From a Web Series: Youth Work in the Time of Covid-19: How the values of youth work can shape our practice

Planning Guide For Refocusing How You Support Young People during Covid-19

DRAFT

Developed by Deborah Moore, Youth Work Learning Lab, and the Youth Studies and Youth Development Leadership Departments
at the University of Minnesota - School of Social Work

In partnership with St. Paul Sprockets, Minneapolis Afterschool Network and Ignite Afterschool

May 2020

Introduction

A Letter to Our Youth Workers,

With so much of our youth programming plans up in the air, it can be overwhelming to determine how to best show up for our young people during COVID-19. This planning guide is designed as just that – a Guide.

We suggest that now is not the time to create the same activities we did with young before the pandemic, but just online. But it's also not the time to shut down when so many young people are hurting. No one knows what is best and we learn more each week about what is safe for connecting with others. Given all of this, what should youth work look like in our communities? This guide begins takes the stance that what matters most is taking care of the young people and what they and their families need. We know that meeting young people where they are at is always at the heart of our work, but right now our purpose becomes much more clear. SO youth workers, we can do this!

This guide will remind us to focus on what we know matters most and then get's practical about how to put it into action. Remember, these are things youth workers always do best. To help, we wanted to give you and your colleagues something to work from and play off as you make decisions and choices about how to do your work in the next 6-12 months. It is not perfect, it is meant as a new idea generator and to take some of the pressure off you to design programs when it is easy to feel overwhelmed.

With our care, our best thinking and imperfections – we hope it helps you stay focused. Know we stand with the youth workers during this time. You are not the first responders, but part of the second wave of people that will support and care for our young people in each and every community. Get to work.

With Regards,

Katie Johnston-Goodstar, Deborah Moore, Colin Peters, and Ross Roholt-VeLure, Youth Studies Department and the Youth Work Learning Lab at the University of Minnesota, School of Social Work

All suggest resources/documents include web links and may also be available via your local afterschool network and for now, a Google Drive Folder provided by the University of Minnesota Youth Work Learning Lab.

If you have questions, concerns, or want to add to our collection of resources, please contact Deborah Moore, U of MN at ddm2@umn.edu.

How this Guide Works

This guide will help anyone working with young people think about your core purpose and the multiple roles we can play during this pandemic, and re-envision your approach to youth work to be more intentional in meeting the most critical needs of our young people right now.

The process includes an eight step planning approach including:

- Step 1: Start By Grounding In Youth Work Values – What Is The Purpose Of Our Work?

- Step 2: What Do Young People In Your Communities Need RIGHT NOW, Next 6 Months?

- Step 3: Start With The Smallest Unit Of Design

- Step 4: Build To Fit The Space You Have

- Step 5: Determine How To Be More Safe

- Step 6: Figure Out What To Do In The Space You Will Co-Create

- Step 7: Simple Data Capture

- Step 8: Organizational And Structural Implications

The planning process is set up as eight steps to inform your plans that layer and scaffold your program design based on a strong foundation of your values, expanding your possible roles and models and linking these ideas to your design.

Each step includes a brief summary, questions to answer and resources to help. There are worksheets to make it easy capture staff ideas, all which can be put in a final plan. Final plans could be shared with all staff, young people and their families, stakeholders and funders. It is a time to communicate and be transparent about what and how we are doing our work.

The steps can be done at staff meetings, a longer session or as individual work with a group share time over the phone or online to discuss and come to agreement. It is not meant to be a deeply drawn out process, but a simple grounding that leads to a more powerful set of options for working with young people during a pandemic.

Start The Design Process Here

Step 1: Start By Grounding in Youth Work Values – What is the Purpose of our work?

The field of youth work has a long history of focusing on young people in a very particular way. Not school, not social work, not recreation, but learning and caring and fun are still at the center. Regardless of what it is and is not, most youth workers believe relationships are the key to their work with young people. Before you begin to imagine and refocus how you will support young people in your communities, pause for conversation with each other about what is at the foundation of your work – a specific set of values and ethics that drive how you see young people and your role in their lives, and in community life.

Take some time with your staff (and young people) and share what you see as some of the key purposes for the work you do.

To get your brains turning, find a few things to read that will stimulate and remind you of why we do this work.

Resources that may help:

https://www.sjsu.edu/people/marcos.pizarro/courses/185/s1/DuncanAndradeHOPE.pdf

https://infed.org/mobi/what-is-youth-work-exploring-the-history-theory-and-practice-of-work-with-young-people/

https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2015/december/a-big-threat-to-our-little-campers-protecting-children-in-disasters/

https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/cardev/gr9_found/courage_poster.pdf

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/02673843.2000.9747867

Questions to Answer:

Pick a few of the articles (or some of your own) and work in small groups to ponder and discuss how they fit with your understanding of young people and what youth work is all about.

