

Proposals for Change
Youth Advisor Task Force
Recommendations

Submitted to the UUA Board of Trustees
June 2000

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Introduction

The Report and Our Philosophy

Youth programming is reflective of Unitarian Universalism as a faith. It is structured differently from the youth programming of other faiths because it is founded upon the Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes. Our youth programs are communities in which youth live by our Principles; respecting the inherent dignity and worth of all people, advocating for the democratic process, and promoting social activism in our congregations and throughout our Association. The free and responsible search for truth and meaning is a core piece of the life of teens, and youth community focuses deeply on the interdependent web. Youth advisors have a special role in this movement.

The ministry of youth advisors is complex. They are expected to support the youth in learning to live our Unitarian Universalist values, while not dictating values. They are cheerleaders for youth leadership, but cannot force youth to take ownership of their programming. They are expected to have a good rapport with youth, but also are asked to communicate well with adult leadership. They are asked to translate between youths and adults. They are expected to have skills in dealing with youth in crisis. Yet they often receive little or no training, are not paid, are overwhelmed, and often have no support system to aid them. In the most thriving youth groups there is a sense of safety and vulnerability that exists in very few places in youths' lives. We can think of no other organization in which that vulnerability by youth is encouraged while the adult presence is often all volunteer, poorly screened, untrained, and not intentionally and comprehensively supported.

In the work of the Youth Advisor Task Force we continually confronted the difficulty of separating youth advocacy needs and the needs of youth advisors. We found that in many ways that they are inextricably linked, and thus many of these recommendations address both issues at once. Youth issues truly are everyone's issues. We tried to focus on the next five years as a critical transition time, but included some longer-term needs we deemed critical.

One of the unwelcome truths of many of these recommendations is that quality youth programming requires money. We know that money is sometimes an elusive thing, and that some may dismiss some of our work because of the expectation that the money "just isn't there." We know that many congregations struggle to adequately fund all of their programming, and we do not dismiss that reality. We have tried to include a variety of recommendations that do not depend on additional funding for youth programs. Yet we feel that the long-term needs of a quality youth program, worthy of our amazing youth, includes adequate funding, and that any long-term vision of growth within our denomination must include more resources for youth programming.

It is widely recognized that most of our growth comes from families with children. Some of these families will leave our congregations unless they see a strong, healthy youth program into which their children can grow. If one-half of our youth today remain active Unitarian Universalists as adults, our denomination will grow by 15-20% over the next ten years. In raising funds for growth a few years ago, several districts found that youth programming was a key issue that inspired people to give. Congregations have found that when they highlight how, as Rev. Joel Miller of Columbine Unitarian Universalist Church in Littleton, CO, said at the Opening Celebration at General Assembly 1999, "... lives (are) saved by Unitarian

Universalist heroes — by our youth group advisors who have sustained our youth programs, and brought hope and meaning where there was none." Every member of our task force has experienced this truth: our youth programs save lives.

Youth who go through our youth programs and conferences have a very different view, in some ways, of what Unitarian Universalism is and can be. We must respect and include that perspective in how we all practice our faith, whether we are adult converts, raised Unitarian Universalist without any Young Religious Unitarian Universalists (YRUU) involvement, or YRUU veterans. Many of the congregational, district, and continental leaders of the Unitarian Universalist movement developed their faith and commitment to our principles from within our youth programs. Yet so many others leave our faith after high school. One youth told us, "I'm a UU, a YRUU Unitarian Universalist. I just cannot find a UU church of people that live our UU principles in the way that we did in YRUU." Much has been said of the lack of young adults in our congregations, and much has been done to work to change that sad loss. We feel that quality youth advisors can, if trained and supported well, serve as an important bridge to the congregation, not only creating a sense of belonging for youth, but also a sense of ownership by the congregation at large.

The Youth Advisor Task Force believes that our youth are an amazing and important part of our congregations and denomination. We often hear that youth are the future of our faith. That is true whether or not they remain a part of our faith, for when they leave we all lose their unique insight into what it means to be Unitarian Universalist. Yet youth also are the present of our faith. They are Unitarian Universalist leaders, congregants, and worshipers. They are in our congregations already, and we cannot wait until they are older to make them feel welcome. Youth advisors need support in creating that feeling of connection and belonging.

The Youth Advisor Task Force took two years to talk to people, gather stories, collect data, develop recommendations and begin the creation of some critically needed resources. We collected data through personal conversations, workshops, and the questionnaires that helped us identify many issues. The following report is the result of that work, compiling our research and attempting to give a clear vision for institutional change in how we select, train, and support youth advisors and their ministry. Some of these recommendations aim to improve training and direct support mechanisms for youth advisors. Others try to improve lines of communication between youth and ministers, religious educators, and church and district board members. This is because many youth advisors expressed their concern that they cannot effectively do their ministry without congregational support of youth and the youth program. Our hope and vision is that an increase in communication and trust between youth and adults at all levels will create a climate where youth advisors are an integrated part of the ministry of our faith and feel supported by their congregations.

About the Youth Advisor Task Force

The Youth Advisor Task Force was created by the Unitarian Universalist Association's Board of Trustees in 1998 in response to a recommendation of the Youth Programs Review Report and at the request of Youth Council 1997. The Youth Programs Review Committee, in their work examining the state of youth programs in the UUA, determined that there was a great need for detailed analysis of issues around youth advisors, analysis beyond their charge. They recommended a task force be created to that important work. Following up on the recommendations of the Youth Programs Review Report, released in 1997, Youth Council 1997 passed a resolution requesting that the UUA Board create such a task force. The UUA Board created the Youth Advisor Task Force and appointed its membership at their Spring 1998 meeting.

The UUA Board gave the following charge to the Youth Advisor Task Force: The Youth Advisor Task Force is charged to examine and make recommendations on Youth Advisor Training and support for the purpose of reinforcing adult involvement in youth programming (especially on the local level); and to consider Youth Advisor Training (especially in regard to fostering youth leadership, adolescent development, healthy personal boundaries, and Middle School advising), the development of clinical pastoral consultancy, the creation of a youth advisor networking and advocacy organization, and anti-racism training. This charge was the guideline for the two years of work the task force undertook.

We met four times in person and had many conference calls. We used email to communicate extensively. The YATF first met in November 1998. We created a mission statement and a vision for our work, emphasizing concrete results, including creating resources, educating about youth advisors, and having clear recommendations for training redevelopment. We began work creating a website and a presence at General Assembly, developed two questionnaires, and created a framework for our work. In May 1999 we held our second meeting in Chicago, further elaborated on our plans for General Assembly 1999, and began to outline the resources that we wanted to create. Our meeting in Boston in October 1999 included meeting with the UUA Board of Trustees. We began to concentrate on the recommendations that we would make, using all of the information that we'd gathered over the last year. In February 2000 we held our final meeting, finalizing our recommendations into this report.

The statement we developed at our first meeting framed our process: The mission of the Youth Advisor Task Force is to make concrete recommendations for action and initiate creation of programs based on the evaluation of issues gathered from as many voices as possible about the present state of youth advisors in our congregations, district, and continent. We also learned a great deal in our work together. The tension and frustrations we faced at times, with every one of us already balancing very busy schedules, reflected the issues that we were examining. Tackling these issues ourselves was an important part of truly understanding the obstacles that all to whom we direct this have faced — youth, youth advisors, ministers, religious educators, parents, board members, and all others whose lives are affected, whether they realize it or not, by the miracles happening in our youth programming.

Youth Advisor Task Force Membership

The UUA Board appointed a varied group to this task whose diversity of experience is included in this report.

A. Drake Baer of Princeton, NJ is a long-time youth advisor at Princeton Unitarian Universalist Church and adult chair of the Metro District YAC. He has served on Youth Council, the YRUU Steering Committee, and as lead youth advisor to continental conferences at the United Nations and for bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender youth activism training. He reminded us of the miracles of our youth programming in transforming our congregations.

James Coomes of South Pasadena, CA is a social worker specializing in child and family mental health. He is a member of Neighborhood Church where he served three years as a Youth Coordinator. In his work with the task force, he reminded us of the need to be intentional in our responsibilities and recommendations.

Dori Davenport of Chicago, IL currently serves the Central Midwest District as Religious Education Consultant. She served two congregations as Director of Religious Education between 1983-1998, and has been a member of Youth Council and the Liberal Religious Educators' Association (LREDA) Board. She reminded us of the importance of the religious educator's voice and a clear love of youth work within that role.

Reverend Frank Hall of Westport, CT is Minister of Westport Unitarian Church, and came to Unitarian Universalism and ministry through his work as a youth advisor. He brought us a deep concern for our youth programming and reminders of the difficulties parish ministers face in advocacy.

Dallas Rising of Minneapolis, MN was one of the key voices advocating at Youth Council 1997 for the creation of this task force in her role as Youth Council Representative from Prairie Star District, and is a member of the Unitarian Universalists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals Board. She brought with her an older youth voice, and a voice of compassion for those confronting difficult situations without adequate skills and support.

Jo H Victoria of San Francisco, CA serves as the President of the Pacific Central District Board of Trustees and as Pacific Central District YRUU's Youth Advisor Trainer. She has taught Junior High Religious Education and Junior High Our Whole Lives (OWL) at First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Francisco, and is one of their youth advisors. She brought her caring for younger youth and concern about youth/adult communication.

The Youth Office also served on the Youth Advisor Task Force as Ex-Officio members. *Jen Harrison*, the Youth Programs Director, was our Staff Liaison and provided us with logistical support. Her background is as a youth advisor and she has worked with Coming of Age programming. She brought us a comprehensive view of youth advising as ministry.

The Youth Programs Specialists, *Nathan Staples*, *Duncan Metcalfe*, *Nathaniel Klein*, *Austin Putman*, and *Sienna Baskin* all brought unique and valuable skills and perspectives, all reminding us to think outside of the box. Their input reminded us to look to where we want to be, not just focus on what things are not going well and how to fix them.

The Recommendations of the Youth Advisor Task Force

Introduction

Following are our recommendations to constituencies and groups all around the continent regarding youth advisors, their selection, support, and training. These recommendations are focused on the local youth advisor, and include issues within five categories: youth/adult communication, support for those doing ministry with youth, resources for youth advisors and others, training of youth advisors and religious educators, and Middle School youth.

For the purposes of this report we have used some terms in ways that may not be universal. A full list is provided at the end of this report, in Appendix B. There are several terms we would like to define before we continue, however. We use the term "religious educator" to refer to the person in a congregation, volunteer or paid, who oversees programs including the children's religious education program within a congregation, including Directors of Religious Education, Ministers of Religious Education, Religious Education Coordinators, and Religious Education Committee Chairs in those congregations in which this is their role. We use the term "religious education" to mean lifelong religious education, specifying where possible when we are referring only to children's religious education. We use "youth group" to mean the part of a congregation's youth program that is based on the philosophy of youth empowerment, includes some youth leadership, and is supported by a youth advisor, using religious education to refer to curriculum-directed programming. As United States' school districts increasingly have Middle Schools rather than Junior High Schools and many youth programs include grade nine, we use "Middle School" to refer to Junior High and Middle School youth programs that include those from grade six through nine. We use "congregation" as an all-encompassing term that includes churches, fellowships, societies and other Unitarian Universalist congregational groups. In this report the term "minister" refers to all ordained Unitarian Universalist clergy, including community ministers and ministers of religious education, and we have attempted to specify parish minister when that is whom we mean. We refer at several points to the "Resource Revision Team." This team is outlined in a recommendation . The tasks that we direct to them are also contained within the recommendation directly discussing the creation and work of the Resource Revision Team.

We have provided timelines with some of the multi-step recommendations, as a guide to our vision for their implementation. Many recommendations do not have timelines, as we felt that the timelines were contingent on the issues confronting organizations that we cannot predict or generalize about. While we feel a sense of urgency in beginning the steps to change, we also want to emphasize that many of these changes are long-term processes that will not immediately succeed. It may take several years of meetings between youth and adults to build trust, for example. We hope that you persist, with the long-term goals in mind.

Despite our attempts to limit the use of acronyms and obtuse terminology, and our attempts to create as universal a document as possible, the organization of each congregation and district are very different. We hope readers will adapt our recommendations to apply to the culture and needs of their specific group or organization, keeping in mind the broad ideas that we are trying to convey. While our recommendations specifically target individuals and groups with specific tasks, it is our hope and expectation that youth, youth advisors, parents, and religious

educators in particular will act as advocates for youth programming, and will help to hold those groups responsible for, at the very least, considering our recommendations.

