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Preface

A standardized training program to strengthen the role and skill of child care professionals is critical to residential care services. In 1985, staff at the University of Oklahoma National Resource Center for Youth Services (NRCYS) began developing the *Advanced Course for Residential Child Care Workers,* which was published in 1986.

Since its publication, the material has been used by thousands of youth care professionals, nationally and internationally. In youth care work, as in any professional field, philosophy and practice have evolved over time. In an effort to incorporate these changes and feedback from the field, the following revision of the curriculum has been developed.

How to Use this Curriculum

To receive the most benefit from this curriculum, we recommend that the modules be read in order since each module builds on the one before. The information is meant to accompany the residential child and youth care professional course. Therefore, the modules should be read either prior to, or in conjunction with, the training sessions.

Things to keep in mind when reading this curriculum:

- *The terms child, youth, and adolescent are used interchangeably in this curriculum.*
- *The words he and she are used alternately throughout this curriculum.*
- *The terms child care professional, youth care professional, and child and youth care professional are used interchangeably in this curriculum.*
- *Family is defined by each individual youth. In this curriculum you will see the terms caregiver, support network, and permanent connection used interchangeably with the term family.*
- *The curriculum focuses on work with children and youth in short- and long-term residential settings; however, the curriculum can be easily adapted for work with youth in schools and other nonresidential settings.*

Introduction to the Curriculum

When the decision is made for children and youth to be placed in out-of-home settings it means their needs have not been met consistently or adequately in traditional family settings and relationships. These young people generally require a more structured environment in which social, emotional, and educational issues can be addressed comprehensively, and in which appropriate relationships with adults and other young people can be learned and practiced. The success of their placements depends largely on the development of consistent, nurturing, and helping relationships. Many people such as teachers, social workers, and therapists will be involved in building relationships with these children and youth. However, it is the child care professionals who have the greatest amount

of interaction with these children and youth and, therefore, potentially the greatest impact on them.

The influence of child care staff on the children in their care cannot be underestimated. Child and youth care staff must understand agency philosophy and program goals and processes. They must have a solid understanding of their role in implementing agency values and approaches and interpreting this information to the young people, their families, and other professionals with whom they work. Youth care professionals' effectiveness in performing these functions is directly related to the training and support they receive.

This curriculum is designed to help improve the quality of residential care for children and youth by strengthening the skills of youth care staff that are responsible for the daily nurturing, care, and discipline of the young people placed in residential settings. The goals of the curriculum are to:

- *provide youth care professionals, who work together, with a common knowledge base regarding residential care philosophy, values, and programs and their role in service delivery*
- *strengthen the skills of child care staff in the essential areas of developing a culture of care, understanding child development, building relationships, and teaching discipline*
- *relate current trends in residential care issues, programs, and child care staff roles.*

Premises

As youth care professionals, it is important that we examine our values and beliefs about the program participants we serve and the services we provide. These values and beliefs have an impact on every aspect of our work with children, youth, and their families. Just so, a training curriculum must also have a basic foundation that drives the content and concepts it presents. In the Residential Child and Youth Care Professional curriculum this foundation is reflected in its premises. The key concepts conveyed in these premises include issues related to a strength-based approach, learning opportunities, youth empowerment and involvement, relationship development, the programmatic culture of care, and collaboration with a number of resources. The following five premises provide the basic foundation and philosophy for working with children, youth, and their families which are reflected in this training curriculum.

Premise 1—Children and youth in residential care must receive services that do more than focus on problems or deficits. They need a wide range of appropriately challenging and supportive opportunities to explore, learn, and grow as individuals.

While we cannot ignore the problems and deficits that bring young people into care, it simply is not enough to base our programs on trying to eliminate them. *Problem free is*

not fully prepared. The time young people spend in care will be much more productive if we focus on their strengths and competencies and work with them to build new skills to meet their needs more effectively. In order to change their behavior, we must assist the youth in learning new behavior to replace the old, and the best way to do this is through programs that provide opportunities to practice. Additionally, youth care professionals must view these opportunities as rights rather than as privileges that must be earned and can be taken away.

Premise 2—Children and youth in residential care and their families must be engaged and actively involved in all aspects of the services they receive. This includes assessment, goal setting, case planning, activities, program design, and program evaluation.

The concept of assessment and service from a strengths/needs perspective is vital. Critical to the process is the involvement of youth in their own assessments and case planning. Young people need to be able to partner with the people responsible for their case planning and implementation. They must also be involved, to the fullest extent possible, in their services and in planning for their own futures. In addition, their families (or other support networks) need to be involved, as much as possible, in what happens to their children.

Premise 3—Children and youth in residential care must have opportunities to establish caring relationships in their lives. Their growth and progress occurs within the context of their relationships with staff, peers, family members, and other caring adults.

Many children and youth who come into care have not had the opportunity to establish healthy relationships with others, particularly adults. Often it is this lack of connection that brings them to our programs. Youth care professionals must demonstrate the warmth, respect, supportiveness, and encouragement necessary to engage young people. We must provide them with opportunities to form relationships with us, their peers, and others, if we want them to learn the skills necessary to form other relationships throughout their lives. The relationships young people are involved in actually provide the context for them to learn and grow. If we do not establish relationships with youth, they will not engage with us nor learn from us.

Premise 4—Children and youth in residential care must be served in programs that take into account environmental influences on growth and progress. Environments include physical, cultural, philosophical, and social dimensions.

In order to effectively serve children and youth, we need to examine the environment of our program to ensure that it promotes positive development. It is essential that we provide services that are culturally and socially relevant to the young people and their community. Our culture of care must be safe, healthy, and accessible in order to create an environment that promotes learning, practice, and growth.

Premise 5—Children and youth in residential care must be served in programs that collaborate and form partnerships with a number of resources. Those resources include the youth, their families, staff, other service providers, and the community.

First and foremost, we must view young people and their families (when possible) as resources, and partner with them to provide services that meet their needs. Our work with youth cannot, and should not, be done alone. Collaboration with other staff and other service providers helps to ensure that young people are receiving services that are consistent and meaningful to them. Additionally, through access to resources in the community, young people have a variety of opportunities to learn and practice new skills and behaviors. Participation in these partnerships opens the door for youth to establish permanent connections.

These premises support a competency-based approach and are reflected in the following four modules. Competency-based programs focus on strengths young people have rather than the problems they exhibit. It is our belief that by supporting their strengths we can provide more effective care for young people, and enable them to make a more successful transition when they leave our programs.