Then, have a reflective conversation with your colleagues and come to agreement about which ideas you agree can be used to shape and make decisions in your design choices. Questions are as follows:

A. Youth Work Purpose:

1. What ideas, theories, concepts in youth work most resonate with you during the pandemic and *WHY*?

2. How will you make sure you use these as touchstones for what you will plan and design?

B. Youth Worker Roles:

3. What roles should we make a part of our work during this time?

4. Are there roles we need to let go? What is the plan/process needed to communicate and make this happen?

Step 2: What Do Young People in Your Communities Need RIGHT NOW, in the Next 6 months?

What is it like to be a young person right now? Every possible routine and structure has been disrupted. This includes aspects of our lives we enjoyed and those we did not. School, family time, family roles, who we see, what we can do, what we eat, how we sleep, new responsibilities, daily news blasts that are distressing and so much more. We generally know that everyone is stressed and that life has changed – but do we know how life has changed for each of our young people?

As we started talking to young people in the past month, we quickly learned that no one seemed to be asking them things like, "Do you still have your job? Do you have enough to eat? What changed with your living situation? What are your classes like? Homework amount? What do you worry about most? What keeps you going?"

As youth workers, we know that we often have the trust and respect of the young people we work with, and that makes us differently responsible for getting a better read on what young people need before we design our with them. This can be done through the planning process. However, we should all consider asking them about what it is like for them each time we meet. We may be one of the few adults who ask.

Resources That May Help:

https://www.childtrends.org/publications/ways-to-promote-childrens-resilience-to-the-covid-19-pandemic

https://cdn.doctorsonly.co.il/2020/04/Behavioral-and-Emotional-Disorders-in-Children-during-the-COVID-19-Epidemic.pdf

https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/04/27/survey-tracker-k-12-coronavirus-response.html

Questions to Answer:

Some youth workers may already be doing this and may just need to fill in the gaps. Others may need to start. These questions will get you focused on what may be important to know about what is happening with your young people. Data can be collected informally through conversations or more formally through simple methods such as surveys, Instagram posts and more. They key is to find multiple and regular ways to ask and listen to what they tell you. If you have the capacity and want to push yourselves to a whole new level, engage the young people in the whole process of gathering data, including what they need.

1. What data (formal or informal) do you already have to help you understand two things (data ex: staff have talked to many youth on the phone):

   • What are young people experiencing right now – what is their life like right now?

   • What do young people need based on what has changed?

   Then, which of their needs connects to what you have identified as a key purpose for your work?

2. What data is missing or what don't you understand well enough?

3. How could you get more information about what you don't understand in formal or informal ways? Describe a simple plan for getting that information?

Step 3: Start With The Smallest Unit Of Design

One message we have clearly heard is that youth workers feel overwhelmed, they know they have to shift and adapt, but feel confused about the mountain of things that seem to need doing. To get things down to the basics, we suggest you start with the smallest unit of designing a program – who is in the group? This was perhaps too simplistic an idea a few months ago, but now we have to keep things simple and build up if and how we can. The following questions are designed to get you to take a few basic steps and then build it out.

Be aware that doing this will help you face the reality that you may need to scale down what you do with young people. You may need to decrease the number of young people you can support in your new design. But if you get it right, you can always grow. Our hope is that if we all take a deeper responsibility for some of the young people right now, make it manageable and safe, more programs can keep doing good work and we build a case that we have it figured out to our partners and stakeholders around us.

Resources That May Help:

https://www.nccs.org/sites/default/files/resource/CurriculumPlanningToolkit.pdf

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1pGADyvSb6miKpFGRFsryn5mKpxII8ccN

https://www.slideshare.net/DetroitYDRC/tools-and-tips-for-designing-a-high-quality-program-final

Questions to Answer:

1. What is your basic "youth group" that you will design your program around?

   Many of us use small groups and group work in our programs already. Given some guidance from youth workers during natural disasters, we suggest a way to start that you begin by planning with a small, closed group. A small, closed group could be in person or online but is a set group where all members stay the same. The small, closed group means there is no (or limited and socially distanced) interaction in the space between small closed groups, but there can be online larger group interactions. You will have to determine the ratio best for your program, but based on our experience in working in person and in groups (before now) and online with students during Covid-19, 5-6 young people per adult suits highly relational work.