Opening Communication between Youth and Adults

One of the key issues that affects youth advisors is communication between youth and adults within a congregation and within a district. While part of a youth advisor's role is to help bridge communication between youth and adults, when youth and adults aren't communicating well the youth advisor often becomes more than just a translator. Youth advisors can become the sole means of communication. This is especially difficult if there is conflict, as youth advisors can be under pressure from both youth and adults, and are often expected to speak for youth, rather than from their own perspectives as youth advisors. We don't feel that this is healthy for anyone.

Youth are marginalized in much of society, and in many congregations. They don't feel invested in the congregation, are seen as disinterested in the congregation, and may consequently be omitted from important decisions being made in the congregation. This makes it even more difficult for youth advisors to maintain a bridge between the youth and the greater congregation.

Following are our recommendations regarding communication between adults and youth. We feel that in some ways this is the most critical thing that needs to change in our congregations from the youth advisor perspective.

Youth Involvement in the Congregation

Ideally, youth would be visible and active in a congregation. Youth have energy, ideas, and enthusiasm to bring to any group. It's unfortunate that in many places, youth groups and congregations are obviously divided. It is easy for adults to have great misconceptions about what the youth group does or is about because of this division. Youth groups need to feel welcome and enthused about coming "out of the basement" and up into the pews and pulpit. If youth are given the spotlight for a while, they can dispel any myths that may be floating around the congregation about them. Also, it never hurts for youth to be given recognition for the work that they do. Announcements from the pulpit about youth work and comments about what the youth are up to would help to dispel some misconceptions adults who don't work with youth may have. If youth are visible in a congregational community, parents of younger children will be excited to have their child grow into the youth program.

Bridging the gaps between the youth and adults in a congregation requires not only that youth advisors work with the youth to create enthusiasm for involvement, but also that the congregation reach out to the youth. There is an untapped potential for youth to minister to adults, and for adults to minister to youth. Youth often feel that the congregation is for their parents, and call the Sunday service the "adult service." Ideally, worship is for all in a congregation, and we fear that without a connection to the greater church youth programming becomes a place for the children of UUs, not for young UUs. While youth need a place in the church that is their own, they also need to feel that they are part of a greater community.

When congregations are in search for a new parish minister or religious educator, including the youth voice in these critical decisions can be key in developing the relationships between youth, ministers, and religious educators. We feel that in order to create good communication and respect for youth, parish ministers and professional religious educators need to have a working understanding of ministry to youth, and need to view youth as a part of the congregation. Youth also bring a fresh voice and view to the process of a search, and can help the group avoid adult-centric bias. This is particularly useful in learning first hand about a candidate's comfort with youth.

Recommendation to Local Youth Group Leadership and Youth Advisors:

Consider ways in which you can connect ministers to the youth in your congregation. Invite a minister to be a participant (not a leader) in a youth group event such as an overnight, specific youth-designated activity, or focused conversation. Interview the minister about how she views her faith. Ask the minister to lead an activity with the youth group using a skill, hobby, or interest that he could share.

Recommendations to Local Religious Educators and Local Ministers:

Examine how you can help to make the youth more connected to the rest of the congregation. Place value on youth program and keep up to date on what's happening with the youth group. Invite youth to the pulpit to share their views and stories. Inform the congregation about youth group activities or highlights during weekly announcements. Invite youth and youth advisors to make announcements, light the chalice, lead songs, and perform other parts of the service.

Recommendation to Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association (UUMA) Chapters

Set aside time at a meeting to discuss how you have successfully worked with youth in your congregations. Compile ideas into a resource that others can use in their congregation. Consider setting aside time to share successes annually.

Recommendation to Congregational Boards:

Evaluate your by-laws to see how the voice of youth can be better heard in the decision-making in your congregation. Consider creating a youth representative position on your board, as this increases youth investment in the congregational life and gives the congregation the benefit of the youth voice. Look at other ways in which the congregation may include or exclude the youth voice. Invite youth and youth advisors to board meetings, to give reports of the work they are doing, or just observe. Include youth advisors in your vision of who is in leadership in your congregation.

When your congregation is in search for a parish minister or professional religious educator, consider including a youth member on the search committee, and examine other ways in which youth can be involved in these important decisions in a congregation.

Recommendation to Commission on Appraisal:

While re-examining what it means to be a member of a congregation, take into consideration that while youth may not be able to financially pay dues, time is valuable as well. Many youth have more experience with Unitarian Universalism and have invested more time learning, growing, connecting, and being in leadership in congregations than other members, yet cannot join.

Recommendation to the Department of Ministry:

Consider adding to the ministerial search guidelines that youth should be included in a list of voices to be needed on a search committee.

Recommendation to UUA Department of Congregation, District, and Extension Services and UUA Department of Ministry:

Research funding possibilities for the publishing of an anthology of essays about ministry to and with youth, drawing from the work being done by Dori Davenport. The book should address how ministers' work with youth has enriched their ministry and congregation, and be able to serve as a resource for ministers in their work.

Intergenerational Programming within Congregations

Intergenerational work within congregations is receiving greater attention now than at any other time in our Association's recent history. There is renewed emphasis on the important role of a strong religious education program in the growth of a congregation; parish ministers, religious educators, parents, youth advisors, and youth all express a desire for a greater sense of congregational identity that bridges the generations. There is also a desire in many congregations to find new ways to build community in a congregation beyond committee work. This is an area in which youth and youth advisors can help lead the way.

Youth programming has a strong element of community development. *Deep Fun*, the YRUU games book published by the Youth Office, contains games that are also steps to building community, games that build trust, support, caring, and nurturing within a group. These elements are not unlike what we seek in our congregations.

Many congregations are doing great work in creating intentional, intergenerational community. Youth have led congregational workshops, using skills gained in their youth group and at youth conferences. Youth advisors have worked with religious educators and ministers, finding ways to support their congregants in community development. Congregations and youth groups have found ways to reach out to non-Unitarian Universalists in their communities through this work. Projects have raised the visibility of youth and children in a congregation through a congregational commitment to inclusivity. Yet these success stories are not broadly known.

We recommend that a new resource be created to provide examples of congregational programming that congregations can undertake, based on successful programs used in congregations throughout the Association. It should include models of programming focused on the existing congregation and models that invite in the non-UU community. This resource should draw from the work done by Nato Hollister, a former Youth Office intern, and Drake Baer, who have researched this topic.

Recommendation to the UUA Board and Religious Education Department:

2000-2002 UUA Board and Religious Education Department find funding for and commission a resource for intergenerational programming within congregations. This resource should include examples of intergenerational programming that encourages youth and youth advisors to contribute to congregational shared ministry, meaningful community, and community outreach. The writers should be experienced in doing such work, and can draw from successful models gathered by Nato Hollister and Drake Baer. Publish and distribute the resource through the Youth Office, the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, and other appropriate organizations .

Local Religious Education Committees and Youth Adult Committees

Most congregations have a committee overseeing and/or supporting religious education, which we will refer to as the religious education committee. This committee often steers the religious education department. Youth programming may be seen as either separate from religious education, or as another religious education class. When youth programming is completely separate, the youth can be especially marginalized in the congregation, and continuity and transitions between the children's program and the youth group are difficult or non-existent. When youth groups fall exclusively under religious education, religious educators are often given the monumental task of supporting youth advisors and program as well as programs for children and often adults. Too often the religious educator is placed in the role of "bad guy," imposer of rules and restrictions, and may not have acquired effective skills for communicating with youth. We feel that neither situation empowers youth, youth advisors, or religious educators.

Our hope is that congregations and religious educators will develop a new vision of youth programs, with youth programming as a part of a continuous flow of lifespan religious education and all-church programs that integrate youth and adults. A good way to do this would be to create a committee separate from the religious education committee to coordinate all youth work. This group could focus on the older children, grades six to twelve, or whatever would work best for the given congregation, and would have liaisons to and from the religious education committee. For the purposes of our recommendation, we are calling this group the local youth adult committee, or YAC.

A local YAC can be a wonderful support and advocacy group for a youth program, as well as a problem solving and prevention tool. A YAC should ideally consist of youth, youth advisors, the religious educator, parents, and if possible, a minister. If parents are invited to serve on a committee along with youth advisors, they would have the opportunity to work side by side and get to know one another. A YAC also gives youth advisors and religious educator a set time to sit down in the same room and check in about how things are going. Most uncomfortable situations can be cleared up with open communication, and a YAC is an ideal set up for being able to lay issues (such as problems with youth advisor, parental concerns, activity conflicts, etc.) on the table so everyone can hear them and respond. A local YAC can work together to break stereotypes that the congregation may have about youth or their youth advisors, and help the youth advisor break stereotypes that the youth may have about adults in the congregation. The focus of the YAC, ideally, would be on supporting the youth program and advocating for youth within the congregation.

We recommend that youth groups also develop a method of planning, developing covenants, and resolving intra-group conflict. This could be a leadership committee of the youth group, officers who have meetings outside the group, or whole group planning and organization sessions. Our vision of a YAC is not as a planning body for the youth group, but a mission-based group supporting healthy, balanced youth programs.

Recommendations to Resource Revision Team:

Take the publication *From YACs to SACs* and examine ways to include local YACs and religious education committees. Create a pamphlet for local churches about ways to create a youth adult committee from scratch and ways to support a YAC, including models for different size and style of congregation.

Recommendation to Youth Office:

Hold a workshop at General Assembly about creating and sustaining a local youth adult committee. Have people with successful local YACs present to share their experiences.

Recommendations to Local Youth Program Leadership, Religious Educators and Youth Advisors:

Examine how your congregation does or doesn't support your youth program. Talk to youth advisors, youth group, religious educator, church board, and parents about starting a YAC, or another group to meet support and advocacy needs. Use other religious educators with successful YACs as resources in your work. If your YAC serves as your youth group planning body or has a different composition or role, consider creating another group with the function we discuss above in mind.

Recommendation to Local Religious Education Committees:

Look at how you do or do not include youth and youth advisor perspectives in your work, especially if the youth group falls under your mandate and with respect to transitions from the children's program to the youth program. Consider inviting youth advisors and youth to serve on the local religious education committee or act as consultants on specific projects.

Youth Advisor Selection Process

Youth advisors serve a very delicate and important role, yet when you ask advisors how they were selected, too often you hear, "Well, I guess I was the one who said yes." We feel that this dynamic needs to change in order for our youth programs to be healthy for all involved. Not just anyone can be a good youth advisor, and too many times youth advisors are chosen by either the religious educator or the youth with little or no involvement by the other party. This creates a situation in which youth advisors start their work in a place of tension, increasing the likelihood that not only will youth advisors feel uncomfortable, but also that any concerns about their work are more difficult to address.

Youth should have an active role in choosing their own youth advisor, but should not bear the full responsibility of recruiting youth advisors. The best way for youth to be involved is to be on or form a committee to recruit their own youth advisors. We recommend that voices on this committee include the religious educator, several youth, parents, ministers, and various lay leaders of the congregation, and possibly a long-term quality youth advisor if appropriate. This would enable all to take an active role in every step and interview all potential candidates. It also shows the congregation that it is a privilege to work with youth and that it takes someone special to do youth work, and is a way of saying we respect our youth and their youth advisors enough to choose only the most qualified people for the job. Another way to ensure that everyone's expectations are being met is for youth to do a half year review with their youth advisors. That would be a time to discuss how things are going with the group and everyone could talk about how they feel and suggest ways to solve any problems that have arisen.

Getting different constituencies involved will lead to greater understanding of youth advisors' work and the responsibilities of all involved. We also hope that congregations will have teams of youth advisors to prevent burnout and foster a sense of community among the youth advisors as well as the youth.

Recommendations to Local Religious Educators and Youth Group Leadership:

Form a youth advisor search committee to determine next youth advisor, even if you have a youth advisor or youth advisors who intend on continuing the next year. Make sure youth are on the committee and play as active a role as possible.

Schedule a mid-year review of youth advisor, and include input from youth, parents, religious educator, and minister(s).

Recommendation for Resource Team:

Create a pamphlet detailing youth advisor search committees and include various models. In addition to publicizing this resource in religious education publications make sure it reaches Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association and *Interconnections*.

