

## **Youth Enrichment (YEN) Provider Survey Results**

**Prepared for:**

**Project Rise, NOVA Southeastern University**

**Prepared By:**

**Marcela Gutierrez, Ph.D.  
Gutierrez Consulting Partnerships**

**In collaboration with:**

**Diana Lores, M.S.W., Ph.D.  
Associate Director of Youth Development  
Project RISE  
Nova Southeastern University  
Center for Psychological Studies**

**February 2016**

## Executive Summary

In December 2015, Project RISE, with collaboration from CCDH's All Children Together (ACT) project, conducted an online survey of Youth Enrichment (YEN) providers funded by The Children's Trust to assess their areas of need for capacity building. In addition to asking questions about existing strengths and training needs, the 22-item survey also covered needs related to working with youth with disabilities and their families and ways of sharing best practices among YEN providers. This survey was one component of a three-pronged approach to assess YEN providers' training needs. A Youth Development Advisory Committee (YDAC) that was formed in November 2015 assisted in creating this survey and provided additional insight on providers' needs. Field assessments that are being conducted using the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) will also offer additional information regarding specific high-quality staff practices. Together, these three sources of information will inform a YEN support plan to be implemented during the 2016-2017 contract year.

The YEN Provider Survey was sent to all YEN provider organizations. Of the 33 managers and front-line staff supervisors who answered the survey, half came from organizations who were receiving grants for the first time and nearly 60% of the organizations had more than ten years of experience working with middle and high school youth. The respondents' profile suggests there are many seasoned providers in the YEN pool that Project RISE can take advantage of for creating peer-to-peer, capacity-building opportunities. The analysis of survey responses suggests that YEN providers' primary need is for strategies to improve recruitment and retention/attendance of youth, especially of high school-aged youth, followed by parent engagement. In fact, 62% of all YEN providers rated youth recruitment or retention as "Difficult" or "Very Difficult" for their organizations. Recruitment of youth with disabilities was rated by 22% of the respondents as an area in which they would like assistance. This is notable since all programs must enroll at least 10% of youth with disabilities as per their contract with The Trust.

Not surprisingly given these findings, a majority of respondents expressed their willingness to participate in networking activities related to youth recruitment and retention. They also seemed to recognize the internal expertise within the pool of YEN providers and appeared open to opportunities designed to do peer-to-peer capacity building. Besides offering expertise in direct service provision to youth, such as teaching jobs and life skills, offering mentorship, and sports and fitness programming, YEN providers also offered to contribute their knowledge of operational best practices, such as staff communication, use of interns as a resource, and structuring programs. A combination of survey item responses and open-ended responses suggests that external issues such as transportation to the program; competition with other after-school activities; and youth/family issues such as mental health, homelessness, and family conflicts or violence may interfere with youth participation. These possible external factors should be considered when planning future networking or training opportunities.

The survey results also revealed that while none of the respondents rated staff performance as "Poor" in any of the areas related to high-quality staff practices, 59% of all YEN providers identified at least one area in which staff performance is "Fair" or in which they believed their staff needed help. Almost 40% of respondents also rated finding appropriate training for staff as "Difficult" or "Very Difficult." Additionally, approximately a quarter of respondents acknowledged that they could use help training and supporting staff to work with youth with disabilities, and close to half of all respondents asked for

specific training to provide adequate resources to this population of youth and their families. Finally, over half of the providers preferred remote types of activities rather than actual face-to-face meetings for ongoing sharing of best practices. Some of them justified this preference as a way to avoid lengthy travel to meetings for front-line staff. Project RISE should consider this preference in its support plan, and could consult with the YDAC on which best practices should be shared, how often, and by what means.

In conclusion, the YEN provider survey makes a strong case for beginning capacity building around youth recruitment and retention, especially for high school-aged youth, and overall parent engagement. Planning for a networking meeting should include identifying external factors that become barriers to participation and retention for youth and parents, as well as effective strategies for overcoming these barriers. YEN providers are also interested in receiving additional staff training in various staff practices and to better serve youth with disabilities and their families. Many YEN providers see themselves as having relevant expertise they can share with their colleagues and are willing to contribute and supplement what Project RISE and CCDH may have to offer. Finally, while networking opportunities to learn from each other and from experts are welcome, for ongoing communication of best practices, providers seem to prefer remote ways of delivering content, such as written materials and webinars, over face-to-face meetings that require travel.

