

# Youth Advisor Survey Report

## **Introduction:**

Because there is no organized body of Unitarian Universalist Youth Advisors, the Task Force on Ministry to and with Youth used a survey to get input from adults who work with youth into the Consultation process. The Survey was available online from the beginning December 2006 to the end of February 2007. It used SurveyMonkey, a popular online data collection tool. The survey was advertised over UUA listserves (including the advisor-l list and the owl-l list), and promoted by task force members and UUA staff. During the time that the survey was available, there was a banner ad with a link on UUA.org's main page. 386 people participated in the survey.

The data was broken into five areas for analysis: demographics, size of congregation, whether the respondent is a member of his/her/hir congregation, if the respondent had heard of the Chrysalis training program, if the respondent is paid to work with Unitarian Universalist Youth and by the respondent's identified sexual orientation and racial identity. We prioritized these comparisons over many other potential comparisons because they provide us with the information which is most relevant to the desired outcomes of the consultation process.

There were two types of questions on the survey. Some questions could be analyzed numerically. For example, 70% of the respondents are between the ages of 35 and 60. . Other questions were open-ended. Participants were asked to briefly give us their thoughts about what is going well, not going well and needs to be changed in youth ministry. For these questions we identified the major ideas which were echoed by many respondents. We report separately on the data from these two types of questions.

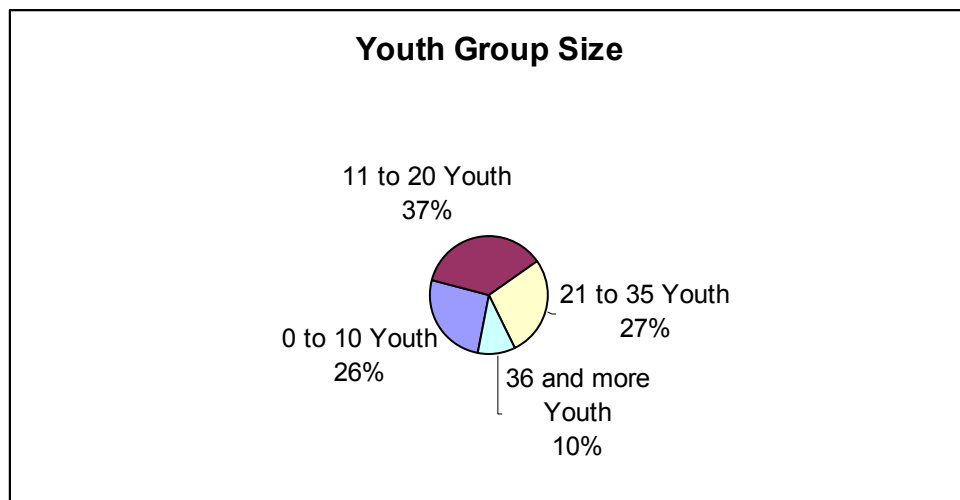
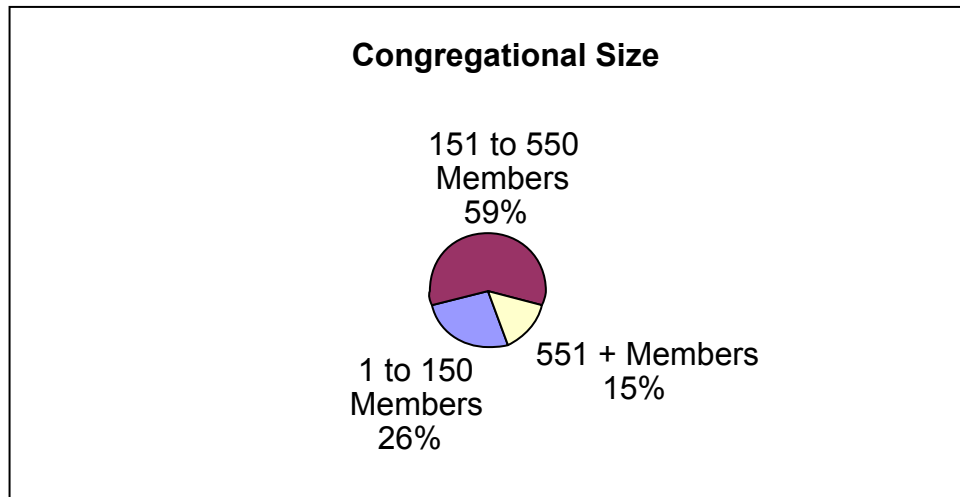
We do not have any data on how many adults work either professionally or in a volunteer capacity with Unitarian Universalist youth, which means that we do not know whether this sample of 386 participants is statistically representative. We suspect that it is but all data that we present must be view through the lens of those who took this survey.

Analysis of this survey was done by Jesse Jaeger and Megan Dowdell.