Communication between Board, Religious Education, and Youth Leadership

Time and time again in our research we heard stories of youth advisors who felt overwhelmed by the lack of communication between youth and adults. The lack of consistent and healthy communication between youth leadership, district and local youth advisors and district and local boards and religious education committees is a large issue for all involved, at times creating feelings of animosity and distrust. Youth Advisors can end up as the only communication channel between youth and adults. Yet religious educators, board members, youth, and adults all want the same basic thing. They all want youth to feel connected to Unitarian Universalism on a personal level. They all want youth to learn how to live our Unitarian Universalist values. They all want youth to grow into caring, compassionate, responsible adults. The issues, we feel, arise in how each person sees these shared goals being realized, and in a lack of understanding on all sides.

Creating trust with youth isn't the same as with adults. It requires much more intentional outreach on the part of adults. Yet it isn't that difficult to develop healthy lines of communication, and create forums where disagreements can be discussed in respectful, caring ways. We heard examples of how some very simple steps have created better relationships between district youth and adult leadership. All of these examples included creating personal connections between youth and youth advisors and other adult leadership and educating each other about their respective needs and communication styles. The potential for transforming district youth programming for the better through intentional outreach is enormous.

Recommendation to UUA Youth Office:

1999-2000 Develop a resource, titled something similar to "Youth and Adult Leadership Communication Building," to support youth, district board and religious education leadership in creating connections, giving examples of how districts have overcome tensions by creating communication and developing mutual trust and respect. Either include local relationship building as well, or create an additional pamphlet addressing local issues and potential solutions.

Recommendation to UUA Youth Office, Religious Education Department, and District President's Association:

2000-2001 Publicize and distribute "Youth and Adult Leadership Communication Building" to Youth Council Representatives, district boards, and district religious education leadership.

Recommendation to District and Local Boards, Religious Education Committees, and Youth Program Leadership:

Examine communication lines among the leadership in your district or congregation. How do you hear each others' voices? How are issues around youth programming resolved? How can you increase understanding and communication before there is a problem? How can you involve each other in events such as youth conferences, religious education meetings, board meetings, and congregational or district events? Look at the steps and processes described in the "Youth and Adult Leadership Communication Building" pamphlet, and see how you can change how you look at each other to create a stronger youth program, congregation, and

district. Consider creating youth seats on boards and religious education committees. Consider creating formal liaisons between organizations.

Recommendations to District and Local Nominating Committees:

Include youth advisors and youth in the constituencies from which the nominating committee solicits nominations for local and district leadership. If there is a youth advisor on the board, do not expect her to speak for youth. Allow youth advisors to be their own constituency.

Support for Ministry with Youth

The average tenure for committed youth advisors is 18 months, according to the Youth Office, largely because youth advisors can feel isolated and also overwhelmed by the often intense demands of their role. The range of challenges faced by youth advisors in ministering to individuals while supporting the cohesion of a sometimes volatile mix of components that comprise a youth group is extraordinarily broad. On top of this challenge, there are the issues of leadership development, building meaningful community, spiritual and personal development, group process, working for social justice, and helping youth lead curriculum.

Youth advisors often feel isolated in their congregation, and there are few support systems for most youth advisors. Advisors have a very important role in the life of the youth of our congregations, and often support youth through difficult times in their lives. Religious educators and parish ministers often lack a comprehensive understanding of youth needs and youth empowerment. They are often untrained in supporting the work of advisors, which are rooted in challenges very different from those typically addressed by parish ministers and religious educators. One youth advisor told us that when she asked for support from her religious educator, she was told "Oh, you're great at this! I know you'll figure it out!" While it is great to have support in the form of encouragement, many youth advisors need more.

While we recognize that the reality for many congregations is that they feel they are unable to have more than one youth advisor, we strongly encourage that a youth group have at least two youth advisors. This creates continuity, provides healthier transitions, and provides youth advisors with automatic support and opportunity for self-reflection.

We found that many youth advisors, religious educators, and youth were frustrated by the fact that youth advisors are often seen as inseparable from the youth group. Problems with youth advisors are seen as problems with the youth group, and vice-versa. Youth advisors need to be seen as their own constituency, with the need for individual support beyond support for the youth group.

"It takes a congregation to support a youth advisor" is one of the jokes we made as we looked at these recommendations, yet it is also a very serious reality. Youth advisors need, and deserve, support from many different people — religious educators, parish ministers, other youth advisors, district and continental UUA staff, youth leaders, and parents. Yet part of the problem is that those people do not themselves know how to support their youth advisor. These recommendations attempt to address the many different sides of supporting youth advisors.

Acknowledging Youth Advisors

We found that youth advisors often feel they are not acknowledged for their work. We feel that an important part of affirming the value of youth advising is acknowledging advisors' worth in a public way. A congregation could have a recognition service for youth advisors, for while some congregations have ceremonies for religious education program volunteers, youth advisors are not always invited to participate in a meaningful way. Parish ministers could talk from the pulpit about the youth program. Youth advisors could be asked to participate in a service, sharing their experiences in working with youth.

On the continental level, although there is a Youth Advisor of the Year award, few people nominate youth advisors, and the award recipient is not widely publicized. We know of no districts with an award for youth advisors. We feel that these awards are an opportunity to recognize not only one youth advisor, but also the work of ministering to and with youth. Such awards are also a chance to publicize a success story from which other youth advisors can learn.

Recommendation to Resource Revision Team:

Create a resource to show a congregation how to make a youth advisor and youth volunteer celebration day, giving models of worship services and other ceremonies from which congregations could draw.

Recommendation to Local Religious Education Committees and Parish Ministers:

Brainstorm and examine ways in which you can annually publicly acknowledge the work of youth advisors. If you have a ceremony honoring religious education volunteers, find ways to include youth advisors. Make sure the congregation knows who has given their time and why it is so important. Consider having the youth advisors speak from the pulpit about their work.

Recommendation to Youth Office:

2000-2002 Develop the Youth Advisor of the Year into a better publicized recognition, including finding funding to subsidize the recipient's travel to General Assembly accept the award, better publicity for nominations, recognition on the YRUU website, and perhaps a more significant physical and/or financial award.

Recommendation to District Boards:

Consider creating an annual district "Youth Advisor of the Year" award or another award acknowledging the work of youth advisors in your district's congregations.

Youth Advisor Advisory Committee

Congregations can support their own youth advisors by starting a youth advisor "advisory" committee to act as an in-house support system for the youth advisors. This committee could give youth advisors input on their concerns, support them in dealing with issues they confront in their work, or invite them to supper at a member's home so they can stay connected to others in the congregation. This group could function in many ways as a committee on ministry does for a minister, giving honest feedback to youth advisors and supporting them as they grow in their role.

Youth advisors who have such a committee speak in glowing terms of the difference this supportive group can make in their growth as healthy youth advisors. Some of the issues that can lead to burn-out — lack of self-care, difficulty in handling hard youth group situations, feeling of disconnect from the congregation — can be eased by having an intentionally created support system. We feel this is especially useful for situations in which a congregation has only one youth advisor or has a paid youth programs coordinator, but would be quite valuable for all youth advisors.

Recommendation to local Youth Adult Committees or Religious Education Committees:

Examine how your congregation supports its youth advisors. Consider creating a Youth Advisor Advisory Committee. If this is not possible, consider other ways you can create a support system for your youth advisors — regular meetings with the parish minister, religious educator, or other skilled person and a designated person to receive comments about the work of youth advisors in order to give them feedback on their work, or whatever would work best in your congregation.

Involving Other Adults in the Youth Program

Many leaders in congregations carry plates piled high with commitments and responsibilities, and active youth advisors epitomize this. They are all but buried by commitments: youth group meetings, overnights, conferences, service projects, special events, damage control, church politics, and so on. The Youth Advisor Task Force realizes that to be a youth advisor, a certain amount of knowledge and natural ability are required. However, to simply be involved and support youth and their youth advisors, one need not be an expert. Often youth advisors are happy to work with other adults not usually affiliated with the youth group in order to do a special project or event. Many adults within a congregation might feel that they would like to have a better connection to the youth, but are reluctant or unable to commit themselves to long term responsibility. People often erroneously assume that they must commit to being with youth every week or they shouldn't be there at all. Helping with a specific project may be more concrete and manageable for such people, especially if it coincides with the person's interests or talents. Getting other adults involved can benefit everyone and help build bridges between the youth program and other groups within the congregation.

Recommendation to Local Religious Educators, Local Youth Leadership, Youth Advisors, and Youth Adult Committees:

Evaluate ways other adults could be involved in projects or events with the youth group. Screen and recruit congregational adults, and pair each with an established, trusted youth advisor who can support the other adult in developing rapport with the youth, establishing boundaries, and planning the activity. Some ideas might include:

- Facilitating a workshop on creative writing, sexuality, drug addiction, college selection, conflict management, eating disorders, church history, chalice making, or some other topic or project in which both the youth and the adult are interested.
- Attending or helping the youth plan an overnight camping trip, rafting trip, or other event in which an additional adult would be helpful.

Managing Conflict around Congregational Youth Programming

Part of the role of youth advisor is as a translator between youth and adults, working to create better lines of communication and understanding. Yet at times youth advisors or the youth program become the center of conflict with all communication flowing through youth advisors, who become trapped in the middle. While conflict can be a necessary component of growth, conflict badly handled can damage the youth program as well as other parts of a congregation. Conflict may arise over miscommunication between adults and youth, over adult distrust of the youth advisor, over youth dislike of a youth advisor who is liked by adults, or over differing views of the role of youth in a congregation. Conflict can include parents, youth, church boards, religious educators, and youth advisors, and can spread beyond the scope of the original issue. Our research showed there were instances in which outside perspectives were needed. Some districts' Youth Advisor Trainers have served in this role, but are not explicitly given training in this area. Some districts' Religious Education Program Consultants have been asked to intervene, yet it is sometimes neither appropriate nor possible for them to be the only people who serve in that function.

Several districts have Conflict Management Teams who are trained to aid congregations in conflict as well as help to develop mechanisms that enable conflict to serve as a healthy part of growth rather than as a divisively painful occurrence. Yet those teams are not trained in working with conflict around youth programming, and are not commonly used to help mediate youth program-related disputes. Conflict around youth programming is not always seen as damaging to the congregation as a whole, and the Conflict Management Team is rarely brought in to develop healthy management of youth-related conflict within a congregation. If the training of Conflict Management Teams included youth-specific issues and mechanisms were established for inviting their involvement in such disputes it would ease a great burden laid upon youth advisors and religious educators in many congregations, and the publicity of such a program could educate congregations about healthy conflict resolution in such conflicts.

Districts without Conflict Management Teams are strongly encouraged to develop their own ways to support the development of a program addressing these needs. We feel that it is in the interests of the district to create a mechanism for supporting the healthy resolution of conflict around youth programs, and recommend that a task force be created to research the needs of congregations and training be developed for the appropriate persons. This is an important issue for youth advisors, not only for issues such as advisor recruitment and retention, but also in creating congregational support for the youth advisors and youth program, enabling those doing ministry with youth to focus on the youth program itself.

Recommendation to District Conflict Management Teams:

2001-2002 Create a team of developers to devise an addition to the annual Conflict Management Teams' training that specifically addresses issues of youth-related conflict within a congregation. The team will need input from youth, youth advisors, religious educators, ministers, and parents. Evaluate the possibility of training youth to be members of the Conflict Management Team, especially for dealing with youth program related conflict.

2001-2002 Evaluate current process for service requests. Develop procedures to enable congregations with youth-related conflict to ask for the involvement of the Conflict

Management Team. Gather input from youth, youth advisors, ministers, religious educators, and parents. Create a mechanism that allows for youth and youth advisors to be involved in a request for services.

2001-2002 Consider creating training with district youth adult committee to train youth, youth advisors, parish ministers, religious educators, and other congregational leadership in healthy modes of handling conflict around youth programming.

2002-2004 Include the youth program focus in Conflict Management Team training, and integrate into the training schedule. Publicize new program within the youth, religious educator, and youth advisor communities. Advertise the new services, and the need for these services within congregations.

2004-2005 Evaluate the training and program, revise if necessary.