## Summary of Findings

### Background on technical assistance to YEN providers

Project RISE has worked closely with out-of-school program providers for more than a decade; however, its services have focused on the needs of providers that serve elementary school-aged children. As of the 2015-2016 contract year, Project RISE's services have been extended to YEN providers serving middle and high school-aged youth. In order to properly serve this new population of providers, Project RISE is conducting a comprehensive needs assessment to develop a support plan for subsequent years. This survey was one of a three-pronged approach to assess YEN providers' training needs. The second component will be recommendations from a Youth Development Advisory Committee (YDAC) that was formed in November 2015. This committee also assisted in creating this survey. The third component will come from field assessments that are being conducted using the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA). These assessments will offer additional information regarding specific high-quality staff practices. Together, these three sources of information will inform a YEN support plan to be implemented during the 2016-2017 contract year.

### Methodology

The YEN Provider Survey is an online survey using the SurveyMonkey platform. The survey items were developed in consultation with Project RISE's staff and piloted with a group of YEN providers prior to launching. The survey tool consists of 22 questions organized under five main headings: 1) Program Information, 2) Staff Strengths and Training Needs, 3) Training Needs Related to Children with Disabilities, 4) Sharing Best Practices, and 5) Other Comments. The survey link was emailed to all YEN provider organizations. The providers were given the option to have anyone who supervised front-line staff complete the survey, especially if the provider offers YEN programming at multiple sites.

### Findings

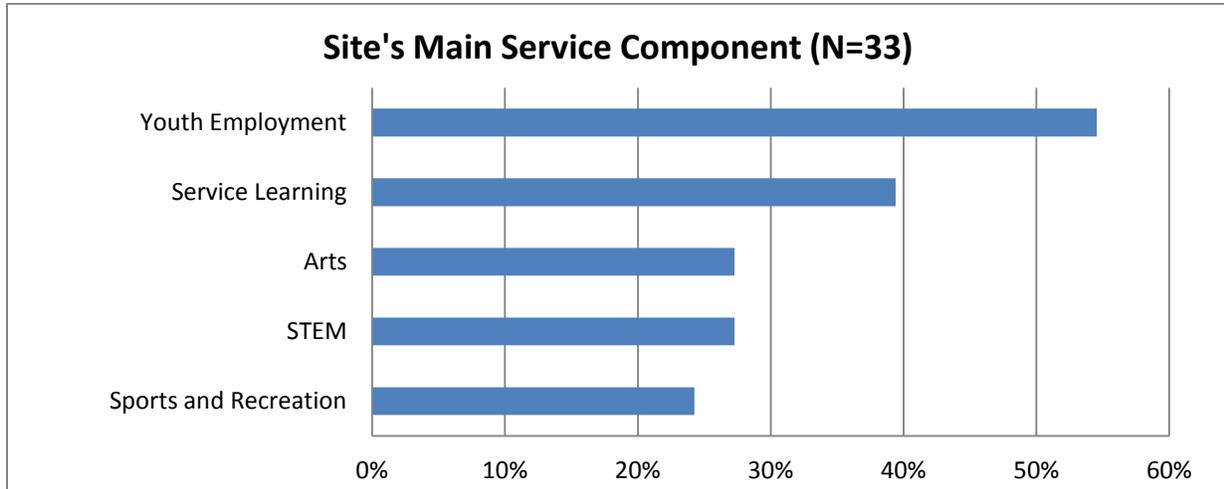
#### 1) Program and Respondent Information

The Survey Monkey link was emailed to 27 organizations and 33 individuals responded. This represents 100% of YEN providers, although some respondents did not answer every question. Two organizations had multiple respondents. Among respondents, 36% were in management/ administrative positions, 45% were front-line staff supervisors, and 18% were other direct-service providers. A majority of respondents represented programs providing Youth Employment services, followed by Service Learning, Arts, Sports and Recreation and STEM (See Figure 1). Over half of respondents supervised between one and four staff, and the remaining half supervised between five and ten front-line staff.

