

A primary component of youth culture is the incorporation of fads or trends. As discussed later in this chapter, trends have a profound impact on the economy. Within youth culture, trends play a pivotal role in the formation of identity. The wider youth culture, referred to as the mass or popular culture, revolves around the adoption of certain fashions, leisure pursuits, and lifestyle choices (Outhwaite & Bottomore, 1994). These fashions, leisure pursuits, and lifestyle choices affect how youth interact with others.

To understand the value youth culture plays in the overall composition of society, youth workers need to analyze the historical and psychological perspectives related to youth work. During the twentieth century, youths transitioned from “little adults” with no definitive norms,
rules, or regulations to call their own, to a vibrant portion of the population, crying out for a humanistic representation in our society. As “little adults,” youth were forced to conform to the norms and values of the adult population. Conformity of such magnitude drastically affected the psychological makeup of youth, often wearing them down mentally and physically and warping their interpretation and learning of such life skills as respect, integrity, and trust.

The pioneers in the field of youth work discussed in chapter three paved the road for the establishment of a youth culture. Jane Addams, G. Stanley Hall, and Luther Gulick, to name a few, recognized the worth of youth and the need to help them develop into strong leaders. Their actions were the framework for acknowledging the importance of a youth culture. The formation and articulation of a youth culture is the recognition that the youth population is valuable, that their symbols, actions, and behaviors are a necessity for the prosperity of our society.

THE CONTEXT OF YOUTH WORK

Youth work has undergone a continual evolution, rearranging and shaping its services to form the body of knowledge and practitioners that currently exists. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the concept of youth work was a radical idea formulated by individuals whose goal was to remove youth from life-threatening situations and help them develop into strong citizens of society. Their goal was to eliminate exploitative youth labor and develop avenues for youth to exhibit creativity and begin to practice the skills needed for later stages in life, such as working together in groups, integrity, and reasoning.

As the original idea of youth work took hold in American society, community members began to formulate methods to reach youth and encourage such fundamental concepts as play and recreation. Organizations such as the Boys Scouts and the YMCA were stakeholders in this movement, emphasizing the importance of molding youth and guiding their actions.

PRACTICES AND PRINCIPLES FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Universal acceptance of the term youth development as a way of defining the efforts of youth workers and youth service organizations is relatively new. In the past decade there has been a great deal of interest and attention focused on development principles and strategies to be used in the practice of youth work. There is some agreement regarding the importance of a positive or prosocial approach to youth development. As a result, a number of principles for promoting youth development have emerged (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004). Further, the application of approaches to learning, such as constructivism, has yielded additional ideas regarding the process of youth development. We offer the
following as principles and practices upon which youth development strategies can be built.

**Positive Orientation, Support, and Universiality.** A positive orientation builds on or accentuates the strengths of each and every individual youth. The emphasis is this area is that each youth has the right of access to those supports, which are necessary for their development. Such support should be provided in a way that does not stigmatize the individual based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, or individual condition. As Hamilton, Hamilton, and Pittman (2004, p. #) write, “... opportunities should be available to all. Opportunities—to learn, explore, play, express oneself. . .”

**Engagement, Empowerment, and Participation.** Youth development best occurs through some form of engagement within which individuals have some say in their development. In other words, youth learn, explore, and grow in environments in which they have some active role in shaping as they unfold in meeting their needs. Simply stated, youth need a voice in those opportunities that are established to assist them in their development. Preparing youth as critical thinkers, problem solvers, and decision makers in a democratic society requires that they have a hand in the processes that influence their development. To empower youth means to enable them to have some influence regarding the life activities that influence their development.

**Exploration, Experimentation, and Competence Building.** Adolescence is often characterized as the process of becoming. It is a time in one’s life of opportunities for exploration, experimentation, and competence building. Youth often seek opportunities to explore new ideas, relationships with others, and meaning within the context of society as a whole. Youth seek to develop their knowledge, skills, and competence in preparing for life. Youth need opportunities to fail, as well as a framework for development, which provides challenges of increasing complexity and support. Youth require opportunities that enable them to progressively develop their abilities to function successfully in society.