Recommendations to District Boards of Districts without a Conflict Management Team:

2001-2002 Evaluate needs, determine appropriate action. Gather input from the district youth program governing body, youth advisors, youth, religious educators, ministers, and parents. Develop program, which may include requesting participation from a neighboring districts' Conflict Management Team.

2004-2005 Implement and advertise program.

2005-2006 Evaluate program, revise if necessary.

Parish Ministers Supporting Youth Advisors

Youth Advisors are practicing a form of ministry, which is important work and must be supported. It is important for ministers to have a working understanding of what it is to practice healthy ministry with youth. In an ideal world, ministers and youth advisors would work side by side, but unfortunately, there is often a gap between the main body of a congregation and its youth group. Youth ministry is often overlooked. This is distressing because youth are part of the congregation and have energy and insight to contribute. If ministers and youth advisors could work together to close the gap between a congregation and its youth group, the dynamics between youth advisors and ministers, youth and ministers, and youth and other congregants will improve.

Parish ministers, much like youth advisors, are under a great deal of pressure to show people the perspective of others, and have a lot of responsibility, yet often little power. They can be perceived as indifferent to youth, but have much that they can offer youth and youth advisors. They have a great deal of knowledge in ministering to adults, but part of the trouble is that most parish ministers are not prepared to apply this knowledge to ministering to youth and youth advisors. They are trained to empower lay people, but not to apply empowerment to work with youth. This makes it difficult for them to support youth advisors in their work. If youth work was part of seminary curriculum, ministers would be better equipped to become involved with the younger members of their congregation later on, and also have firsthand knowledge of what it is to work with youth. Our research showed that youth advisors need support from their ministers. If more ministers had training and experience with youth, they would have more of the tools they need to become involved in a positive and constructive way.

One effective way a minister can become involved and visible in the youth community is to serve as chaplain at a local or district youth conference. This would provide youth and ministers an opportunity to talk in a casual setting about what is on their minds. It would also be an opportunity for ministers to participate in youth worships, which are generally quite different from most Sunday services, and give ministers hands-on experience with youth empowerment. Ministers in a district could take turns serving as conference chaplain to give each an opportunity to participate, rather than have the same minister serve in that role continuously.

Recommendation to the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association CENTER Committee and the Director of Ministerial Development:

2001-2002: Create a team of developers to write a training for parish ministers already serving congregations to address youth ministry and the issues related to youth and youth advising. The training should be adaptable to parish ministers with varying sizes of congregation and levels of youth activity. Developers should include perspectives from youth advisors, ministers, youth, religious educators, parents, and youth programs consultants.

2002-2003 Test run trainings with groups of parish ministers.

2004-2005 Evaluate trainings, change ways of reaching parish ministers if needed, revise as necessary.

Recommendation to Local Parish Ministers and District Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association Chapters:

Open a dialogue with youth and youth advisors about how parish ministers can serve the needs of youth advisors. District staff and/or the UUA Youth Office can help facilitate such conversations. Develop a plan of action. Publish success stories. Encourage networking. Keep developing youth advisor/ministerial dialogue as a key issue, highlighting successes.

Recommendation to UUA Department of Ministerial Education and Seminaries:

2000-2002 Evaluate steps needed to include ministering to youth as part of curriculum. Work with the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association CENTER Committee to develop courses or seminars on youth ministry and effective support for youth advisors

2002-2003 Develop ways for students to connect to youth groups or youth organizations. Create liaisons with groups of youth and possibly pair active and successful youth advisors with seminary students as mentors. Have students report back to seminary school about how the work and learning is going.

2003-2004 Evaluate what needs to change to make this become a successful part of seminary schooling for all students. Change as needed.

Recommendation to District Boards, Youth Adult Committees and Religious Education Committees:

Encourage chaplaincy at all youth conferences. Help find ministers to participate.

Pastoral Care of Youth

Because of the nature of the deep sharing that is encouraged in youth groups, youth advisors often find themselves emotionally supporting troubled youth. While many youth advisors intuitively do this work well, most have no formal training in therapy, counseling, or pastoral care. Youth advisors can also find themselves supporting parents of the youth group members as well. While it is important that the pastoral needs of youth and parents are met, it can put an undue burden on youth advisors to do that work.

Parish ministers, however, are trained in pastoral care, and can be resources not only to youth advisors but also to youth. Yet parish ministers are not trained specifically in pastoral care to youth. We feel that because of this, ministers are an untapped resource for youth advisors. There are a variety of ways to address this gap in knowledge, and we recommend changes ranging from more training in seminaries to the creation of a Youth Ministry Seminary track. We know of people interested in going into Youth Ministry, and of congregations interested in hiring a Youth Minister, yet there is no present track at our seminaries to fill that need. We feel the idea deserves some research.

In our conversations with Divinity Schools they have been very receptive to the idea of increasing students' exposure to youth work, and have already begun examining how they can better support students' desire to receive training in ministry with youth. We feel strongly that a crucial part of creating connections between youth and our congregations is breaking down the perceived distance between youth and parish ministers. A key to better supporting youth advisors is giving parish ministers the opportunity to develop some experience with ministry with youth.

Recommendation to UUA Department of Ministerial Education and Seminaries:

Examine how seminary students on the Parish Ministry track could pursue training specifically in youth pastoral issues. Consider requiring that part of Community Pastoral Education work take place in a youth setting such as residential treatment programs, foster homes, youth groups, or juvenile detention facilities.

Many other faiths have a ministry track for those who want to focus on youth ministry, and we feel that many congregations would hire a Youth Minister. Explore the possibility of developing a Youth Ministry Program for Unitarian Universalists who want to be ordained in Youth Ministry.

Recommendation to Parish Ministers:

Set up office hours specifically designated for youth to talk to you about personal issues. Actively announce to youth that this time is available to them. Consider talking to the youth group about pastoral care and confidentiality.

Recommendation to UUA Department of Ministry, UUA Department of Congregational, District, and Extension Services, Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association Chapters, Liberal Religious Educators' Association:

Consider creating a workshop on ministering to youth that can be held at Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association Chapter meetings; Ministry Days before General Assembly; Liberal Religious Educators' Association Annual Conference; and at Urban, Small, Midsize, and Large Church conferences.

Ministerial Fellowship Committee and Regional Subcommittees:

Consider a review of how youth and youth advocates are involved in evaluating ministerial candidates, and how the process addresses ministers' preparedness for ministering to youth and youth advisors. Some things to consider: experience of members of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee and Subcommittees, letters of recommendation for candidates, and required reading list.

Support of a Professional Organization

Youth advisors often find themselves in a gray area. They volunteer to work with the youth, but often are not told what the specific expectations are, or where they can go for support and collegiality. They love what they do, but without adequate support and networking, they burn out quickly. Recognizing the unique challenges of youth advisors, it would be helpful for youth advisors to have a formal networking and support group.

Attempts to create a Continental Youth Advisor Network have not been successful, in large part because they depend on volunteers who are already overwhelmed and who may not have skills in developing advocacy and support organizations. An organization already exists, however, that was created specifically as an advocacy and support network for religious educators. Liberal Religious Educators' Association (LREDA) already encourages youth advisors to join under the "supporter" category, and many have done so and appreciated the support they've received.

Recommendation to Liberal Religious Educators' Association:

- Create a category of membership for youth advisors, and develop, with the support of the Youth Office, resources, activities, and support systems for youth advisors.
- Evaluate providing scholarships for youth advisors to attend Liberal Religious Educators' Association conference, as youth advisors, even when paid, often do not have a line item in the budget for such expenses.
- Consider including workshops in annual conference program that focus on youth advisor issues, to benefit not only youth advisors, but also religious educators in general.
- Encourage cluster groups to invite youth advisors to attend meetings.

Religious Education Program Consultants

The state of youth advisor affairs varies widely from district to district. In districts where there is not a Religious Education Program Consultant (or other district staff for youth programs) it is very difficult, or impossible, to provide consistent support and resources for youth advisors in local congregations. Volunteer youth and adults have other time commitments, and are not hired and trained specifically for that role. Currently more districts are hiring Religious Education Consultants to fill these needs.

A Religious Education Program Consultant can support interaction between religious educators, district leadership, and youth, and spread general district knowledge of youth programming and Youth Advisor Training. Religious Education Program Consultants participate in and support youth programming to varying degrees, yet they all play an important role in keeping the lines of communication functioning, and in supporting youth

advisors. Most Religious Education Program Consultants attend some district youth adult committee meetings and youth events each year, which makes them visible to youth advisors. Some Religious Education Program Consultants, on the other hand attend all district youth adult committee meetings, go to the major district youth conferences, and conduct Youth Advisor Trainings.

The role of the Religious Education Program Consultant, much like parish ministers, religious educators, and youth advisors, is often one of being "in the middle." As alluded to elsewhere in this report, relations among district and local religious education committees, youth groups, and youth advisors are often characterized by poor or no communication, lack of trust, or outright conflict. Religious Education Program Consultants are often caught in the middle, trying to bring the constituencies together to improve communication and solve problems together.

When Religious Education Program Consultants are actively involved in youth activities in their districts, they can find themselves automatically playing a support role for youth advisors because youth advisors from local congregations feel more comfortable calling them with questions or for resources and can more easily reach a district staff member than a volunteer who may have other commitments and responsibilities. Religious Education Program Consultants can also support district youth leadership by providing necessary information to religious educators and ministers about district youth activities, for example, logistics and publicity, or details about problems that arise at youth events. In doing the latter, Religious Education Program Consultants can help reduce the spread of rumors regarding youth activities. Unfortunately, Religious Education Program Consultants don't all receive the training that they may need to fill this role. Districts may not anticipate the need for those skills, yet Religious Education Program Consultants are generally the only district staff supporting youth programming.

Religious Education Program Consultants also have a great deal of knowledge about the youth advisors and youth in their district, but are seldom queried when district and continental groups are researching possible event staff and trainers. We feel that they should be viewed as additional sources of information, just as Youth Council Representatives should be — providing references for applicants, answering questions, and suggesting additional applicants.

Recommendations to the UUA Department of Congregational, District & Extension Services and District Boards of districts with Religious Education Program Consultants:

When developing job descriptions for Religious Education Program Consultants, include areas of responsibility for working with district youth adult committees and youth advisors. Include Youth Advisor Training and the Ministry With Youth Renaissance module as required training for Religious Education Program Consultants. Ensure that Religious Education Program Consultants have the skills necessary to act as mediators or negotiators with youth, youth advisors, religious educators, and other connected groups. Include youth and youth advisor voices in the development of the job description and search process. Clearly state in job descriptions that Religious Education Program Consultants should attend a certain number of district youth adult committee meetings and district youth conferences. Also examine in the process the long-term goal of having district staff specifically charged with supporting youth programs.

Recommendations to the Youth Office, YRUU Steering Committee, and District and Regional Youth Event Organizers:

When considering youth or adults for positions on Youth Council; as Leadership Development Conference, Spirituality Development Conference, or youth advisor trainers; for Youth Program Consultant and Youth Program Director positions; and as staff for district and regional youth events, include Religious Education Program Consultants in the reference checks.

Networks of Mentors to Youth Advisors

Burnout is a tremendous problem among youth advisors. Youth advisors face a wide range of challenges in ministering to healthy, well-adjusted youth. The demands of troubled individuals and youth in conflict with their families are greater still. Most youth advisors have no one knowledgeable in the unique challenges of youth advising to turn to within their congregations for mentoring and support. While we hope that in the future ministers can play part of this role, in many congregations they are unable to do so. Those youth advisors who have access to other youth advisors in their districts usually see them in the context of the distracting work of advising a conference or the limited experience of a training with many people, which only last a few hours. Most committed youth advisors hunger for mentoring and support by someone with the experience and skills to do so effectively. We feel that a key to building a strong, safe, sustainable youth program must include experienced, trained mentors who have the concrete experience of being a youth advisor and can support youth advisors in developing healthy boundaries.

This is especially critical in the context of our youth programs, which require a different depth of personal growth by youth advisors than is required by religion education teachers. Our other recommendations address other needs of youth advisors, including local support, training, resources, staffing, and training of religious educators and ministers. We feel, however, that there is an element of need that can be addressed only by a comprehensive mentoring system for youth advisors. The skills required to support a youth program are different from those needed to support youth advisors themselves. A mentoring system may also reduce the potential liability faced by our youth programs .