Fifty three percent (53%) of respondents came from organizations receiving YEN grants for the first time, and 46% had already had YEN funding in the past. Close to 60% of respondents stated their organizations had been serving middle and high school youth for over ten years; 24% had worked with

these youth between 5 and 9 years, and 17% had between 1 and 4 years of experience with this population.

Figure 1\*



\*Some respondents checked more than one service component for their site, thus, totals exceed 100%

## 2) Staff Strengths and Training Needs

When asked to rate their staff's strengths and skills on a list of high-quality staff practices, a majority of respondents felt their staff's performance was between "Good" and "Excellent." While no one rated staff performance as "Poor" in any of the areas, 59% of all YEN providers identified at least one area in which staff performance is "Fair" or in which their staff need help. Figures 2 and 3 present the areas where respondents felt additional help could be needed or where performance was assessed as just "Fair." The top areas that the respondents indicated that their staff need more help in are: supporting youth's critical thinking, preparing lesson plans and finding interesting activities, and providing academic supports outside of homework assistance. The highest percentages in areas where staff's performance was assessed as "Fair" include: asking open ended questions, ensuring activities are challenging, supporting youth creativity, visual and performing arts, homework assistance and other academic components.

Figure 2

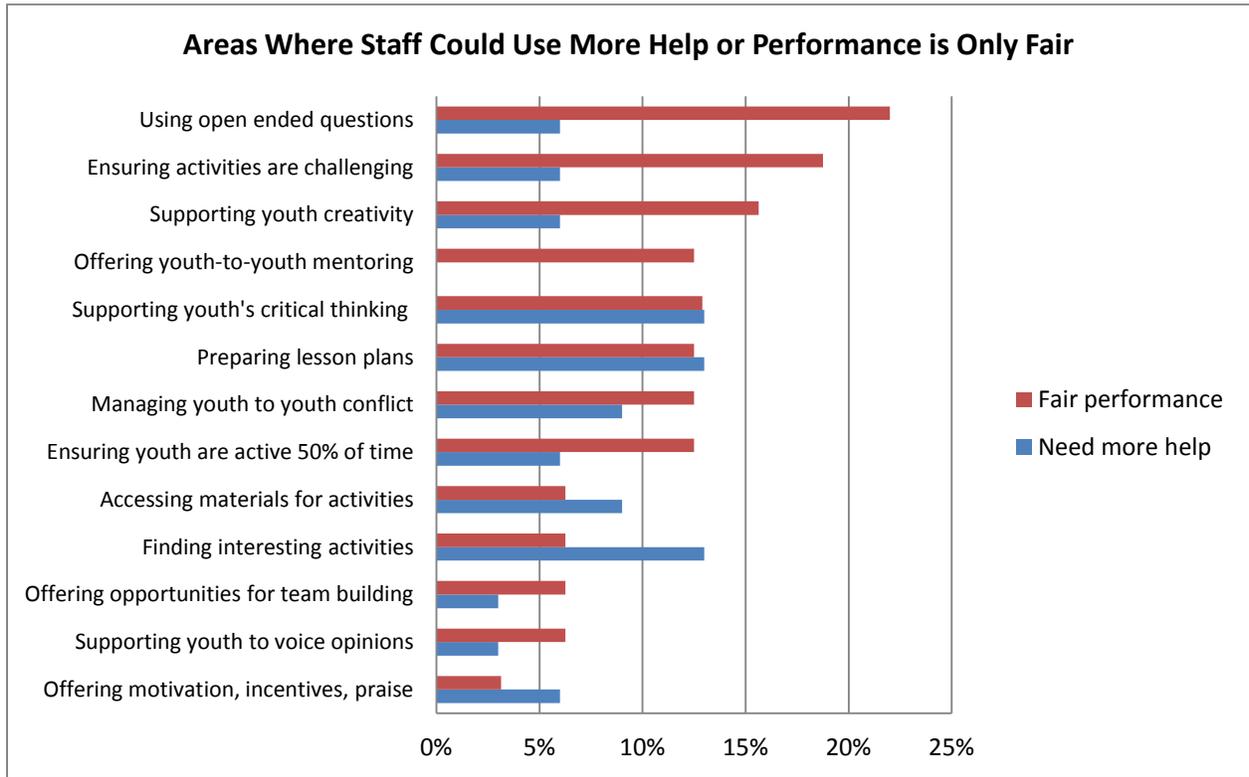
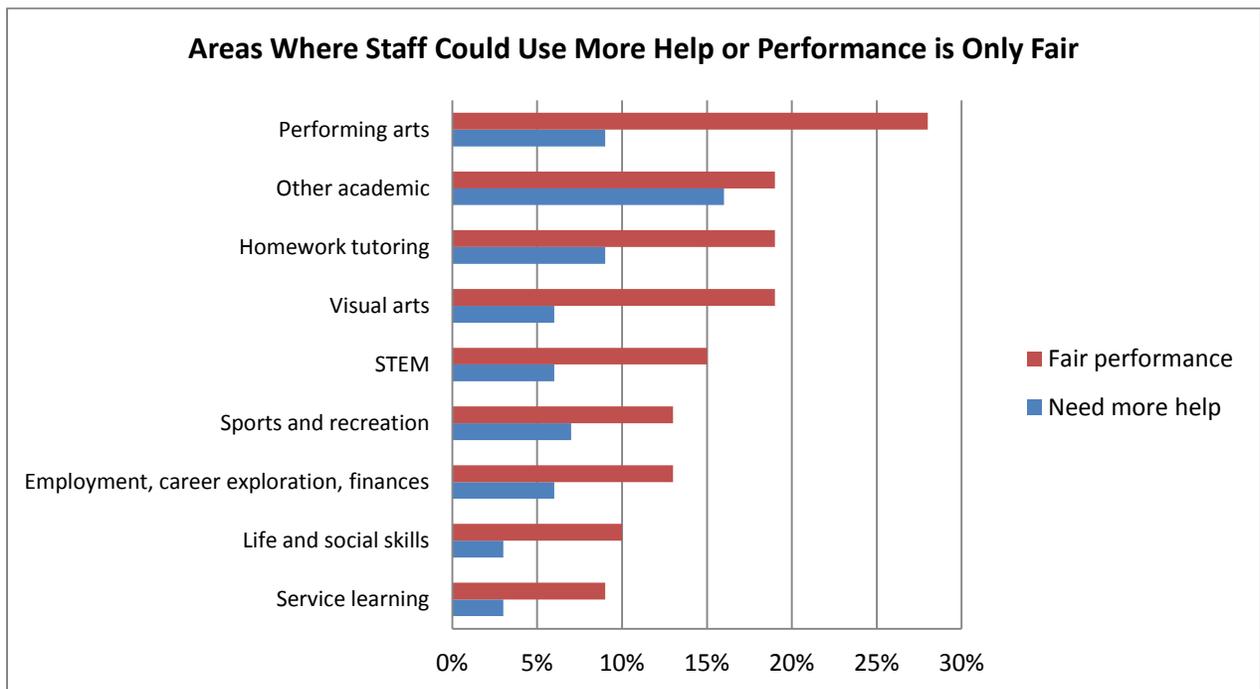
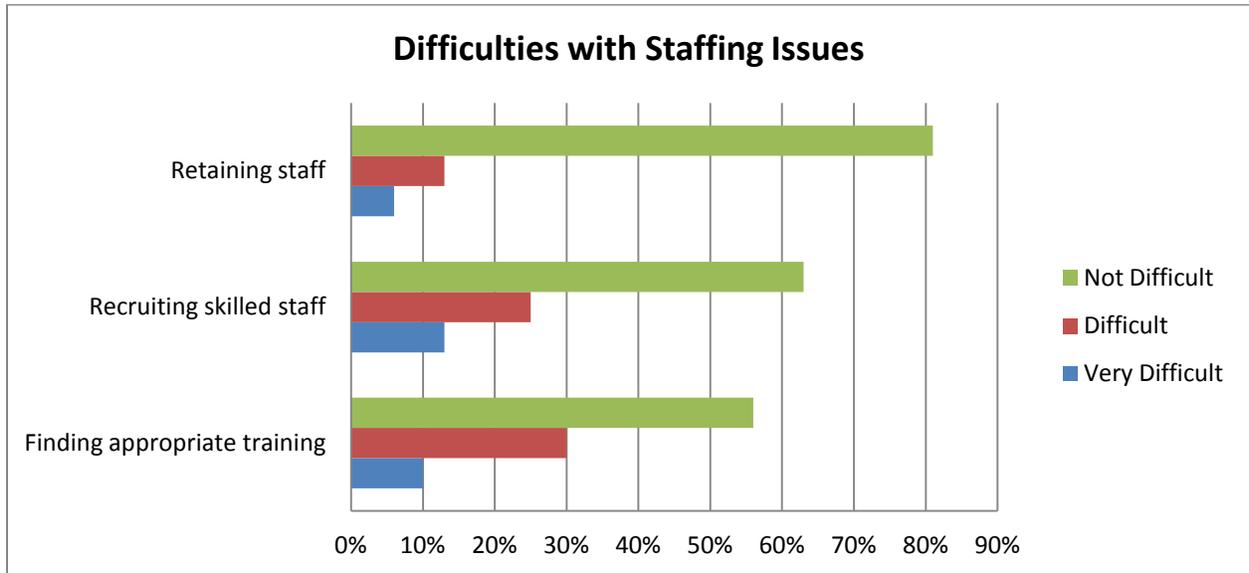