**Safe Environments.** All youth have the right to develop in environments that are conducive to positive growth. Such environments require that youth be physically, and psychologically safe. However, this does not mean that youth should not be challenged or exposed to risk, but rather they should be free from physical abuse and psychological trauma that impede their development. Increasingly youth environments are punctuated, with violence, crime, physical and sexual harassment, bullying, and neglect. In order for youth to develop, they are best served when their environments, whether they are in the home, school, or broader community settings are free of such barriers, which may be detrimental to one’s development.

**Autonomy.** Youth seek autonomy and do not want to perceive
that they are being controlled or compelled to act. Youth desire a level of independence and freedom of action. Conversely, youth also often seek adult support and guidance, and in fact some structure to enable their development. As Friederich Fröbel (1897, p. 125) stated over one hundred years ago, the challenge is one of “systematizing play and directing it so as to make it more effective.” Fröbel (1897, p. 125) “... knew that spontaneity must not be sacrificed to system, as the great value of play intellectually and morally depends on the freedom of the [individual] in expressing its own purposes and carrying out its own decision.” The question then and the question today remains: How does the youth worker assist individuals in maintaining freedom, perfect spontaneity, and independence of action, yet provide support and guidance?

**Becoming and Belonging.**
Youth work assists in the ongoing search for and development of their identity. We are all in the process of becoming, however, for youth, becoming is a quest of life. Youth ask the question consistently, “What will I become when I grow up?” In fact, as we become older, we continue to ask the question “What will I become when I become who I am to be?” Edginton (2000, p. 143) has written that youth are “... capable of learning, growing and perfecting themselves.” In fact, to live and learn is to always be in the process of becoming. It is a continuous process that will be experienced throughout life. A part of the search for one’s meaning in life is finding out where he or she belongs in life. Belonging refers to membership in an organization or association; simply put, a member in a group. Youth strive to belong to a group, to feel a sense of worth and inclusion that embraces them for who they are. Communities that develop support networks and strong relationships with youth may be the group needed to facilitate a youth’s quest to find out who he or she will become in life.

**COMMUNITIES AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

Youth development does not take place in isolation. In fact, for effective youth development to be undertaken it requires the commitment of an entire community. All of the resources of a community can be brought to bear on the needs of youth. Clearly, the efforts of individuals, community groups, non-profit organizations, government agencies, schools, religious organizations, civic institutions, and businesses have an important role to play in building a program of youth development in any community setting. Each of these different types of organizations, agencies, and institutions, as well as others, can work in partnership to strengthen a community’s effort aimed at enhancing its youth development strategies.

As Perkins, Borden, Keith, Hoppe-Rooney, and Villarruel (2003, p. 6) have written “... youth development, either positive or negative, occurs as youth interact with all levels of their surroundings, including the other people in their environment such as family, peers, other...
adults, and members of their communities." These authors have suggested that community youth development may be defined as "...purposely creating environments that provide constructive, affirmative, and encouraging relationships that are sustained over time with adults and peers, while concurrently providing an array of opportunities that enable youth to build their competencies and become engaged as partners in their own development as well as the development of the community" (Perkins et al., 2003, p. 6). Further, Swisher, and Whitlock (2004, p. 216) have noted that communities "...are constituted by social interactions between residents. ...these relationships among youth, their friends and peers, parents, teachers and other adults in the community are important resources on which youth development efforts attempt to build." It is when "...youth are fully invested in their community and are empowered to provide direction, insight, and efforts around problem solving for the community..." that efforts are truly advanced (Perkins et al., 2003, p. 8).