To meet this need, we strongly recommend the creation of a formal mentoring system in districts. This would include a district effort to gather potential mentors; a formal and comprehensive application process, including screening; regional or continental training in mentoring skills; and staff support for the mentoring network. This recommendation is an outline of a timeline for a network such as we envision.

Recommendation to Religious Education Department, Youth Council, and Youth Office:

2000-2002 Religious Education Department and Youth Office assess the feasibility of different mentoring models. Find funding for training and program development, and develop support for mentoring network within districts.

2002-2004 Develop training program. Hire a consultant (either one to do continental work, or one in each district or region) to begin gathering names of potential mentors through contacting current and past district and continental youth and adult youth program leaders, and

Religious Education Program Consultants. Develop application process , including screening mechanisms.

2002-2004 Work within districts to determine what kind of paid staff would support these mentors, either within a district or regionally. The Mentoring Network Coordinator could be an additional staff member, or become part of the role of the District Youth Program Consultant or Religious Education Program Consultant if their skills are compatible with these needs.

2004-2006 Begin trainings and support districts or regions in creating this network. Annual or bi-annual trainings should occur, to keep mentoring skills honed, train new mentors, and evaluate effectiveness of the program.

Youth Program Staff Support

Youth advisors need to have people to turn to when they have questions or are in need of resources. Currently the Youth Program Director is the only UUA staff member whose job description includes responsibility for youth advisors. There are not enough hours in the day for the Youth Program Director to do everything in her job description; individual youth advisor needs are often put on the back burner in favor of more pressing issues. If there were another permanent Youth Office staff member dedicated to meeting the needs of youth advisors, and available to talk with individuals, it follows that the quality of youth programming would increase across the continent.

There must be more support available at the district level for youth advisors as well. We applaud the many districts that have hired Religious Education Program Consultants whose portfolios include youth programming. However, there is inadequate time for them to meet the needs of all of their constituencies, and youth program support requires very different skills from those of supporting child and adult religious education. Religious Education Program Consultants have expressed frustration with the breadth of tasks and challenges associated with supporting the entire range of lifespan religious education. If each district had a Youth Programs Consultant, not only would youth advisors be geographically closer to their support, but personal connections could improve the accessibility of help. The Youth Programs Consultant could work with district youth adult committees and boards to achieve and maintain effective youth programming. In our long term vision, districts would provide a district youth office and youth could serve as Youth Program Interns to support the work of volunteers, develop resources, and support events such as regional youth conferences and youth participation in district events.

We recognize that these recommendations may be seen as the most ambitious and long-term of all of the things that we recommend, and is one of the few sections of recommendations that extend well beyond five years. We do feel, however, that our youth programs need, and deserve, dedicated and skilled staff to make long-term improvement in the development of healthy youth programming. Our youth are the present and the future of our faith, and our call to positively affect our world calls us to recognize the importance and value of those skilled people who work with our youth.

Recommendation to UUA Religious Education Department:

2001-2002 Develop a long-term plan with the Youth Office to hire a Continental Youth Advisor Supporter to join UUA staff. This person could work out of the Youth Office to provide support and references for youth advisors, organize trainings, and regularly assess local and district youth advisor needs; and work with Youth Office staff, district Youth Program Consultants, and other district staff to meet the needs of youth advisors. Build support for funding the position.

2002-2004 Locate funding and enter into a search process. Hire person to fill position.

Recommendation to District Boards:

Review how the district's youth programming and youth advisors are supported. Establish priorities and evaluate long-term staffing goals and funding mechanisms to ensure that staff are funded for adequate time and have adequate space. Consider creating the position of Youth Program Consultant, and the possibility of Youth Program Interns. Look carefully at district needs in developing a vision of the job description, recognizing that supporting youth advisors and supporting youth programs require differing skills. Evaluate steps that would be needed for the project to be successful, develop a timetable based on district needs, and implement your plan.

Renaissance Modules

Many religious educators focus most of their time and energy on children's programming and find it challenging to organize youth programs. The concept of youth empowerment is often one that must be taught to a religious educator. The Ministry With Youth Renaissance Module is one tool religious educators have for learning about youth programs. between 1998 and 2000 there have been nine Ministry With Youth Renaissance Modules. It is one of the best ways of training religious educators in skills about how to manage youth programs and how to support youth advisors.

The Ministry With Youth Module should be revised to better educate religious educators about youth empowerment, balanced youth programming, anti-oppression issues, liability issues, guidelines for support of volunteer youth advisors, guidelines for support of paid youth advisors and youth program coordinators, and youth advisor boundary issues.

Religious educators especially need training on Middle School issues, which hold challenges different from both children's religious education and older youth programs. There is also a need for training on Coming of Age program issues, including mentors, program development, etc. We recommend that a new module be created to address these unique issues.

Recommendation to Renaissance Module Coordinators

1999-2000 Form team to revise the Ministry With Youth module.

2000-2001 Re-train module leaders to facilitate new module format, hold revised module.

Youth Advisors at District Youth Conferences

Each district has a different way of looking at youth advisors at district conferences. In some districts, youth have to be sponsored by an adult, who is normally only screened by the congregation's religious educator if by anyone. In other districts the district youth adult committee recruits and screens youth advisors for conferences. Yet each of these models share some similar characteristics, and the youth advisors share some similar challenges.

We feel that just as in a local youth group, district youth advisors have a very special role. In a youth group, the youth advisor is involved in the weekly life of a youth. At times, however, a youth may need to talk to someone who is not involved in their lives. Youth in transition and in crisis can benefit greatly from the loving support of conference youth advisors, and sometimes open up in a way that they cannot with any other adult in their lives. This role should not be underestimated. We urge district youth adult committees to create mechanisms to ensure that conferences adults are screened in some manner, and are supported and trained in the work that they do. We urge districts with "sponsorship" roles for youth advisors to look at how they respond to youth advisors who are inappropriate or violate rules, including a mechanism so that youth sponsored by that adult are still able to attend the conference if the adult is asked to leave. We also strongly encourage the organizers of district youth conferences to look at how they do and do not encourage and enable youth advisors to participate in the conference community, as they have a potentially very special role in youth's lives. Districts should strongly discourage advisors from attending only part of a conference, as everyone gains when the community remains a constant.

Youth conferences are powerful in that they provide opportunities for youth to meet in an environment that encourages forming strong bonds in a short time. Youth advisors who sign on for conferences must be prepared for their unique role. Once a conference is underway, adults are outnumbered by youth, some of whom are seeing close friends for the first time in months, and some of whom may be overwhelmed by the intensity of their first conference experience. Youth advisors have remember their temporary responsibility for the safety of the youth, yet still bear in mind that they are in an advisory role as opposed to that of an authority figure.

Because conferences are intense for everyone, it is important that a youth advisor's first youth conference experience be a positive one. To smooth the way for youth advisors at their first conference, pair them up with a youth advisor who has a few conferences under his or her belt. This makes for a youth advisor buddy system, and the novice can ask the veteran questions when they arise. Youth advisor's first conferences can be overwhelming for them just as they can be for youth. Sometimes it just helps to have someone nearby who's been through it before. Some districts already set aside time at youth conferences for youth advisors to get together and talk about what's on their minds on a local and district level. This is one grass roots way for youth advisors to network and support one another.

Recommendation to Resource Review Team:

Create a pamphlet, using models from districts, entitled "Resources for Youth Advisors at Youth Cons" or something to that effect. This should be a guideline for districts in creating their own pamphlet for youth advisors new to conferences, and should address role clarification, liability, boundaries guidelines, how to get involved in a conference, rules violations, contact information for district leadership, and answers to common questions.

Create a pamphlet that presents a model for a youth advisor orientation at a conference, drawing from the experience of districts that have such orientations. Include examples of how it could be designed and who could lead it. Cover such topics as: how a conference works, what is likely to happen, how to respond if there is a problem, staff members who are resources, how to become part of the community while respecting that the community is for youth, and other issues relevant in your district.

Recommendation to District Youth Adult Committees:

Examine the role of adults at your district youth conferences. Consider creating a buddy system for new youth advisors, having separate registration for youth advisors, how to handle rules violations by adults, how to screen youth advisors, and how to increase youth advisor involvement in conference community. Consider creating resources for youth conference youth advisors about their role and what conferences are about. Consider approaching the district board and religious education committee about the issue of screening youth advisors and how it can best be done.

Create a youth advisor training or orientation at conferences . Cover issues such as how a conference works, what is likely to happen, how to respond if there is a problem, staff members who are resources, how to become part of the community while respecting that the community is for youth, and other issues as relevant in your district.

Recommendation to UUA Youth Office and Youth Council:

2000-2001 Collect examples from districts of conference youth advisor resources , outlines of how they select and screen conference youth advisors, and outlines of any training that they do for conference youth advisors specific to their role at conferences. Make resources available and publicize their availability as models for other districts.

Resources

There is a surprising lack of widely available resources for those concerned with youth programming. Several well-worn resources, such as the *Youth Advisor Handbook*, badly need revision. Many resources are geared toward a mid-sized youth program of a particular style. There is no resource specifically for religious educators about youth programming, and too few about how to start a youth group. Electronic media, including websites and email listserves could be used much more effectively to support advisors than they are today.

An in-depth analysis of the existing resources is needed, spearheaded by the Youth Office, with an eye to what resources are most needed. The need for several specific resources was clear to us. Some of those we've begun creating. Others we have outlined in depth. Some were referred to throughout this report.

Many talented people are doing amazing work on many of the issues that confront youth advisors, youth leaders, religious educators, ministers, parents, and board members — but there are few ways in which to share that information. Flexible, easy-to-use pamphlets and booklets, as well as books and other resources, are time-tested ways to share information in an accessible manner. These recommendations address those needs.

Resource Revision Team

Our congregations need resources and trainings. Such materials are necessary to the work youth advisors do within congregations. Resources give youth advisors the knowledge they need to do their work. But they need more resources than our Association currently offers. Such support will be instrumental in keeping our youth advisors working with the youth in our churches. Currently there is a publication available entitled *The Youth Advisor Handbook*, but it should be supplemented with some additional resources.

Recommendation to the Department of Religious Education and Youth Office

2000-2002 Develop funding for and create a Resource Revision Team to analyze the resources currently provided to our youth advisors. The team should include youth advisor, youth, religious educator, and ministerial perspective and be developed with the input of the Youth Office.

2001-2003 The Religious Education Department, working with the Youth Office and using the advice of the Resource Revision Team, should contract skilled and knowledgeable people to write and revise resources to fill the gaps identified by the Resource Review Team.

We have found a need for the following resources, and recommend that the Resource Revision Team include these in their list of potential projects. The team should examine data from the Youth Advisor Task Force Congregational Questionnaire to determine other resource needs in addition to those identified below, and consider the use of websites and email-accessible resources for advisors.

- *Prospective Youth Advisor Resource*: A pamphlet that would talk about the requirements and benefits of advising, including negative and positive personality qualities and styles. Too often the energies of youth advisors and a youth group are spent on recruiting youth advisors; this would aid them in their efforts while uplifting the important work a youth advisor does.
- *Guide to Parent Orientation Planning*: Parents are too often in the dark about what is happening in a youth group, often barely knowing the youth advisors. Creating clear communication lines for parents creates a sense of trust that can help avoid conflict. Many youth groups have successful orientations for parents, and their experience should be shared.
- *YACs to SACs Revision*: This existing resource is very useful but has not been revised in many years. The revision should include a section on local YACs, with examples for different congregational and youth group sizes.
- *Youth Advisor Role Descriptions*: The role of youth advisors differs based on congregational size, location, and style. Many resources currently available focus on a youth group size of 10 to 20, yet that is not the reality for all of our congregations. A specific resource with concrete examples from different size congregations is needed.
- *Behavioral Concerns in Youth Programs*: Youth advisors often work with youth groups with a variety of needs, including youth at risk. While some attention has been paid to aiding youth advisors in helping youth facing emotional hurdles, little attention has been paid to supporting youth advisors in working with youth with other special needs, including ADHD. This puts an added strain on an unpaid youth advisor, and the youth's

needs are often unmet by the group. We recommend that a team of relevant professionals and youth advisors be hired to write this resource.