Figure 3



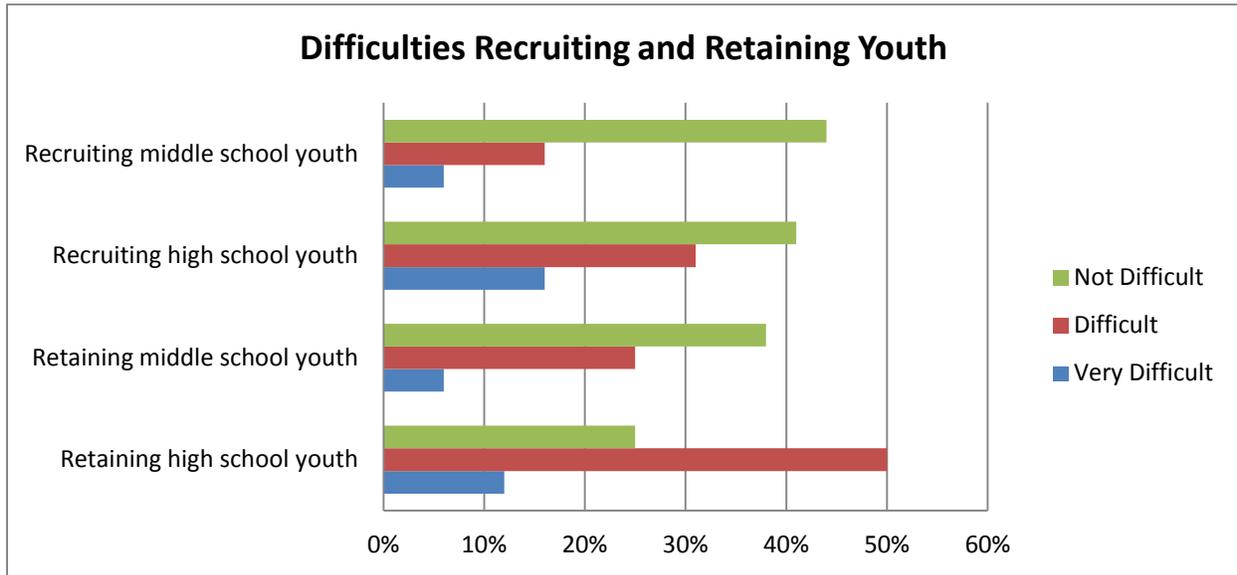
Another survey question explored challenges related to staffing issues faced by YEN providers (See Figure 4). **Finding appropriate training for staff and recruiting skilled staff were considered difficult for 30% and 25% of respondents, respectively.** Comments offered by respondents mentioned challenges helping staff understand Miami Dade Public Schools and difficulties recruiting staff to work in certain sites.