The call to involve an entire community in the process of building strategies in support of youth development has resulted in the creation of a model of community organization referred to as the "capacity focus model." This model deviates from the traditional model of focusing on the problems of youth exclusively. The capacity focus model suggests that significant progress with youth must involve an investment of community members and their resources (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). The model requires that communities look within their own resource base in building for the future rather than seeking external funding from outside sources such as state or federal governments.

The capacity focus model of community youth development has three main components: 1) targeting the assets of a community, 2) focusing the internal resources of a community to promote youth development, and 3) the development of relationships. As stated earlier, identifying or targeting the assets of a community is an important step in this model (Bogenschneider, 1996; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). A clear understanding of their resources that can be brought to bear in a community is essential. Second, the capacity focus model for community youth development suggests that a community must develop itself from within. An internal focus creates a sense of ownership and provides a witness for youth and others that their actions in the community can in fact have a positive impact on youth. The last component involves the development of relationships within the community. This process of developing relationships is in effect the engine for building change within a community.

As noted, the capacity focus model involves calculating the assets that may exist within a community. The role of community members becomes one of aligning its assets together to build a strong future for youth (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). In any given community, the assets that may be
available to support a program of youth development include community members, agencies, organizations, institutions, and other groupings that exist. Individuals and community organizations may bring together their unique talents, skills, and knowledge in a collaborative way to advance concerns related to youth.

Certainly youth workers must work in a collaborative fashion with such individuals and organizations to build partnerships that help identify concerns and solutions to challenges, locate resources, and/or provide guidance to a community’s effort. Often community groups such as volunteer organizations or clubs are directly involved in issues that impact a given community. Such organizations with grassroots community origins and leadership capacities have the ability to address community concerns. Such individuals and organizations hold a great deal of influence within a community and have access to human, physical, and fiscal resources. They often have a depth of knowledge of a community that extends over a long period of time and can bring that perspective to bear upon the community.

Community institutions have varying levels of organization. The structure of organizations ranges from formal to informal. Organizations such as service or fraternal groups, civic groups, neighborhood associations, and others may have a significant amount of influence, power, or control within a community. More formally organized community groups, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, schools, religious organizations, civic institutions, and businesses may have a legal, moral or community-sanctioned mandate that provides them with a great deal of influence. Such organizations often have as an important part of their vision or mission statements concerns for youth within a community. Many of these types of organizations have resources and can provide direct or in-kind support that may benefit a community’s development of youth.

Community building for youth development is increasingly embraced throughout the United States. Efforts such as America’s Promise, CityYear, and AmeriCorps are all reflections of strategies aimed at strengthening youth development within communities. Building collaborative relationships, partnerships, and other efforts aimed at connecting community resources are at the heart of this process. This process is built and renewed continuously between individuals, associations, and the institutions of the community. Such relationship building will strengthen the fabric of the community and solidify its efforts to develop youth within the community.

YOUTH IN AMERICA TODAY

There are 39 million youth between the ages of ten and nineteen living in America today (U.S. Census, 2000). This represents 14% of the population of the United States. By the year 2010, it is estimated that 42 million youth will be in this age...
range. In the year 2050, it is estimated that the youth population of America will be 53 million. As one can see, we live a society where the youth population is expanding. The influence of youth is ever present today and will increase in the future.

In this section of the book, a discussion of who and where our youth can be located, as well as future growth projections by region within the United States, will be discussed. In addition, we will explore how youth spend their time. The chapter will also include a discussion of the social health, physical health, educational attainment, and economic factors influencing youth today.

Who Are Our Youth?

The United States has become a “mosaic,” with vibrant youth that possess various characteristics decorating our canvas of America. The diverse cultural groups of youth have inspired a whirlwind of change in the field of youth work. When analyzing the youth population, there are several groups that encompass significant portions of the population. Within America, there are 32 million youth who are Caucasian, 6.2 million youth who are African-American, and nearly 800,000 youth who Asian, American Indian, Eskimo or from the Pacific Islands (U.S. Census, 2000). These statistics all increase as the projection is cast for 2050.