- *Changing Size Resource:* Youth groups can go through periods of great growth, because of congregational growth or other factors, and as groups fluctuate in size they change. Youth advisors and youth leaders can be caught unawares by the changing dynamic of the group. This resource would address ways of easing these transitions, and share successful ways to work with a youth group to grow or shrink in a healthy way. It would also help a youth advisor recognize how she may need to evolve along with the community.
- *Non-UU Parents of Youth in UU Youth Groups:* YRUU attracts not only Unitarian Universalist youth. It also brings in other youth who need a safe, affirming community. These youths' parents often know nothing of YRUU or Unitarian Universalism. A brief resource on YRUU and Unitarian Universalism would be helpful in supporting such parents in understanding the program in which their youth participates.
- *Fundraising Resource Revision:* The Youth Office has a resource for fundraising which has many good ideas, but is primarily focused on a specific size and style of congregation. Funds for youth programming are generally small, and advocating for funds and developing fundraising ideas is time consuming for youth advisors. This resource should be revised, or a new resource developed, that addresses fundraising in different size congregations, including timelines of successful projects.
- *Local Youth Adult Committee Creation Pamphlet:* Local churches need help identifying ways to create a youth adult committee from scratch and to support a youth adult committee, including models for different sizes and styles of congregation.
- *Youth Advisor Selection Process:* This should detail advisor search committees and include various models.
- *Acknowledging Youth Advisors:* This resource would show a congregation how to institute a youth advisor and youth volunteer celebration day, giving models of worship services and other ceremonies from which congregations could draw.
- *Resources for Youth Advisors at District Youth Conferences:* This pamphlet, using models from districts, should provide a guideline for districts in creating their own pamphlets for new conference youth advisors. It should address role definition, liability, boundary guidelines, how to get involved in a conference, rule violations, contact information for district leadership, and answers to common questions.
- *Creating a Youth Advisor Conference Orientation:* This should draw from the experience of districts that have such orientations, and present a model for a youth advisor orientation at a conference, including examples of how it could be designed and who could lead it. Topics covered should include: how a conference works, what is likely to happen, how to respond if there is a problem, staff members who are resources, how to become part of the community while respecting that the community is for youth, and other issues as apply in your district.

Congregational Guide to Youth Programming

We saw an urgent need for a *Congregational Guide to Youth Programming*, written for religious educators, ministers, youth advisors, parents, youth, congregational leaders, and congregants. While there are some resources regarding youth programming in print, they are

old and not geared to this broad audience. Religious educators often ask where to find such a resource, only to find that there is no such guide.

Such a resource should be created by a team of religious educators, youth advisors, and youth with experience in youth programming. Further support should come from the Youth Office and the Religious Education Department of the UUA, with input from Liberal Religious Educators' Association and Youth Council. This relatively short and non-intimidating printed resource should cover recruiting, covenanting with, training, mentoring, and supporting youth advisors. It should explain youth empowerment concisely and clearly to the full target audience. It should include anecdotes of problems and successful situations that convey the broad range of challenges and solutions that come with vital youth programming. The resource should affirm that conflict about youth programming is common in congregations and detail situations in which different kinds of conflict was managed, resolved, or allowed to destroy the programming or burn out the youth advisor. It should be useful for congregations with no paid leadership as well as those with a diversity of staffing patterns, and for congregations with new or rapidly changing youth programs.

This resource would help involve a broader range of volunteers and professionals in developing and supporting youth programming. It could give congregations the motivation and resources to develop and become invested in their own vision of vital youth programming, and involve youth advisors and youth in modeling for congregations the larger UUA goal of shared ministry. We feel such a resource empowers congregations to draw on and support the resources of youth advisors as lay ministers and helps congregations move toward a more authentic and creative expression of intergenerational community. This resource will encourage and provide models for teamwork between ministers, youth advisors, religious educators, and lay people in ministering to the needs of youth and supporting youths' ministry to the congregation.

Recommendation to Religious Education Department and Youth Office:

2000-2001 Develop or locate funding for the creation of a *Congregational Guide to Youth Programming*, and work with the Youth Office and input from Liberal Religious Educators' Association and Youth Council members to locate a team of two to four skilled people who could be hired to research and write the guide. The writers should have experience with youth programming, and ideally will include a youth advisor, a religious educator, and a youth.

2001-2002 Begin work, researching issues and developing the guide.

2002-2003 Finalize guide, ideally with editorial input from the Youth Office and Religious Education Department Guide is published and available for purchase.

2005-2006 Evaluate guide and make plans for updating as needed.

Following is our outline of information we feel should be covered in this document.

- Concise History of youth advising in the Unitarian Universalist movement, including discussion of the role of youth advisors in Liberal Religious Youth (YRUU's predecessor organization) and Young Religious Unitarian Universalists (YRUU), to give a perspective on why the youth advisor role must be nurtured in the context of supporting youth programming.
- Discussion of the richness and the challenges inherent in youth empowerment and of the difficulties of sticking to a commitment to youth empowerment in the larger congregation

and working in environments with power disparity between youth advisors, ministers, and religious educators.

- Information on the problems of burnout for those youth advisors who are not adequately supported and the possibilities of personal and congregational growth for those who are.
- Ideas for youth advisor recruitment, including sample contracts, job descriptions, qualifications, a range of personality types that may be effective, different approaches to recruiting, time commitment, how to do background checks, and covenanting process.
- Information from the *Guide to Professionalization of Youth Advisors*, including salary ranges for paid youth advisors and guidelines for when youth advisors should be paid.
- Models for support and advisory committees for youth advisors, including those parallel to committees for ministers or religious educators.
- Models for building support for youth advisors and youth programming within congregations and for lobbying for funding. Include a sample process for building advocacy and support for youth advisors and youth programming. The resource for intergenerational programming within congregations should be cited.
- Recommendations that job descriptions for youth advisors include District Youth Advisor Trainings paid for by the congregation,
- An overview of different models for youth programming, including programming for large, medium and small congregations; Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and other meeting times; curriculum and discussion-based youth groups; and clustered youth group programming. This should emphasize involving youth in the creation and evolution of programming.
- Explanation of the value of district and continental leadership by youth and youth advisors. Emphasize that when one or a few youth move into leadership outside of the local level, the entire local youth group benefits. Include a diagram of the continental structure and sample structures of district youth organizations.
- A sample beginning-of-the-year orientation for parents and interested congregants to open channels of communication to youth advisors, religious educators and ministers, and to set reasonable expectations. The orientation should include time to process concerns about confidentiality, guidelines, and other issues. Include concrete examples of orientations developed by congregations throughout the Association.
- A section that addresses common situations that can cause conflict and isolate youth advisors, such as when youth with non-UU parents want to join youth group, after minor damage happens to a building at a conference or overnight, when parents object to confidentiality policy, etc. Youth Office should be consulted about this and additional information should be gathered in the field.

Guide to the Professionalization of Youth Advisors

In congregational youth programming, youth advisors are frequently selected because they were the only ones willing to work with the youth. Youth advisors are often expected to do difficult work without training or pay, and frequently have no system of accountability within the church structure. This trend concerns many people because the youth advisor role is too important to receive so little attention. There is a new trend toward paying youth advisors in our congregations.

In recent years, more congregations have determined that the best solution to their problems in finding and retaining skilled youth advisors is to pay youth advisors or a youth program coordinator. In some congregations youth advisors are paid a small stipend as an incentive; other congregations have hired a part-time Youth Program Coordinator who oversees volunteer youth advisors on a professional basis. A Youth Program Coordinator is typically a peer or assistant to the religious educator. Some small congregations have grouped together to hire a shared Youth Programs Coordinator for joint overnights and events. Congregations considering hiring or paying youth advisors currently have no resource to help them develop job descriptions, assess reasonable compensation, create clear lines of accountability, or determine reasonable continuing education expectations and budgets. Additionally they have difficulty discovering what other congregations have learned from their experiences.

We support the trend toward honoring youth advising and creating paid staff to support local youth programming. We feel that congregations are looking for resources in making this change, and that such a resource can clarify the difference between paying a youth advisor, paying a Youth Program Coordinator, and hiring a youth advisor support person — each of which requires different skills.

In order to aid congregations considering making this change, we recommend that a resource be created to assist churches in hiring, training, supporting and setting salary standards for youth advisors. We also recommend that congregations, particularly medium and large size congregations, consider hiring a staff member to support their youth advisors and youth program.

Recommendation to Youth Office and the Department of Congregational, District, and Extension Services:

2000-2002 Compile information on the current status of paid youth advisors, how many there are, what hours they work, how they are paid, and how are they trained. Study the current condition of paid youth advisors and youth program coordinators.

2000-2002 Study other religious organizations to find out what kind of trainings and support they have for ministry with youth. Perform a comparative study of salary standards for ministry with youth.

Recommendation to Religious Education Department, Youth Office, Liberal Religious Educators' Association, and Ministry Department

2000-2001 Religious Education Department, Youth Office, Liberal Religious Educators' Association, and Ministry Department work together to create a resource that will assist churches in hiring, training, supporting and setting salary standards for paid youth advisors and youth program coordinators.

2001-2002 Publish and publicize resource, making it available at religious educator events, Leadership Development Conferences, and Youth Advisor Trainings. This resource should cover the following areas: roles of youth advisors, who youth advisors are, youth advisors overview of roles within the church and within the youth group, staffing, volunteers versus paid youth advisors, how to create youth advisor contracts, job description worksheet, sample job descriptions, how to recruit good youth advisors, how to screen and select youth advisors, how to evaluate youth advisors, systems of accountability, how to set up a youth advisor advisory board, compensation, salary ranges for size of church and size of youth

group, how to value the volunteer, skills training and continuing education for youth advisors, District Youth Advisor Training, Leadership Development Training, Spirituality Development Training, Youth Advisor Certification Program, youth advisor support in local church, in district, through Liberal Religious Educators' Association, and UUA Resources. This resource should be designed to complement the *Congregational Guide to Youth Programming*.

Recommendation to Local Congregational Boards:

Examine your youth program and its needs, including the youth advisor job description and the possibility of hiring staff to support the youth advisors, staff to coordinate youth program activities, or both, recognizing that these are different skill sets.

Recommendation to Extension Ministries and the Department of Congregational, District, and Extension Services:

Examine the test case of funding a youth advisor position in Princeton, New Jersey to see if it met its objectives, and explore the possibility of funding other youth advisor and youth program coordinator positions.

Youth Program Liability Resource

Questions of the liabilities and the responsibilities accepted by youth advisors, churches, and youth regarding youth events are among those both most ignored and most feared in youth programs throughout the continent. Too often either no attention is paid to issues of liability, or critical programs are stifled in the interest of legal safety. Looking below the surface of liability policy development in congregational youth programs has uncovered a plethora of "what-ifs" that could compromise the stability of effective youth programming. It is critical that congregations and districts develop clear guidelines for youth events that both provide reasonable legal safety and honor the critical importance of youth ownership of the development and execution of programming.

The issue of liability especially concerns youth advisors as they are in the difficult role of supporting youth leadership and accountability, yet also bear some legal liability for the program. At the same time, the institution itself risks much if it lacks clear guidelines for liability-related policy and procedures related to presenting or hosting youth events. This delicate issue has arisen in many mainstream denominations throughout the United States and Canada in recent years. It must be addressed proactively to support the wealth of programs and resources for youth in our denomination today. While there is no way to eliminate liability risks, we can reduce the risks with some intentionally created documentation while still honoring our unique program of youth empowerment.

To meet this goal, the Youth Advisor Task Force has begun initial development of a liability resource to be used by youth advisors, youth, and congregations in the development and continuity of youth programming. Such a resource will help local and district level youth and youth advisors to establish clear and effective rules for events, and to troubleshoot the potential for mishaps that could harm the viability of youth programming and the security of youth advisors.

The workshop at General Assembly 2000 sponsored by this task force presents a model for a liability resource. With the assistance of legal counsel, religious educators, youth advisors and

child welfare specialists, this resource has been developed to bring awareness to a range of issues that every person involved with youth programming should consider. This resource should be evaluated bi-annually and updated to reflect current legal and ethical considerations.

Recommendation to UUA Board:

2001-2002 Create a team including the voices of youth advisors, youth leadership, legal counsel, and child safety specialists to review the youth programming liability resource for congregations and make recommendations and revisions to reflect current legal and ethical considerations. Create a mechanism for advertising and distributing said resource.