Figure 4



The next set of questions dealt with difficulties related to working with youth and their families. **When it came to recruitment and retention, a majority of respondents felt high school youth were more challenging than middle school youth** (See Figure 5). While only 22% felt recruiting middle school students was “Difficult” or “Very Difficult,” 47% felt the same about high school students. Similarly, 31% of respondents felt retaining middle school students was “Difficult” or “Very Difficult” compared to 62% who felt the same way about high schoolers. Some survey participants felt transportation and lack of parent engagement were an issue, as well as competition from other after-school activities. A provider serving college-age youth also found them challenging to engage and retain. Finally, a provider shared that maintaining youth engagement over prolonged periods of time was an ongoing problem for their organization.

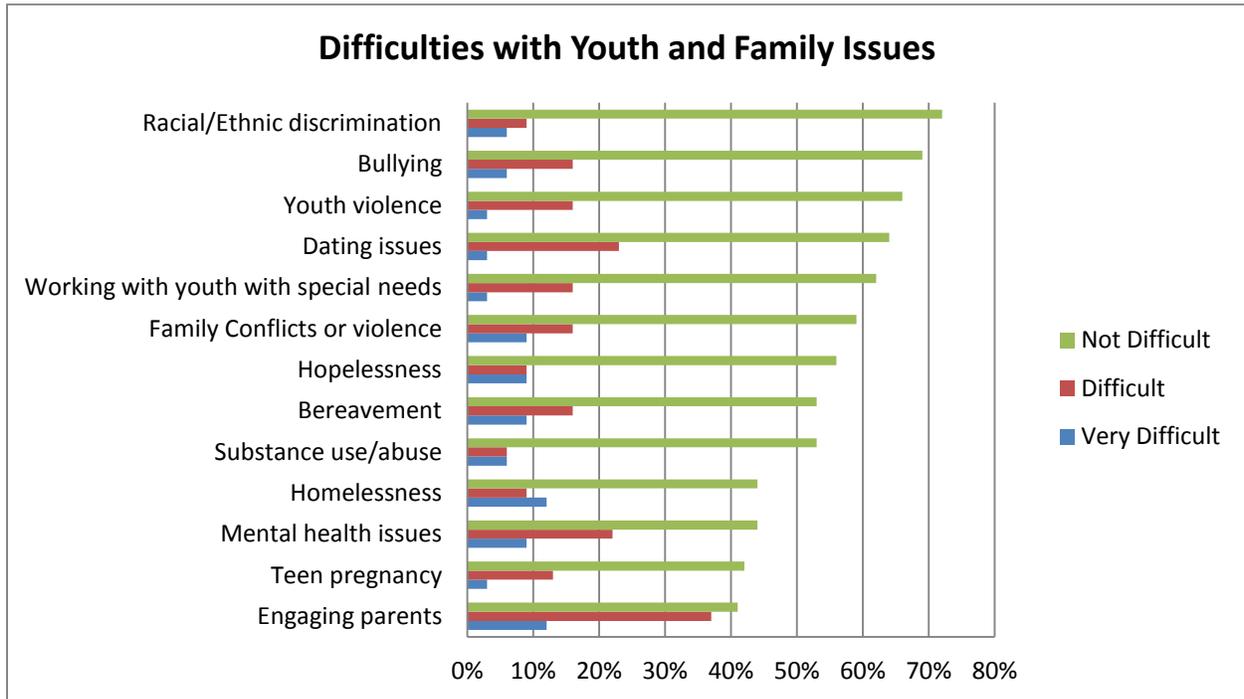
Figure 5\*



\*This figure does not include N/A results, therefore, percentages do not add up to 100%