After looking at the statistics, the importance of incorporating a multicultural perspective is essential in youth work. As discussed in chapter eight, multiculturalism is an integral part of youth development. The demographics of the youth population will continue to vary, thus creating a norm of daily interaction with various cultures. Youth workers who can create programs and modify existing ones to meet the needs of the various cultural youth groups they encounter will enhance the existing field of youth development.

Social and Physical Health of Youth

Each day, millions of youth participate in activities that have life-altering effects on them. Some examples include sports programs, religious groups, support groups, after-school programs, and community services. Each one of these activities carries with it a specific value system and code of ethics that manage the interaction of youth. These interactions during the activities become the framework for how many youth engage others in a social setting. Youth learn verbal and nonverbal communication, how to work in groups and active listening.

Many of these activities are the only outlets to which youth can escape and avoid the dangers associated with other parts of their social life. Drug and alcohol use and abuse, physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual abuse and neglect, unprotected sex, teenage pregnancy and parenting, delinquency, lack of physical fitness, violence and crime are just a few of the obstacles that may have the potential to negatively impact a youth’s life. If there is not
an opportunity to avoid these dangers and grow and interact with their peers, a youth may have lasting psychological, emotional, and physical scars.

- **Drug and alcohol use and abuse.** The age of first use of alcohol has decreased steadily over the decades, with sixteen years old as the most recent statistic indicating initial consumption. In 1998, one out of five teenagers were current alcohol drinkers and one out of thirteen were binge drinkers, consuming five or more drinks on one but no more than four occasions (Greenblatt, 2000). Since 1992, there has been a steady increase in drug usage among eighth, tenth, and twelfth graders with no differences in usage between males and females (Johnston, O’Malley & Bachman, 1996). The number of juvenile arrests for drug-related crimes reached 148,000 in 1998. Drug and alcohol abuse has also been linked with crime and delinquency, with over 40% of the youth incarcerated in long-term juvenile facilities stating they encountered drugs for the first time before the age of twelve.

- **Physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual abuses or neglect.** Within the United States, there are over 263,000 reported cases of abuse and neglect to children between the ages of ten and eighteen years old (U.S. Census, 2000). Signs of abuse include bruising, fractures, burns, patterns of injuries, low self-esteem, unexplained aggression, poor hygiene, exhaustion, lethargy, and constant hunger. Neglect is characterized as the failure of the child’s parents or caretakers to provide the child with the basic necessities of life, which include shelter, nutrition, supervision, health, education, affection, and protection (Cowen, 1999). Maltreatment or abuse of youth also includes exposure to parents who have substance addictions, psychiatric disorders, and violent tendencies (Atwool, 2000).

- **Unsafe or unprotected sex, teenage pregnancy, and teenage parenting.** Research indicates that youth under the age of eighteen years who give birth tend to have academic deficiencies, poorer socioeconomic status, repeat pregnancies, abusive tendencies towards their children, and be single parents (Flanagan, Coll, Andreozzi, & Riggs, 1995). The amount of youth under the age of eighteen that have engaged in sexual intercourse has risen steadily since 1970, and the average age at first intercourse has declined (Caron & Moskey, 2002). In the United States, 24% of females and 27% of males under the age of fifteen years have had sex (Cooksey, Mott, & Neubauer, 2002). Out-of-wedlock birth rates for fifteen to nineteen year olds rose nearly 10% in the early 1990s. According to Miller (2002),
there are 900,000 teenage pregnancies a year, and Lowenthal and Lowenthal (1997) indicate those youth ages ten to fourteen comprising the fastest growing group of parents.

- **Delinquency, crime, and violence.** Youth crime increased steadily through 1980s, with nearly fifty thousand people murdered by youths between the ages of twelve and twenty-four years. During this time period, youth accounted for 35.5% of all nontraffic-related arrests in the United States (Simons, Finlay, & Yang, 1991). A result is that many of the incarcerated youth left dependents that were then incorporated into the family structure of relatives or foster homes.