Training of Youth Advisors

Key to enhancing the value of quality youth advisors is providing adequate training opportunities. Youth advisors want to continually develop in their ministry with youth, and they yearn for training on a deeper level than is presently available.

A major theme in our work was that youth in our congregations deserve more than "whoever said yes." They deserve youth advisors who can and will support the youth emotionally and spiritually. Many times, congregations are fortunate in that the person who said yes was skilled and capable — a high quality youth advisor. But that is not always the case, and even a youth advisor with good instincts for advising benefits from training.

We see a danger in the haphazard ways we select and train youth advisors. If an adult in our congregation were in crisis or major life transition, we would not grab an untrained congregant who seemed okay, and give them the responsibility of supporting that adult. But that scenario is eerily similar to what we expect of our youth advisors.

Youth advisors want more training and experience. Time and time again District Youth Advisor Trainers report that they are asked to provide training on supporting youth in crisis, creating a multi-cultural anti-bias youth group, and integrating youth into the congregation. The trainers, however, do not always have the appropriate training and skills to develop such a program, and should not be expected to do so on their own. Our questionnaire data indicates that youth advisors want and need training in a wider variety of issues, available in a wider variety of ways.

A thorough look needs to be taken at how we train youth advisors, and what kinds of training would be most useful. Some of this evaluative work is already underway, and some test projects have been undertaken. Yet there is much more to be done.

The Continental Youth Advisor Training

In November of 1997, Young Religious Unitarian Universalists trained a Youth Advisor Trainer in every district. Over a long weekend they were trained to lead trainings based on a curriculum including the basics of youth empowerment, ministry with youth, boundaries and power issues, balanced youth group programming, community building, Unitarian Universalist and self identity, and problem solving. The trainers then returned to their districts to lead these trainings.

Trainers adapted the curriculum and format to meet the needs of their districts. Formats included afternoon events focused on a specific issue, weekend-long events, and week-long summer camp trainings. Some trainers led events for clusters of congregations, or focused an event on youth advisors from youth groups of a specific size. Some Youth Advisor Trainers did all the work of site selection, publicity, and program organization; others had the support of their district youth adult committee or religious education committee, and some had the support of both groups. Some trainers trained a youth or an adult to co-lead with them, and many trainers developed curriculum to meet the needs of the youth advisors they were serving.

The goal of this program was to give local youth advisors the basic training they needed in order to be effective in their role. Trained youth advisors are more likely to have healthy boundaries and less likely to burn out and feel isolated. In addition to the information presented, Youth Advisor Trainings also provide youth advisors with opportunities to develop a peer support network.

There have been problems with the present Youth Advisor Training strategy. Districts selected their trainer in various ways, and there was conflict in some districts over who would be an appropriate trainer. Trainers cannot always be held accountable after the training, and not all trainers kept the Youth Office informed about the trainings they led. It was difficult to determine their skill, as evaluations were not always returned, and the training provided scant time to evaluate the skills of those attending. In some districts the Youth Advisor Trainer was unable to continue and trained a successor who was not screened or trained by continental leadership. While sharing knowledge is valuable, the Youth Office has no way of evaluating the skills of these new trainers and their ability to teach the material. The Continental Advisor Training occurs only every three years, asking for a long time commitment for those trained.

The training itself also has flaws. The curriculum covers the basics, but doesn't go into enough depth for experienced youth advisors. There is a need to teach specific material about ministry with youth and issues such as conflict resolution, teen suicide, eating disorders, teen sexuality, adolescent development, drug abuse, and other topics youth face. The training lacks material about advocacy within a congregation, social action program development, and the special issues faced by large and very small youth groups. Information in the present Youth Advisor Training duplicates that in Leadership Development Conferences and Spirituality Development Conferences.

Recommendation to the Religious Education Department and the Youth Office:

1999-2000 Examine how all continental trainings flow together and build upon each other, perhaps making Youth Advisor Training a pre-requisite to Leadership Development Conference training or vice-versa.

1999-2000 Create a Youth Advisor Training Revision Team including two Youth Advisor Trainers, two Spirituality Development Conference leaders, two Leadership Development Conference leaders, a religious educator, a Program Consultant, and others as appropriate.

2000-2001 Youth Advisor Training Revision Team evaluate trainings, including making the Youth Advisor Training more focused on youth advisor issues and considering making a Youth Advisor Training II to deal with more skill-specific issues, such as conflict resolution, crisis response, adolescent development, youth program advocacy, and program development. Use data from Youth Advisor Task Force Questionnaires to inform decisions. Make recommendations for and initiate program development and revision.

Scheduling of Youth Advisor Trainings and Leadership Development Conferences

Youth programs in local congregations are often in stages of transition. Three years is a generation in a youth group, with frequent turnover and new youth leadership constantly needing training, and there is often little continuity among youth advisors. In the best cases, our congregations operate with the philosophy of youth empowerment — youth, with the support of adults, creating and running much of their own programs. The challenge for youth advisors is to know when to step in and help make things happen, and when to stay in the background, being supportive.

To address these issues, it is vitally important to offer consistent trainings for youth advisors and Leadership Development Conferences every year at the district level. It is also important to put systems in place for youth advisors, so they know they will not only get training, but also ongoing support from their congregation's professional and lay leadership. This will help with continuity, so there are not new youth advisors every year.

Recommendation to District Youth Adult Committees and District Religious Education Committees:

District religious education committees and youth adult committees meet together to create an annual calendar for District Youth Advisor Trainings and Leadership Development Conferences, and to publicize them to congregational youth programs and their youth advisors. The events should take place at similar dates every year, giving youth and youth advisors a regular pattern of training.

Recommendation to Youth Council and Liberal Religious Educators' Association:

Advocate within your constituencies for the development of a regular schedule for annual District Youth Advisor Trainings and Leadership Development Conferences.

Youth Advisor Certification Program

There are many advantages of creating a Youth Advisor Certification Program, in which an advisor would take an established group of Unitarian Universalist sponsored and possibly other trainings and possibly undergo some kind of screening mechanism. It would provide youth advisors with an incentive for attending trainings, and provide congregations with an incentive for paying for such trainings. We feel this is especially helpful in creating a pool of

adequately trained adults to work with our youth, and that it would further legitimize the work of ministry with youth.

Recommendation to Youth Advisor Training Revision Team and Youth Office:

As you revise the present Youth Advisor Training program, evaluate the possibility of developing a Youth Advisor Certification Program, possibly including requirements of specific kinds of trainings, options for additional non-UU trainings, and some kind of screening or reference check. The Youth Office should then institute program and advertise through appropriate channels.

Anti-Oppression Training

In 1996 our association introduced a way to address issues of racism and oppression within our institutions via the Journey Toward Wholeness. The Journey Toward Wholeness report to the Association outlined a social barometer of stages our institution must navigate as we move to an anti-racist lens.

Since its introduction, the anti-racism, anti-oppression movement has focused on assisting in the transformation of leadership, lay leadership, and institutional structures. In the past year, youth have been engaged in this process through Youth Council and the Youth Office.

While the denomination has made great strides to instill its leadership and adult membership with anti-racist values, the message of anti-racism, anti-oppression work has not reached the youth advisor community adequately. It is paramount to reach youth advisors and youth in anti-racism and other anti-oppression trainings as these groups have not been adequately targeted for participation in these resources.

Recommendation to Youth Council Representatives, District and Local Youth Adult Committees, Youth Advisors, District and Local Anti-Racist Organizers, District Boards, and Youth:

Strongly encourage youth advisors and youth to attend and participate in anti-racism and anti-oppression trainings in their churches and districts, including *Journey Toward Wholeness* events. If you are organizing a training, consider in your outreach how you can include youth and youth advisors.

Recommendation to the Faith in Action Department and Youth Office:

Faith in Action Department and Youth Office collaborate to implement proactive methods to expand promotion of and access to anti-racism, anti-oppression trainings and resources to youth advisors and youth.

Middle School Youth Advisors, Teachers, and Programs

Youth and youth programming have often been at the forefront of change within the denomination. It is heartening to see the renewed attention to the needs of young adults, and awareness of the tragedy of losing those born into Unitarian Universalism after they graduate from high school. But we also lose youth when they leave religious education classes to find nothing that meets their needs offered for youth in grades six through eight. This is second tragedy can be averted with intentionality and resources.

The current establishment of a Youth Office with a full time director and two youth program specialists is a testament to the need for resources and support for youth programming. The role of the Youth Office, however, has traditionally focused on high school and post-high school youth. The Department of Religious Education has been the source of most of the youth program resources for grade six to eight, the years that we refer to using the United States system's "Middle School." Even with the range of excellent resources, trainings and conferences addressing youth issues, Middle School youth advisors and religious education teachers are often faced with adapting programming and resources inappropriate for Middle School needs.

Congregations and youth are crying out for programming for grades six to eight. The complexity of the needs of Middle School aged youth demands particular attention and nurturing. Furthermore, by retaining young teenagers through Middle School years, they will move more easily into a high school youth group. We feel that it is critical that we have fully developed programming and support for this age range.

Middle School Program Task Force

The needs of Middle Schoolers are complex. The most successful Middle School programs offer more structure than a typical youth group, but have a stronger social bonding element than the typical religious education class. Ideally a Middle School program serves as a bridge between teacher-led programming of Religious Education classes and the youth empowerment of a youth group. This requires different skills than those required by High School youth groups and religious education classes. We've seen a lack of curriculum, resources, and training for adults who work with Middle School youth, and we have some concrete recommendations to address Middle School needs.

We feel it is important that the development of Middle School programming and support benefit from the experiences and resources of Young Religious Unitarian Universalists. The current structure of Young Religious Unitarian Universalists offers resources and suggestions for the effective and immediate development of a range of resources to address the needs of Middle School advising. Further, many issues already identified by this group may offer insight into issues that may arise out of the development of Middle School programming and support. For example, there is a continental YRUU network and funding stream that allows for the sharing of ideas, resources, and inspirations across the continent, a model that can be learned from. A thorough examination of the issues around Middle School needs should include a look at how the experiences of YRUU can be applied.

We found an urgent need for a group of people experienced with youth in grades six to eight to more fully address issues specific to Middle School advising. While we have some specific recommendations regarding programs for this age group, we lacked the time, resources, and expertise to fully address this critical piece of our lifelong religious education. For that reason we recommend forming a task force to specifically address issues of Middle School Programming and the selection, training, and support of adults who work with these younger youth.

Recommendation to the UUA Board of Trustees

2000-2001 Budget for and create a Middle School Task Force.

2001-2004 Middle School Task Force begins work researching the differing roles of youth advisor versus educator, the value of experiential learning in development, and the accountability structures for Middle School programming. Include voices from Middle School and High School youth advisors, youth, religious educators, ministers, and parents of Middle School aged youth. Research the diversity of successful programming across the continent, including districts that include 12- to 14-year-olds in their YRUU age range, and develop recommendations for training, curriculum styles, resource development, and examine the structural support continentally for Middle School programming, including staff support.

2004-2006 Have recommendations reviewed by relevant parties and take action.

Middle School Youth Advisor Training

In congregations that choose to have separate programs for youth in grades six to eight, we feel it is important that the adults working with Middle School aged youth have experience with the concept of youth empowerment. While the focus of leadership development is different in Middle School programs, the concepts of supporting youth in finding their power and leadership skills still apply, and exposure to youth-led programming can support a Middle School youth advisor in developing youth leadership within their group. Understanding of the YRUU model will help Middle School youth advisors bridge their youth successfully into the High School program.

To that end, we feel that Middle School youth advisors would greatly benefit from involvement in the YRUU community and the opportunity to learn about and participate in the youth empowerment movement. The goals of such involvement should be to obtain a knowledge of programs available, understand the meaning of youth empowerment, and develop networks with YRUU youth advisors who often address the same social and program issues.

Recommendation to District Youth Adult Committees and District Religious Education Committees:

2000-2002 Develop plans for promoting the participation of Middle School youth advisors in YRUU Youth Advisor Trainings and YRUU events. Evaluate training programs and resource materials for both age groups for collaboration opportunities, and consider ways to develop district or cluster High School and Middle School events if such do not already exist.

2002-2004 Begin projects that concretely address both Middle School and High School youth advisor issues and promote the ongoing collaboration between both groups in the area of lifespan advising.