When asked about difficulties staff experience in dealing with personal youth and family issues, **close to 50% felt engaging parents was either “Difficult” or “Very Difficult,” and close to 30% found mental health issues were either “Difficult” or “Very Difficult.”** Consistently, 22% of respondents felt their staff could use help with parent engagement. Twelve percent (12%) felt they could use help with mental health problems among the youth and their families. Additionally, **19% asked for assistance in helping staff address homelessness.** One respondent commented that while they offered referrals to other service providers, transportation to access services was a big problem to youth and families.

Figure 6\*

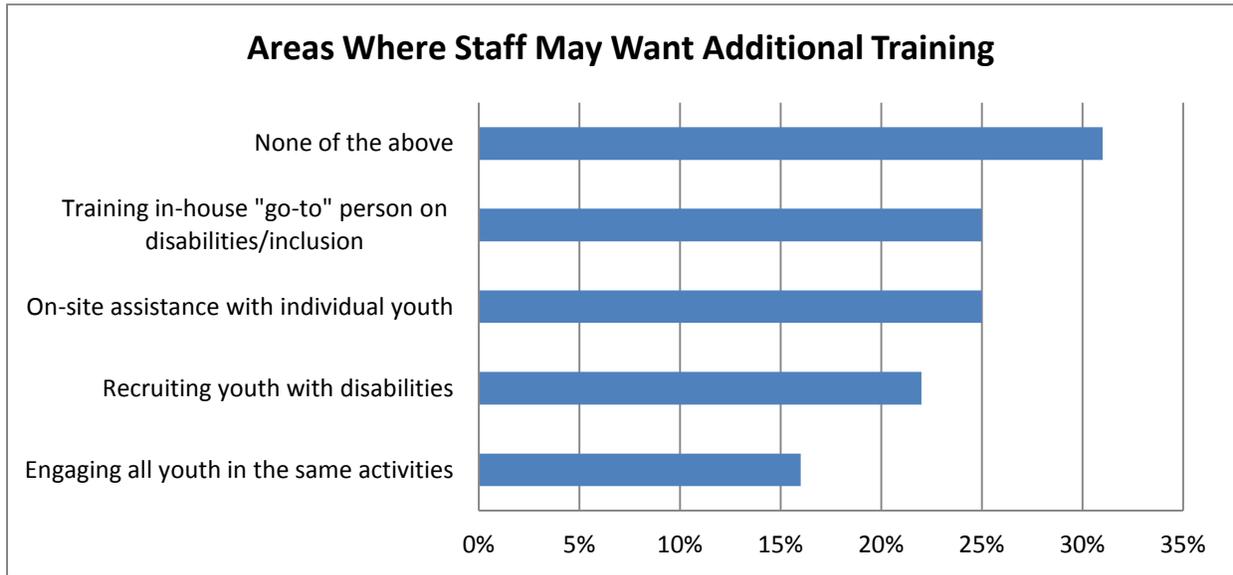


\*This figure does not include N/A answers, therefore, percentages do not add up to 100%

### 3) Training Needs Related to Youth with Disabilities

The survey included two questions relating to working with youth with disabilities. One asked about assistance that could be provided by CCDH’s ACT project and the other addressed interest in receiving training (See Figures 7 and 8). **Twenty-five percent indicated the two top areas in which they need assistance were 1) identifying and training an in-house staff as their go-to person on disability and inclusion related issues, and 2) receiving on-site assistance from CCDH.** Assistance recruiting youth with disabilities was identified as a need by 22% of respondents. This is notable since each provider’s contract with The Children’s Trust requires that at least 10% of youth in the program be youth with disabilities. Finally, 16% of respondents would like to receive assistance on how to engage youth with disabilities along with other program youth.

Figure 7



In terms of training topic interests, nearly 50% of respondents wanted information about community resources for youth with disabilities and their families, while close to 30% were interested in “An Introduction to the Successful Inclusion of Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders” (See Figure 8).