2. What kinds of activities could you do with young people, in person, online/phone, distant and independently?

   This is a time to ask young people and your colleagues to explode the ideas about your ways to connect. Do not get specific about content (ex: we will create a video project about great things to do outside in your neighborhood) but general types of things to do (meetings, physical activities, group project work, ice breakers, etc.). Examples include:

   a. In person
   b. Online/Web
   c. Phone
   d. Home visits
   e. Mail/drop offs

SAMPLE CONTACTS AND ACTIVITIES

Type of Contact	Type of Activity
In person	Hang out, check-in Something fun (game, physical activity, project) Something relaxing (walk, listen to music, eat and chat) Project/activity and/or progress check-in Next time we should…? reflection
Online/Web	Group Zoom check in and chat Online game day Individual project plan
Phone	Call with a few simple questions: What did you do today? How is your family? Hardest part of your day? Anything you need that I can help with? What is making you happiest right now?
Home visits/community connections	Drop off food baskets, treats, list of resources, activities/supplies
Mail	A note of encouragement Something they are interested in (magazine, art paper, article, book, etc.)

3. What could a typical week of programming look like now for staff and youth?

Given that staff are going to be working with much smaller groups, how could staff work with a few groups across a week and what could they do?

SAMPLE WEEKLY PLAN FOR A GROUP

Day	Type of Contact	Activity
Monday	Online	Full Group check-in and chat
Tuesday		
Wednesday	In person	Small group session - projects
Thursday		

Friday	Online	Online Game Day

4. What could a typical month of programming look like for staff and youth?

Now create a draft of how staff might be able to put support for young people together inside their actual work time. Try mapping out how your group model will look across a month. This should help you get more concrete and practical plans about how to spread support across more than a week and think in longer terms. It may also be useful for staff and leadership to understand what the reality of a new model means in actual time costs.

SAMPLE MONHLY PLAN FOR A GROUP

Week	Weekly Contact (with one closed group)	Monthly contact
Week 1	Online Meeting, in person small group, online game/fun day	Mail
Week 2	Online Meeting, in person small group, online game/fun day	Home visit/drop offs
Week 3	Online Meeting, in person small group, online game/fun day	
Week 4	Online Meeting, in person small group, online game day	Phone call

Step 4: Build To Fit The Staff and Space You Have

As I suggested before, youth workers may be a second wave of essential workers. Given that idea, think about how the community is rallying around healthcare workers right now, and how we need to show them the appreciation, recognition and support given their roles are critical to our communities young people. It is now on the shoulders of the leaders in your organizations to show your care for the people that will do the tough heart work that is required by young people. We have to redesign in ways that are sustainable and mentally healthy for our staff as well as our youth.

Resources That May Help:

http://www.movit.si/fileadmin/movit/2ED/koronavirus/Covid-19-Youth-Workers-final1.pdf

https://youthworksupport.co.uk/youth-workers/

Questions to Answer:

1. Staff Capacity and Responsibilities

   a. What is a typical day going to look like for your staff now? What new roles and responsibilities will be added? What will have to be dropped?

   b. What support and resources will they need to make these shifts?

2. Space Parameters

   a. Indoor spaces available (be specific, what room(s), building areas could be used for your small closed group?)

   b. Outdoor spaces available (be specific, what spaces in a close proximity of your building space could be easily accessed for your small closed group?)

   c. What would need to happen to make sure this space is scheduled and managed for the groups?

3. Online Resources and Parameters

   What kinds of web-based access and resources do you have to get young people engaged online?
   a. What access do your young people have to phone, computer and Internet? If they don't have access – any community support from school or others to help?

   b. What access do you have for staff including phones, computers, internet? If they don't have access – any community support from school or others to help?

   c. What platforms and software could be easily accessed for both young people and staff?

   d. What specific actions need to be taken to get the resources to those who need it?

   e. What support do staff and young people need to participate?

4. How many youth can you support given your new model?

Given what you have decided about your basic group and what they will do, how staff will support them, how often and in what kinds of spaces, you have to add it all up. Have staff map out a typical daily schedule and weekly schedule with one group, then add another and see what is possible for number of groups.

Remember to build in time for activity prep, cleaning, breaks and chatting etc. The reality might be – we need to do less, because life has become filled with so many more things that deplete us. There is already emerging research that is describing the mental health challenges we face during the pandemic. This new design is going to be hard on staff, it is a whole new way of working, so do not overload staff from the start. Start small. You can always add if staff feels ready to take on more, but do not make that the expectation. Be mindful that we need to take care of our colleagues as much as our young people.