Recommendation to Youth Advisor Training Revision Team, Religious Education Department, and Youth Office:

2000-2002 Youth Advisor Training Revision Team, Religious Education Department, and Youth Office collaborate on the creation of a training specifically for Middle School youth advisors, that complements the Youth Advisor Trainings currently available. The goal would be to have trainings for both Middle School and High School youth advisors and teachers, either jointly with separate age-appropriate elements or separately. We encourage considering holding joint trainings (perhaps covering issues of mutual interest such as the components of a healthy youth program), to facilitate collaboration between youth advisors from both age groups on a local and district level. We feel, however, that it is equally critical that there be training to specifically address the age groups' different needs. This would be especially vital in districts whose youth programming includes Middle School youth, but is still important in other districts.

Renaissance Module

Religious educators receive insufficient training and support in working with High School youth, yet they receive even less training regarding Middle School. Religious educators need

training specifically on Middle School issues, which hold challenges different from both children's religious education and older youth programs. There is also a need for training about Coming of Age program issues, including mentors, program development, etc. While not all Coming of Age programs in our Association are designed for Middle School youth, some of the issues involved are similar, and a Renaissance Module could be created that addresses those issues and issues unique to each program.

Recommendation to Renaissance Module Coordinators

2000-2001 Recruit people with expertise in these fields to develop a new module focused on Middle School and Coming of Age programs, including mentors, program development, the role of adults, and bridging from children's Religious Education program and into High School youth program.

2001-2002 Develop and field test module, and train leaders.

2002-2004 Incorporate module into district programs, and make adjustments based on feedback from leaders and participants.

Conclusion

We feel that in some ways we have barely scratched the surface of what we would like this report and these recommendations to address. Our mandate was, however, much more extensive than could be covered in two years. We decided to focus on the issues in which we had the most expertise, and for which we felt the greatest need. Thus this report has focused on youth, youth advisors, and youth programming within a congregation.

We discussed many topics not thoroughly covered in this report. We discussed the need for greater examination of the adult role at district conferences, and hope that our recommendations will spur districts to do that work on their own. We have acted on the assumption that our recommendations for the creation of a Middle School Task Force, Resource Revision Team, and other programs will be acted upon. The small steps we have included in these recommendations cannot stand alone if we are serious about transforming the youth programming of our denomination, and transformation needs to happen. We also were unable to address the issues around adults who work with our youth in the contexts of Coming of Age programs, Religious Education classes, and Our Whole Lives curriculum. We do urge that congregations and districts address these roles and issues, and that at all times all adults working with youth remember that their work is critical, and should always come from a place of love, respect, and gratitude.

We are very aware that our process has been dominated by adult voices. The "youth" on our Task Force were three young adults — one who graduated from high school at the beginning of our work, and two YRUU Program Specialists whose roles were limited by their one-year Youth Office terms. While we felt that our task force members were chosen for good reasons and brought valuable insight, we felt a sense of loss over the absence of authentic youth voices in every step of our process. We hope future youth programming task forces include those voices.

In our discussions we talked about our utopia, a Unitarian Universalist world in which the philosophy of youth empowerment is transformed into an integral part of our denomination. In this utopia, our congregations are truly intergenerationally inclusive because congregants have a greater awareness of how their actions empower or disempower others, regardless of age. We feel that this utopia is a reasonable long-term goal, and we hope that you saw as you read this report how the threads of our vision are intertwined within each of our recommendations.

One of our strongest hopes is that the personal and institutional transformation that is central to the work of anti-oppression will be a part not only of the work that youth groups do within themselves, but also of the work that they do in the world. We lacked the expertise to address this critical issue in depth, but we hope our recommendation that youth and youth advisors be more intimately involved in this work is taken to heart. The youth in our congregations are a part of the present and future of our faith, and we must transform all parts of our denomination to ensure the development of an anti-bias, anti-oppression Unitarian Universalist Association. Our youth live in a world very different from that of their parents and elders. Curricula, including programs involving self-examination, must be designed to address their unique perspectives and needs, honoring their experiences and recognizing their unique challenges. Youth and youth advisors need to be part of a

congregation's and district's transformation process, and we feel that the process of becoming an anti-racist, anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, anti-classist, anti-oppressive institution requires becoming anti-ageist as well. We must stop marginalizing the young and old in our congregations if we are to be whole.

Appendices

Appendix A: Recommendations Compiled

Following is a complete list of all of our recommendations, grouped by the person, group, or organization to whom they are directed. More detailed information about these recommendations is contained within the text of the sections and chapters from which they were drawn. We have kept those locational cues with the recommendations for easier referencing.

Local Youth Group Leadership

Communication

Youth Involvement in the Congregation

Local Religious Education Committees and Youth Adult Committees

Youth Advisor Selection Process

Communication between Board, Religious Education, and Youth Leadership

Support

Involving Other Adults in the Youth Program

Training

Anti-Oppression Training

Local Youth Advisors

Communication

Youth Involvement in the Congregation

Local Religious Education Committees and Youth Adult Committees

Support

Involving Other Adults in the Youth Program

Training

Anti-Oppression Training

Local Religious Educators

Communication

Youth Involvement in the Congregation

Local Religious Education Committees and Youth Adult Committees

Youth Advisor Selection Process

Support

Involving Other Adults in the Youth Program

Local Parish and Community Ministers

Communication

Youth Involvement in the Congregation

Support

Acknowledging Youth Advisors

Parish Ministers Supporting Youth Advisors

Pastoral Care of Youth

Local Youth Adult Committees

Support

Youth Advisor Advisory Committee

Involving Other Adults in the Youth Program

Training

Anti-Oppression Training

Local Religious Education Committees

Communication

Youth Involvement in the Congregation

Communication between Board, Religious Education, and Youth Leadership

Support

Acknowledging Youth Advisors

Youth Advisor Advisory Committee

Local Boards

Communication

Youth Involvement in the Congregation

Communication between Board, Religious Education, and Youth Leadership

Resources

Guide to Professionalization of Youth Advisors

Local Nominating Committees

Communication

Communication between Board, Religious Education, and Youth Leadership

District and Local Anti-Oppression Organizers

Training

Anti-Oppression Training

District Youth Adult Committees

Communication

Communication between Board, Religious Education, and Youth Leadership

Support

Parish Ministers Supporting Youth Advisors

Religious Education Program Consultants

Youth Advisors at District Youth Conferences

Training

Scheduling of Youth Advisor Trainings and Leadership Development Conferences

Anti-Oppression Training

Middle School

Middle School Youth Advisor Training

District Religious Education Committees

Communication

Communication between Board, Religious Education, and Youth Leadership

Support

Parish Ministers Supporting Youth Advisors

Training

Scheduling of Youth Advisor Trainings and Leadership Development Conferences

Middle School

Middle School Youth Advisor Training

District Nominating Committees

Communication

Communication between Board, Religious Education, and Youth Leadership

District Boards

Communication

Communication between Board, Religious Education, and Youth Leadership

Support

Managing Conflict around Congregational Youth Programming

Parish Ministers Supporting Youth Advisors

Religious Education Program Consultants

Youth Program Staff Support

Training

Anti-Oppression Training

District Conflict Management Teams

Support

Managing Conflict around Congregational Youth Programming

Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association Chapters

Communication

Youth Involvement in the Congregation

Support

Parish Ministers Supporting Youth Advisors

Pastoral Care of Youth

Youth Council and Steering Committee

Support

Religious Education Program Consultants

Youth Advisors at District Youth Conferences

Training

Scheduling of Youth Advisor Trainings and Leadership Development Conferences

Anti-Oppression Training

Unitarian Universalist Seminaries

Support

Parish Ministers Supporting Youth Advisors

Pastoral Care of Youth

Renaissance Module Coordinators

Support

Renaissance Modules

Middle School

Renaissance Module

Liberal Religious Educators' Association (LREDA)

Support

Pastoral Care of Youth

Support of a Professional Organization

Resources

Guide to Professionalization of Youth Advisors

Training

Scheduling of Youth Advisor Trainings and Leadership Development Conferences

Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association

Support

Parish Ministers Supporting Youth Advisors

District Presidents' Association

Communication

Communication between Board, Religious Education, and Youth Leadership

Commission on Appraisal

Communication

Youth Involvement in the Congregation

Unitarian Universalist Association Board of Trustees

Communication

Intergenerational Programming within Congregations

Resources

Youth Program Liability Resource

Middle School

Middle School Program Task Force

Youth Advisor Training Revision Team

Middle School

Middle School Youth Advisor Training

Training

Youth Advisor Certification Program

Resource Revision Team

Communication

Local Religious Education Committees and Youth Adult Committees
Youth Advisor Selection Process

Support

Acknowledging Youth Advisors
Youth Advisors at District Youth Conferences

UUA Youth Office

Communication

Local Religious Education Committees and Youth Adult Committees
Communication between Board, Religious Education, and Youth Leadership

Support

Acknowledging Youth Advisors
Religious Education Program Consultants
Youth Advisors at District Youth Conferences

Resources

Resource Revision Team
Congregational Guide to Youth Programming
Guide to Professionalization of Youth Advisors
Guidelines for Paid Advisors

Training

The Continental Youth Advisor Training
Youth Advisor Certification Program
Anti-Oppression Training

Middle School

Middle School Youth Advisor Training

UUA Religious Education Department

Communication

Intergenerational Programming within Congregations

Communication between Board, Religious Education, and Youth Leadership

Support

Youth Program Staff Support

Resources

Resource Revision Team

Congregational Guide to Youth Programming

Guide to Professionalization of Youth Advisors

Training

The Continental Youth Advisor Training

Middle School

Middle School Youth Advisor Training

UUA Department of Congregational, District, and Extension Services

Communication

Youth Involvement in the Congregation

Support

Pastoral Care of Youth

Religious Education Program Consultants

Resources

Guide to Professionalization of Youth Advisors

UUA Faith in Action Department

Training

Anti-Oppression Training

UUA Department of Ministry

Communication

Youth Involvement in the Congregation

Support

Parish Ministers Supporting Youth Advisors

Pastoral Care of Youth

Resources

Guide to Professionalization of Youth Advisors

Ministerial Fellowship Committee and Regional Subcommittees

Support

Pastoral Care of Youth

Appendix B: Glossary of How We Used Terms:

congregation	A church, society, fellowship, of other community that is a member congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Association.
district	A regional organization of congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, including the Southwestern Unitarian Universalist Conference.
district board	The elected governing body of a district.
District Presidents' Association	The networking and advocacy organization for Presidents of district boards.
district youth advisor	Person who is an adult advisor at a district youth conference
district youth adult committee (YAC)	The governing body of the district's youth program, possibly called YRUU Council, District Youth Committee, etc.
district youth conference	A district-wide gathering of youth typically organized or sponsored by a district youth adult committee. Commonly called a Con or Rally.
District Youth Program Consultant	District staff member responsible for support of youth programming.
Liberal Religious Educators' Association	Also known as LREDA, the networking and advocacy organization for professional religious educators.
local religious education committee	The group within a congregation charged with supporting or overseeing children's religious education. In some congregations they are also responsible for adult religious education, youth programming, or both.
local youth adult committee	A group of youth, youth advisors, parents, and possibly other congregants and the religious educator, who support the youth program. See page 12 for details.
local youth group	The youth program of a local congregation for youth 14-18 or in High School.
Middle School	Junior High and Middle School youth programs that include those from grade six through nine.
minister	Parish, religious education, and community ministers. We specify parish minister when that is our intention.

religious educator	Person, staff or volunteer, who coordinates the religious education program in a congregation. This person could be an ordained minister of religious education, a director of religious education, or the chair of the religious education committee.
Renaissance Modules	A series of programs for religious educators covering a variety of relevant topics.
Resource Revision Team	We recommend a group be formed to review youth program related resources and evaluate the need to revise or create resources. See page 33 for details.
UUA	The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.
UUA Board of Trustees	The governing body of the UUA, including a Trustee from each district and several At-Large members.
Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association	Continental professional association of Unitarian Universalist ministers and ministerial candidates.
Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association Chapters	District chapters of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association.
youth advisor	Person who volunteers or is hired to work directly with a congregational youth group
Youth Office	An office of the UUA devoted to supporting and nurturing continental, district, and local youth programming.
Youth Program Coordinator	Person who is hired to oversee the youth program of a congregation
YRUU	Young Religious Unitarian Universalists, the youth organization of the Unitarian Universalist Association.