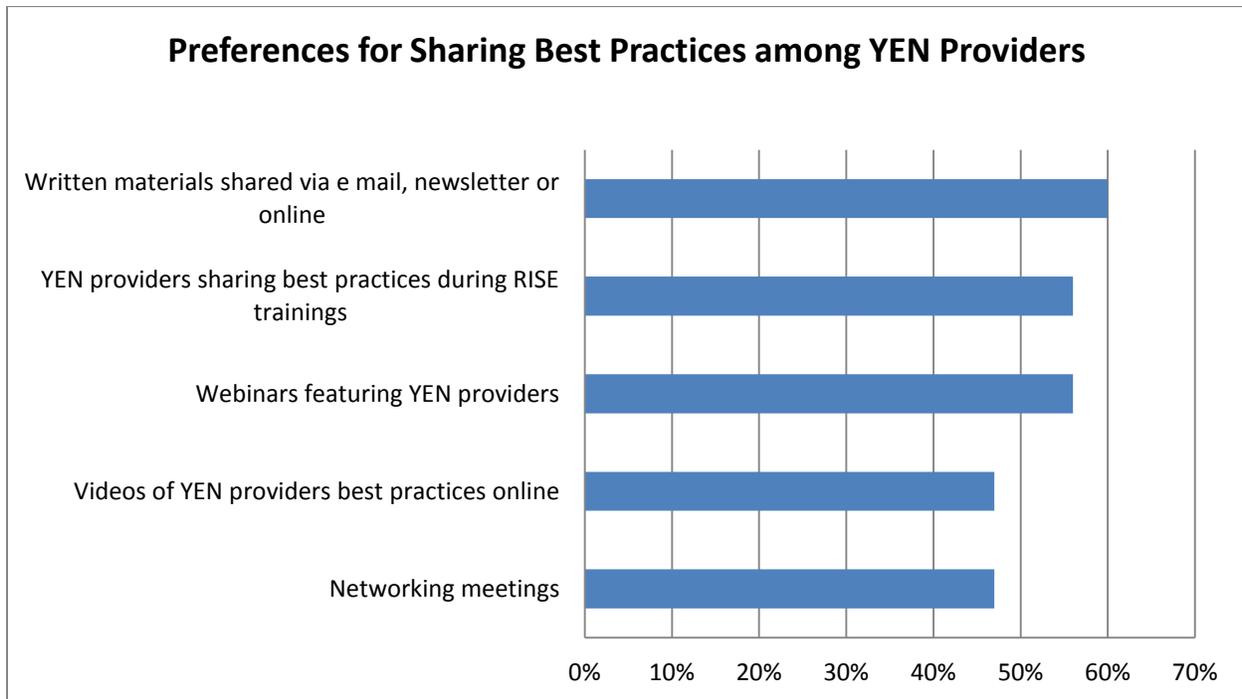
Figure 8



#### 4) Sharing Best Practices

The final section of the survey was dedicated to finding ongoing ways to share best practices among YEN providers (See Figure 9). **A majority preferred written materials, while a little over half of respondents expressed an interest in hearing from their YEN colleagues, either via webinars or through face-to-face presentations during Project RISE training events.**

Figure 9



**Survey respondents were very receptive about the idea of having networking meetings to discuss recruitment and retention strategies;** 75% stated they would be interested in participating in such meetings. When asked what topics they would be interested in discussing beyond recruitment and retention, suggestions included:

- Finding adequate staff
- Retention and communication techniques
- Parent engagement
- Techniques and tools for program management and engagement of high risk youth
- Homework assistance ideas
- EBP curriculum
- Strategies and techniques to keep youth active and engaged

When asked what they would be willing to share with others at mentoring meetings, responses included:

- Enrollment and recruiting ideas
- Long term engagement
- Helping youth feel special
- Job skills, life skills
- Working with youth with disabilities
- Communication between staff
- Sports and fitness, mentoring
- How to use interns
- Incentivizing and integrating real life needs with program needs
- Program structure and operations