## **Demographics:**

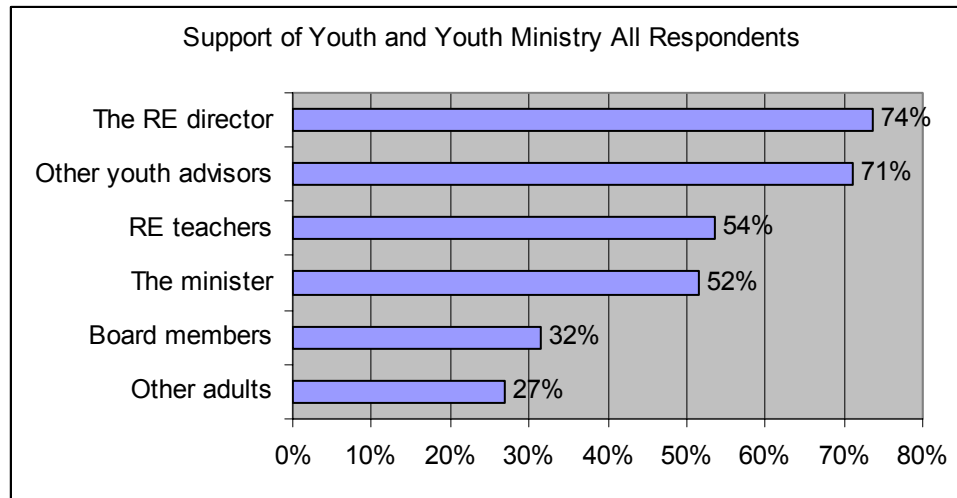
Not surprisingly, Unitarian Universalist adults who work with youth in either a volunteer or professional capacity look a lot like the average Unitarian Universalist. They are mostly middle aged (70% of respondents are between the ages of 35 and 60), identify as white / European decent (86%) and heterosexual (75%). Those who serve in larger congregations, as well as those who are not members of their congregations, tend to be a little younger. In large congregations, a greater percentage of respondents were heterosexual than in small congregations. Respondents who are paid to work with Unitarian Universalist youth almost all identify as white/of European descent, with just a couple identifying as Latino(a)/Hispanic/Chicano(a)/Latin American/South American. Also, most people who work with youth in a volunteer or paid capacity identify as female (67%). Respondents who

identify as a person of color are also more likely to identify as BGLTQ than white respondents.



Most who took the survey serve in midsize (151 to 550 members) congregations. 63% serve youth groups that are smaller than 20 members. About a quarter of all youth groups served have fewer than 10 members. Larger congregations tend to have larger youth groups. Non-members tend to serve mid-sized congregations with larger youth groups. People paid to work with youth are more likely to be serving either youth groups of over 20 youth or youth groups that are smaller than 10 youth. This also corresponds to the size of the congregations, with paid youth staff more likely to be present in small (less than 150 members) and large (more than 550 members) congregations.

## Support:



When asked about the support they receive from different members of the congregation, respondents divide these other members into three tiers of support. About 70% of respondents feel positively about the support that youth and youth ministry receive from religious educators and other youth advisors. This falls to about 50% for support from ministers and religious education teachers and then falls even lower (about 30%) for support from board members and other adults in the congregation. When compared to a similar question asked of youth in the 2006 Youth Ministry Survey, adults who work with youth seem to have a much lower opinion of ministers, board members and other adults in the congregation than youth do.

When we asked respondents specifically about the support that others give to their work with youth, a similar 3 tiers appear. Religious education directors, other youth advisors and youth rate the highest; ministers and religious education teachers in the middle; and board members and other adults at the bottom. Youth advisors feel that ministers, RE teachers, board members and other adults are more supportive of their work with youth than they are of youth in general.

In general, respondents from larger congregations feel more support for youth, youth ministry and their work with youth. Respondents who are not members of the congregation feel less support for their work with youth. Across the board, those who are paid to work with youth feel much more supported than volunteers feel.

People of color feel dramatically less supported than the rest of the respondents. This is particularly true about support from ministers. Only about 35% of the respondents who identify as people of color felt that ministers supported youth, youth ministry or their work with youth. People who identify as BGLTQ also feel less support from all other adults. They feel dramatically lower support from directors of religious education.

At the district/regional, national and continental levels, respondents feel a very low level of support. They find district staff to be the most supportive, with over 25% of respondents

feeling well supported by district staff. Only about 16% of respondents feel well-supported by UUA Continental staff. .

Those who know about the Chrysalis training program feel a slightly higher sense of support from district/regional, national and continental leaders for youth, youth ministry and their work with youth. However, knowing about the Chrysalis program infers a high degree of knowledge about the services delivered by district and national leaders. Only about 35% of those who know about the Chrysalis training program feel supported by district and national leaders, which is hardly good news.

### **Trainings:**

About 50% of the respondents have taken the Basic Advisor Training and the Our Whole Lives Teacher Training, which makes them the most common trainings taken. About 35% of respondents had also taken part in the Leadership Development Conferences, Spirituality Development Conference or Anti-Racism / Anti-Oppression trainings. Respondents from large congregations and respondents who are paid to work with youth were slightly more likely to have attended any training offered by the UUA around youth work.

