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The Importance of Worksite Supervisors in At-Risk Youths’ Lives

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Introduction
For the first time in over 10 years the federal government has brought back summer youth programs as a result of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Researchers and youth advocates have convinced federal legislatures that without summer employment for youth there is an increase of teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, and gang-related activity. To prove to the positive outcomes, summer employment has on youth and young adults, researchers from Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University studied past summer programs and found that summer jobs result in fewer crimes and incarceration, reduce dependency on public assistance programs, and create economic productivity in America (Morial, 2007).

Since federal funds have been distributed to states in April 2009, agencies providing employment services such as Minnesota Valley Action Council have received a summer youth employment program to serve approximately 350 youth in the Region 9 area. Many challenges come along with serving this many youth in a short amount of time, however. One challenge is finding appropriate worksites for youth to gain work experience in. "Appropriate" meaning a work environment where youth can learn positive work habits, and build a strong mentor like relationship with an adult at the worksite. Ideally, a supervisor needs to be understanding, caring, and respectful for youth to maintain employment.

Several studies suggest at-risk youth need at least one significant adult in their lives which may determine future choices youth will make for themselves, whether positive or negative. If youth do not have this adult in their home environment, then who will help steer youth in the right direction? This is the challenge we leave with society and our communities.

Researchers and youth advocates have convinced federal legislatures that without summer youth programs as a result of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Sixty-six point six percent of youth had not completed high school and 33.3% completed high school. For the first time in over 10 years the federal government has brought back summer youth employment programs such as Minnesota Valley Action Council have received a summer youth employment program to serve approximately 350 youth in the Region 9 area. Since one researcher was administering the survey, youth in other counties in the Region 9 area were not tested. If more data in order to complete the study by the due date. This limited researchers to choose the largest regions in the area. Limitations to this study included the lack of time to administer the survey, because of the lengthy IRB process to approve a project involving minors participate in study (Level II). The researchers had only a couple of weeks to collect data in order to complete the study by the due date.

Purpose of the study
The purpose of this research study is to learn the importance of supervisory needs for at-risk youth and young adults between the ages of 14 and 24. The researchers examined age, sex, race, education, and living situations to determine if there are differences in needs of these groups related to worksite supervisors. Data was collected from a sample of 97 youth residing in Blue Earth, Brown, Le Sueur, and Nicollet rural Minnesota counties.

Research Questions
1) What do youth need from worksite supervisors to maintain employment?
2) Are there differences in supervisory needs of at-risk youth by age, gender, education level, living situation, and supervisory needs of the youth in the two living situation groups (t=2.16, p<.05) however.

Demographics Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Number in Each Group</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 14-17</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 18-24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 25-29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Male</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Female</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race White</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race Black</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino American</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Did not complete high school</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Completed high school</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Situation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Situation</td>
<td>1 or more parent, family member, or guardian</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To answer the research questions of this study, researchers compared supervisory needs to demographic information. T-test and ANOVA results showed no significant differences (p<.05) between supervisory needs and age, sex, race, and educational level of youth. All groups of youth displayed a high need for a caring and respectful supervisor in a work setting. This was determined by the youth answering either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to supervisor questions on the survey (See Supervisory Questions chart below). T-test findings did show a significant difference between supervisory needs of the youth in the two living situation groups (t=2.16, p<.05) however.

Supervisory Questions Asked in Survey

1. The most important thing about a job is that my supervisor knows I am reliable.
2. I would like a supervisor who will trust me.
3. I would like a supervisor who is fair.
4. I would like a supervisor who makes me aware of my mistakes.
5. I would like a supervisor who compliments me.
6. I would like a supervisor who is knowledgeable.
7. I would like a supervisor who is approachable.
8. I would like a supervisor who is dedicated.
9. I would like a supervisor who is flexible.
10. I would like a supervisor who is consistent.

All groups of youth displayed a high need for a caring and respectful supervisor in a work setting. This was determined by the youth answering either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to supervisor questions on the survey. T-test and ANOVA results showed no significant differences (p<.05) between supervisory needs and age, sex, race, and educational level of youth. All groups of youth displayed a high need for a caring and respectful supervisor in a work setting. This was determined by the youth answering either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to supervisor questions on the survey (See Supervisory Questions chart below). T-test findings did show a significant difference between supervisory needs of the youth in the two living situation groups (t=2.16, p<.05) however.

Limitations
Limitations to this study included the lack of time to administer the survey, because of the lengthy IRB process to approve a project involving minors participate in study (Level II). The researchers had only a couple of weeks to collect data in order to complete the study by the due date. Since one researcher was administering the survey, youth in other counties in the Region 9 area were not tested. If more counties participated in the study we could have reached a better perception of youth in rural Minnesota.

Discussion, Implications, and Social Work Practice
So what do these results mean for social work practitioners working with youth employment programs such as MVAC? According to the results of this study, young people no matter what age, sex, race, and educational level feel that worksite supervisors are an important aspect of the working world. Although, we cannot determine if supervisors are the most significant factor compared with rewards and incentives, or the job itself. From the questions asked in the survey we can learn that youth need a supervisor who respects them and treats them fairly. What this also means is when recruiting appropriate worksites for youth, there needs to be an emphasis on finding positive, mentor-like supervisors. We learn that youth in independent living situations such as a teen parent, or youth residing in a foster care home or a group home need supportive, positive supervisors more than those youth who currently live with at least one parent, family member, or guardian. Having a respectful supervisor may also assist young men and women to maintain employed for a longer time.

On a final note, MVAC and other youth employment programs need to find strategies of assessing appropriate supervisors when lack of worksites can be a challenge in itself in small communities. With the findings of this study we hope to stress the importance of putting our energy into placing youth in positive environments so young people can then become role models for future generations, reducing crime, incarcerations, dependency on public assistance programs, and increasing economic productivity in America.