- **Physical fitness.** A third of all high school students fail to meet the current public health recommendations associated with fitness. This includes three or more sessions per week of moderate to vigorous physical activity (Gordon-Larsen, McMurray, & Popkin, 1999, as cited in Hatcher & Scarpa, 2002). An unfortunate combination with the lack of physical activity is that many adolescents have poor diets, consuming too much fat, sodium and sugar with little fiber (Gleason & Suitor, 2001; Munoz, Krebs-Smith, Ballard-Barbash, & Cleveland, 1997, as cited in Hatcher & Scarpa, 2002; Siega-Riz, Carson, & Popkin, 1998;). The importance of exercise, physical fitness, and a healthy diet should be primary components of youth programs and activities.

**Educational Attainment**

School attendance and success is considered a primary component of a youth’s life. School is the place where youth may develop the groundwork for how they will progress through life. It is the opportunity to discover and develop talents in a variety of areas, as well as learn how to interact socially. Teachers guide youth and illustrate the different steps needed to be successful; they are often the first role models that youth encounter in their lives.

There is unfortunately a high number of youth that drop out, underachieve, and fail. About 30% of fourteen to seventeen year olds are behind their modal grade, and each year about 700,000 youth drop out of school, with 25% of eighteen to nineteen year olds failing to complete their high school education (Dryfoos, 1997). Indicators of a youth’s possible failure, underachievement or dropout include poor academic performance, lack of social attachment to school, low expectations by the student and the teacher, school discipline problems, low socioeconomic status, and parents’ not completing high school (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1995).

The education that youth receive in school is not only academic knowledge, but life skills as well. For example, if we are learning the English language, one of the first things
Exhibit 1-1
How Could This Happen?

News stories about a teenage girl who went to a party in Des Moines where she was allegedly attacked by teenage boys now charged with sexual abuse should serve as a starting point for a discussion. A serious discussion.

Parents, clergy, and teachers should talk with older youngsters about the horrifying accusations. How could something like this happen?

It’s not a theoretical question. Sexual assault is not uncommon. Look at official rape statistics.

The FBI’s Uniform Crime Report for 2000 showed the national rate at thirty-two reported rapes per 100,000 population. It’s estimated nine of ten such offenses go unreported. Most victims are girls and women, but some are boys and men. Statistics from Iowa State University last year included four reports of forcible sex with men.

Yes, everyone knows sexual assault is abhorrent. Then why isn’t it so taboo that it virtually never occurs? What cultural attitudes send the message that this kind of violence is, for too many people, acceptable? The teens involved at the party must have thought it was.

Different societies have different degrees of tolerance for rape. Why in this society, for example, have date rape drugs become something students must guard against on campus? Why didn’t other students at the party in Des Moines immediately stop the attack that reportedly continued for thirty to forty-five minutes?

Other boys periodically opened the door to the bathroom and told the alleged attackers to quit, according to police, but the assault continued. Other girls were in the living room while the assault took place. Didn’t they hear the victim yelling—as the police report describes—as she fought off the assailants? Was it just a part of the activities at the party?

Youngsters need more guidance than many get regarding sexual assault. Without making them too fearful, they need to know what they can do to protect themselves and others.

And we ask again, why isn’t sexual assault so beyond the pale in our culture that it simply doesn’t occur?

taught in primary school is how to write in English. As we progress through the different grades, we begin to grasp the vowels and consonants, how to structure words and sentences to form conversations and write papers. We also learn the appropriateness of language, such as when it is the proper time and place to say something.

The aforementioned example may seem simple, but there are youth that do not have the opportunity to learn such a thing as language. Not every youth has the chance to complete their schooling, or in some cases even attend. This absence of educational attainment detrimentally affects the life course of youth. They do not have the opportunity to learn academically or practice their social skills for future endeavors. In the end, a youth may turn to an alternative for education, such as a gang, and become indoctrinated into a culture that can have a fatal conclusion.