Not surprisingly, possibly because they were the most attended, the Basic Advisor Training and the Our Whole Lives training are thought to be the most useful. Respondents who identify as people of color find the Anti-Racism / Anti-Oppression trainings to be much more helpful than white respondents do. Respondents paid to work with youth also find Anti-Racism / Anti-Oppression trainings to be more helpful than volunteers do. Respondents from large congregations find the Leadership Development Conferences and the Spirituality Development Conferences much less helpful than respondents from midsize and small congregations do.

About 45% of respondents have heard of the Chrysalis Training Program. Those who have heard of the training program are also more likely to think positively about the trainings they have taken. People paid to work with youth are much more likely to have heard of the Chrysalis Training Program than volunteers. .

### **Involvement:**

About 60% of respondents have worked with youth for over 4 years, which was surprising. There is a commonly held belief that youth advisors only last about a year in that role. This would suggest that this belief is not necessarily true. However, it is also probable that our survey reached those who have worked with youth for more years and are thus more connected to our outreach sources. It is probably still safe to say that youth advisors continue as advisors for longer than is commonly thought. People of color and those who know about the Chrysalis program seem to have been involved with youth longer, and those who identify as BGLTQ seem to have been working with youth for a shorter period of time.

The most common ways that adults are involved with youth at the congregational level are: general volunteering with youth, teaching Our Whole Lives, being a Coming of Age teacher/mentor, or serving on the congregation's Youth Adult Committee. About 20% of

those who took the survey are Directors of Religious Education who have work with youth as a significant part of their job description. These DREs make up the majority of respondents who are paid to work with youth. These DREs who have work with youth as a specific portion of their job description tend to come from smaller congregations. About 50% of respondents volunteer between 6 and 15 hours a month working with Unitarian Universalist youth.

Nearly 90% of respondents are members of the congregation where they work. About two-thirds consider themselves to be very involved in the congregation outside of their work with youth. The top activities that they are involved with outside of youth programs include:

- Participating in social action activities – 60%
- Teaching a Religious Education Class – 56%
- Leading or participating in part of the worship service – 56%
- Helping run a congregational social or community building event – 52%
- Serving as a representative or chair of a committee – 51%

These statistics counter the common assumption that youth advisors are isolated from the rest of the congregation.

Respondents from larger congregations tend to be less involved with other aspects of the congregation. This is particularly true of their involvement in worship. The opposite seems to be true of respondents from small congregations. Respondents who are paid to work with youth are much more likely to be involved with worship in the congregation.

The most common ways in which respondents are involved in district-level youth programming are: being an advisor at district events, driving youth to events, and serving on the district youth leadership committee. People of color are more represented in district level programming than at the local level.

Of the few adults who took part in continental or national level programming, sponsoring a youth at General Assembly was the most common activity. Respondents from larger congregations were more likely to sponsor youth at General Assembly.

### **Professional Youth Staff:**

Just over 25% of respondents are paid in some way to work with Unitarian Universalist youth. Small congregations (under 150 members) and large congregations (over 550 members) are more likely to pay someone to work with youth. We suspect that many of those who are getting paid to work with youth in small congregations are DREs who have youth work as a major part of their job description. People getting paid to work with youth are much less likely to be members of their congregation. People of Color are less likely to be paid to work with youth.

55% of paid respondents are paid for less than 10 hours a week of work. In small congregations, nearly 75% of those who are paid to work with youth are working less than 10 hours a week. People of color are also likely to be paid less than 10 hours a week.

Most paid respondents are given a salary rather than an hourly wage or a stipend. Just over 40% of those being paid a salary are making less than \$10,000 a year. About 25% are making between \$15,000 and \$25,000 a year and about 15% are making more than \$35,000 a year. Larger congregations are probably more able to sustain more hours a week of work and higher salaries than midsize and small congregations.

### **Open Ended Questions:**

When asked what is going well with Youth Ministry in the context where they are working, respondents most often pointed out the positive involvement of youth and the presence of dedicated volunteer adults. They also pointed to youth community building, local congregation support, parental involvement, Coming of Age and Our Whole Lives programs, as well as diversity of programming.

The top challenge identified by respondents is the lack of time. This includes the fact that youth and families are over-scheduled in today's world. It also includes a lack of time for volunteers working with youth. That second part of the lack of time is connected to the second challenge identified by respondents. That challenge is the difficulty in finding qualified volunteers to work with youth. Other challenges identified include:

- Youth “disempowering” adults and conflict about what empowerment means
- Lack of financial and other resources
- Lack of youth interest in youth programming
- Youth integration in the larger community
- Lack of accessible trainings for both youth and adults

The youth ministry need that was most identified was the need for more frequent, diverse and accessible training for adults. Many point out that more trainings are needed on more topics related to youth ministry. Trainings also need to be structured differently so that they are more accessible to adults and their busy schedules. The weekend training model does not work for everyone. Other needs that respondents identified include:

- More paid youth advisors and youth coordinators
- Better communication
- More funding for youth ministry
- More training for youth
- More adult volunteers.