A SAMPLE WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Activity	Monday: At Home day	Tuesday: Onsite day	Wednesday: Onsite day	Thursday: Onsite day	Friday: At Home day
Prep	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour
Connecting with youth in person		4 hours		4 hours	
Connecting with youth online/phone	4 hours				4 hours
Home/community visits			4 hours		
Cleaning		1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	
Paperwork/meetings	1 hour paperwork, 1 hour staff meeting	1 hour paperwork	1 hour paperwork	1 hour paperwork	1 hour paperwork, 1 hour staff meeting
Breaks/check-ins/unexpected	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	1hour

Step 5: Determine How to be More Safe

We are responsible for considering how to keep the young people and staff safe during this time. There are emerging places for guidance around how to do this and new and better guidance will continue to be shared. It must be the highest priority in your planning. And yes, even before relationships because lives are at risk. There are a number of documents to help guide us now, but we encourage you to continue to look for new and better guidelines as more is learned.

Resources That May Help:

https://campnurse.org/education-and-resources/covid-19-considerations-for-camp/

https://www.campnurse.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Communicable-Disease-Management-Strategies-for-the-Camp-Setting-2019.pdf

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html

Questions to Answer:

For now, given the current guidance from the CDC, we suggest safety planning around the following areas:

1. If you are unsure if you should plan to have some in person programming – the CDC has a decision making tool that could be useful.

    https://campnurse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Camps-Decision-Tree.pdf

2. If you decide to offer some in person (or when you open in the future) what new procedures need to be in place due to Covid19?

    The following list is complied from CDC and ACA for places to create clear guidelines and training procedures around health and safety.

    a. Inside/Outside area redesign for closed groups
    b. Check-in and check out
    c. Traveling pathways
    d. Restroom guidelines
    e. Materials safety
    f. Food safety
    g. PPE processes
    h. Cleaning processes

3. How do our staff need to be trained and supported to understand and use these guidelines?

4. How do young people need to be educated and given clear expectations for in-person spaces?

5. What supporting visual materials are needed, should be posted?
    a. Guide for youth workers
    b. Guide for youth and families

Resources:

https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Covid-19_Toolkit_YoungPeople.pdf?_ga=2.89496658.835746096.1589739339-984433262.1589739339

Step 6: Deciding What To Do With Young People

Learning doesn't stop because youth programs or schools are operating differently or not all. Young people (and all humans) learn all the time and from almost every experience we have. The big questions right now is, what content focus and measurable outcomes may need to change given the pandemic? Should there be a priority on connecting and supporting each other, with less pressure on specific content? Could the world we live in become the content? Or could becoming the person we want to be in this time be the learning goal? While that might seem overwhelming or even, a bit lofty, youth work has many ways of thinking about young people and learning that can guide us. The key to making new spaces right now is to get a lot more expert on how to draw out learning in the moment and by letting youth take the lead when they feel engaged in what they are doing.

Resources That May Help:

• https://unicefusa.app.box.com/v/CFCILearningCommunity/folder/112258136111

• https://www.unicef.org/media/66761/file/Practical-Tips-on-Engaging-Adolescents-and-Youth-in-the-COVID-19-Response-2020.pdf

• https://www.unicef.org/media/67396/file/COVID-19%20and%20Its%20Implications%20for%20Protecting%20Children%20Online.pdf

• https://www.wallacefoundation.org/news-and-media/blog/pages/keeping-young-people-creative-and-connected-in-quarantine.aspx

• https://www.wallacefoundation.org/news-and-media/blog/pages/engaging-audiences-in-the-age-of-social-distancing.aspx

• https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/covid-19ysresources

Questions to Answer:

1. What youth work principles and practices do we focus on most?

In times of natural disaster and pandemic the space we create with and for young people must flow out of the person we want to be for young people. We suggest using guidance that was framed within such times. What we suggest is starting with a few simple principles of practice categories such as be connective, supportive, and relational. The following resources could be used for reflection and clarifying how we will practice given who we want to be for our young people.

Suggested Readings Include:

https://www.unicef.org/media/66761/file/Practical-Tips-on-Engaging-Adolescents-and-Youth-in-the-COVID-19-Response-2020.pdf

https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2015/december/a-big-threat-to-our-little-campers-protecting-children-in-disasters/

https://www.childtrends.org/publications/ways-to-promote-childrens-resilience-to-the-covid-19-pandemic

2. What is the best content to focus on now and how do we know?

Use this time and the work you have done in previous steps to think beyond what you used to consider your core content. Now is the time to regularly engage with your young people to determine what they want to do, learn and experience. A few examples to spark possibilities include:

Examples,
- How to both communicate youth-friendly and accurate information your youth and work with them to communicate with each other.