Youth and the Economy

Youth culture significantly impacts the market economy, playing a vital role in the production, distribution and sales of goods and services. Each year, advertisements and sales campaigns target the youth culture for potential investment in whatever product is publicized. According to a survey study by Teenage Research Unlimited, American adolescents spend $89 billion per year, or an average of $61 a week each (Teenage Research Unlimited, 1994, as cited in Russell, 1994). Many investments by youth are related to factors associated with the existing social, physical and even political climate of the area they live. Youth may feel the pressure to belong to the “in” crowd or clique, and purchase something believing that it will be a stepping-stone to acceptance. Some youth may have the ability to make these purchases, while other youth may not have the opportunity, thus resulting in disapproval or criticism from their peers.

The spending patterns of youth fluctuate with the trends associated with their culture (Russell, 1994). A favorable style or tendency is labeled a trend. This could be a type of clothing, music, or hairstyle. When something is considered trendy it is what is the most appealing product at that time in youth culture. As a product’s appeal grows, so does the desire by youth to possess it. Often products will sell out as the wants of youth outweigh the production of goods. As we have witnessed in youth culture, a product’s desirability over time will diminish and be replaced with a new fresh product. As the new product moves into the foreground and becomes the trendy thing to own, the other products slip into the background. This cycle continually repeats itself, with the money spent on products going to the business that can keep up with the trends associated with youth culture.

In some instances, youth become employed to support their spending patterns. There are several industries for youth to gain work—retail, foodservice, and labor are a few examples. Having a job may build important characteristics
within youth—resiliency, trust, a sense of responsibility, the ability to share and work together, and loyalty. Many youth are given the opportunity to attend school during the day and work in the evening. This may be an option for youth as long as the job and its requirements do not violate any legal regulations.

The youth population is a budding new group of individuals within the workplace, fresh with new ideas and potential. The naïveté of youth can also be a quality that employers may take advantage of in the workplace. Throughout the twentieth century, there have been instances of overworked, underpaid youth that employers have hired to create products at the cheapest possible prices. The term “child labor” usually refers to youth performing work that is exploitative or detrimental to their development. For the youth, it means less time for an education or, possibly, no education.

Child labor can also be problematic to children’s health because they often work in dangerous conditions, exposed to lasting physical and psychological harm (Conley, 2000). Up to seven million children and adolescents in the United States work either part-time or full-time (Ambadekar, Wahab, Zodpey, & Khandait, 1999). The National Safe Workplace Institute reported that there were 5.5 million workers in the United States between the ages of twelve and seventeen (as cited in Pignatella, 1995). Within one year of starting their jobs, 70,000 youth had been injured and 300 killed on site. Some of the accidents and fatalities were related to slips, falls, burns, electrical shocks, vehicle accidents, heavy lifting, chemical exposure, and loss of sleep.

Youth may develop into fine young professionals if stable, adequately structured employment programs are built. According to the American News Service (1997), several corporations have established rules delineating the treatment of youth employees. The Kmart Corporation posted placards in all of their stores describing the “Teen Worker’s Bill of Rights” and workplace safety for youth, The Whataburger Corporation in the state of Texas developed a computer tracking system monitoring the hours and shifts of youth employees. Wawa convenience stores in four states designed different colored smocks for youth employees so that managers would know on sight who was not allowed to work the electric meat slicer. These acts illustrate the importance of developing strong competent youth workers whose safety and well being is vital to the success of the organization.

**CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUTH**

Each day a youth encounters multiple challenges that may test their decision-making skills, integrity, and resolve. These challenges manifest themselves in a variety of ways, causing potential anguish, anxiety, and nervousness. Navigating through various social, cognitive, and emotional challenges may require guidance, role modeling, and advice from others around the youth. Collaboration with others allows the youth to experiment and attempt
different solutions to dealing with the challenges they encounter.

The Youth Work Press (1994) has identified various social, cognitive, and emotional challenges that youth encounter as they mature in life.

- **Social Isolation.** Inability to relate to others outside their community, few friends and limited relationship building skills, lack of experience and high anxiety levels in a range of unfamiliar social settings, and an inability to share feelings and experiences with others.

- **Limited Mobility.** Difficulty engaging in various activities requiring transportation, difficulty developing distance relationships, time and participation restrictions due to inability to transport that may lead to high risk situations such as hitchhiking or walking alone.

- **Narrow Horizons.** Stigmatizing or labeling according to social expectations of community, a fear of mobility, limitations related to extended learning due to community traditions, and a pressure to conform or fit in.

- **Inequality of Provision.** Low standard of quality related to facilities and supervision, unmet needs due to marginalization of youth, and difficulty challenging local authority structures for improvement.

- **Visibility.** Anonymity in large numbered populations, a feeling of being “lost in the shuffle” of daily activities, close/claustrophobic links to others if community is small, and difficulty in maintaining a level of confidentiality.

- **Negativity.** Perception of mistrust from adults and a feeling of inevitability that adults’ needs will be a higher priority.

- **Identity.** Difficulty establishing lifestyle; a feeling of intrusion from unwanted individuals; a sense of entanglement between different roles in life; and dealing with racism, sexism and other cultural attacks.

As discussed in chapter five, the drive behind youth development is to establish a strong, lasting foundation that all stakeholders can build upon in distinct ways that benefit youth. If those stakeholders analyze together the different challenges specific to their community, there may be a focused, precise result involving members of the community, including the youth in question.

Pittman, Irby, and Ferber (2000) discuss two traditional viewpoints regarding youth work and the need to restructure them to address today’s youth population. Their discussion of the problem-diagnosis concept and the potential long-lasting effects of collaborative youth work efforts illustrate the importance of combining resources and working together to improve our future generation. Getting on board with these two viewpoints will enable youth and youth workers to become synergetic and create innovative programs beneficial to all whom take part.
Working with youth should include more than just “solving the problem” of the youth; it should include an analysis of all the factors that make up youth’s lives. To improve our youth programs, we may want to move beyond a problem-diagnosis concept and into an environmental analysis concept. Piggybacking this environmental analysis is the idea that for effective programs to occur, they should be more than a “quick fix.”

Youth development is not a laboratory experiment with all the variables controlled designed for a specific outcome; it includes spontaneous, often unsuspected factors that are important for understanding. Long-term efforts may be most effective to growth in youth. These efforts may include an extension of services for youth beyond the typical after-school programs that have sprung up in all areas. As the services are extended, the umbrella of resources and programs can encompass more youth than we are currently serving. These different strategic points are part of the dynamic structure of youth development. As we begin to reassess the topic and goals of youth development, our energy will be directed in a more beneficial manner to all involved.

**SUMMARY**

Youth today are a vibrant portion of our population that will continue to grow and make significant contributions to the overall structure of society. Recognizing the impact of youth includes realizing if they are going to positively affect society, adults are going to need to provide the guidance and role modeling. Youth workers are often the beacon youth turn to when confronted with issues of substance abuse, sexual pressures, and familial problems. Examining the environment of youth gives insight into how to assist them in navigating through instances of confusion and uncertainty so that the result is beneficial to them.

Youth workers who remain ethical in their actions exude the qualities youth need to witness to maintain the fortitude in developing their own ethics. Collaborative efforts with youth workers provide youth opportunities to step in and assume leadership roles they may encounter in the future. These roles give youth chances to create and maintain value systems defining who they are. The effectiveness of a youth’s value system lies in the nurturing youth workers provide in daily settings. Youth workers who aid in the successful development of youth can take pride and understand that their actions are affecting the future generations of society.

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