- Partner with youth to create an online survey to understand what young people are experiencing and what they need.

- Get young people involved in a project to help in their community (ex: thanking healthcare workers, dropping off supplies to the elderly, set up youth friendly mental health supports).

Suggested Readings Include:

https://www.voicesofyouth.org/campaign/take-action-and-help-fight-covid-19

Consider these questions to re-imagine how you create your spaces with young people:

    a. How do we think our learning environment and learning goals must change?

    b. How can we determine simple goals for the space we create with young people as our partners?

    c. Given simple goals for our program, what are some simple outcomes for our program?

    d. What practices or sets of practices can the staff commit to using?

3. What learning methods and models best fit this time?

If we want to be connective, supportive, and relational in our spaces with young people, these well established youth work theories and practices can help us redesign activities.

- Inquiry-based learning
- Project based learning
- Radical community education/ Civic engagement/ action/ Participatory youth work/ YPAR
- Situated learning--identity, relationship l communities of practice
- Responsive youth work - youth work in the moment
- Indigenous Youth Work

4. What are some possible session templates or guides that can help us feel prepared to facilitate what the group wants/needs to do each session?

SAMPLE SESSION

- Open chat time, listening check-in
- Something relaxing
- Something fun
- Project or focused exploration given the above
- Inviting young people to take over what parts: Who wants to bring something for us to do that will relax us next time? Who wants to bring an opening question?
- Thoughts about what we want to do next time, tasks assigned

5. How do we balance planning what we will do, with responding to what youth need in the moment?

Step 7: Simple Data Capture

We know some funders and stakeholders are being responsive and supportive of youth organizations right now. But let's not rest on the idea that we don't have to report or measure anything during this time. Even if you do not have to write a single report to a funder (and if that is true, let us all know how you made that happen?), what we are living through needs to be understood, captured, and improved, because we are making it up as we go. We have some simple ideas to get you started thinking about what might qualify as "data." More information will be available sometime this summer, but for now take a good look around at what you are doing, things you think matter, things that sums up how you are making a difference, and see if there is a simple way to add it up across people or time.

 Resources That May Help:

https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/resources/files/acaps_technical_brief_questionnaire_design_july_2016_0.pdf

http://iin.oea.org/boletines/boletin8/publicaciones-recibidas-esp/the_participation_of_children_and_young_people_in_emergencies.pdf

Questions to Answer:

1. Given how we will pivot - what kinds of easy to catch data could we collect?
    a. Track what we do on calendar
    b. Track what we learn about youth in conversation - journals
    c. Outputs (visits, calls, materials share, online sessions…)

Step 8: What Are The Organizational and Structural Implications?

As a former executive director and leader in large youth organizations, I know this is going to cause some hardship. And this step is much more complicated than can be captured in an early guide. For all staff, know that being a leader right now is a straight up test of leadership, like no other. I keep telling the young people I work with that we are becoming more concentrated versions of ourselves. Remember, the pressure comes from every side for our youth work leaders.

For all formal leaders, what you do matters and there doesn't seem to be enough good examples of how to lead right now. But I have faith in our field, and its leaders. You are smart, wise, extremely capable, complex and strategic thinkers so don't lose heart. Use all the same ethics and principles you embodied when working with young people, but apply that to your staff, the families, your funders and even yourself. The following questions will give you a simple framework to help you focus on the areas that are most likely to be affected by a new design. I wish it were more.

Resources That May Help:

https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/resources-for-financial-management/pages/default.aspx

Questions to Answer:

1. How will staffing need to shift?
    a. Number of staff
    b. Staff role and responsibilities
    c. Staff coverage plan for sickness

2. How will your youth population change?
    a. Will you serve less, more, different young people or populations
    b. Will you spend more/less time and in different ways

3. What are the implications for budget?
    a. Staff time/changes/roles
    b. New Resources/Materials needed
    c. Funding sources redirected, lost added
    d. New partnerships and collaborations
4. What organizational policies need to revised or added?
    a. Sick time
    b. Healthcare and other benefits
    c. Workplace operational guidelines
    d. Job Role/expectations
    e. Volunteers
    f. Internet policies
    g. Transportation – offsite programming guidelines
    h. Travel/purchase guidelines

5. How will we need to communicate?
    a. Key audiences
    b. What mechanisms
    c. What kind of information

6. What do stakeholders/funders need to know and do to support you?
    a. Reporting
    b. Evaluation
    c. Funding redirection
    d. Timeline extensions
    e. Expanded funding