

The Indiana Youth Institute: A Resource for Librarians, Including a Resource Library

By Glenn Augustine

He is wise who knows the sources of knowledge -- where it is written and where it is to be found.

- A.A. Hodge, 1800's American religious leader and principal of the Princeton Seminary.

It started with a question posed more than 20 years ago: What is it that youth workers in Indiana need to enhance their abilities to serve Hoosier youth? While the answers given to that question were many, the solution devised to address those answers was the formation of a new nonprofit organization.

Not designed to serve youth directly, the organization instead would become a resource for youth-serving agencies and youth workers across Indiana, providing research, support, and information. To paraphrase A.A. Hodge, this nonprofit would be a source of knowledge about youth development issues, collecting information so it could be found easily by youth workers and benefit them in their daily delivery of services.

Established in 1988 with strong support from Lilly Endowment Inc., this new nonprofit was called the Indiana Youth Institute (IYI), which quickly earned a national reputation for its research, training, and resource services in the youth development field. In 1989, the agency launched its Library and Resource Center (later renamed the Virginia Beall Ball Library), prepared an inaugural report entitled "A Crisis in Child Welfare," and sponsored a conference for 250 professionals, policymakers, funders, and youth from across the state. In 1994, IYI released its first Kids Count in Indiana Data Book and published the highly acclaimed High Hopes, Long Odds, which captured the opinions of more than 5,000 Hoosier young people.

During its tenth anniversary year, IYI's Board of Directors voted to refocus the agency's

efforts primarily on building the capacity of nonprofit youth-serving organizations, including those offering after-school, summer camp, mentoring, tutoring, arts, treatment, and counseling programs, as well as schools, juvenile justice and social work agencies, faith-based organizations, community development coalitions, and organizations serving the disabled and homeless. During that timeframe, the Indiana Youth Institute conducted the first statewide study of Indiana youth workers, later published as *Youth Work: More Than Child's Play*.

The survey aided the agency in reevaluating its efforts and guided the planning of new programs that would be less theoretical and more practical. IYI continues to undertake a youth worker study every two years, and the Institute's latest initiatives provide Indiana youth professionals with training (including workshops that allow librarians to earn Library Education Units (LEUs)) and professional development grants, affordable consulting, networking opportunities, and information.

IYI is one of the state's leading advocates for youth and youth development, and one of the few statewide agencies in the country devoted to strengthening youth service. IYI now serves nearly 8,000 youth workers throughout all 92 Indiana counties.

Virginia Beall Ball Library

Nothing sickens me more than the closed door of a library.

-Barbara Tuchman, American historian

When IYI created its Library and Resource Center in 1989, the library's door literally was open but figuratively closed. Only by visiting the library in Indianapolis could youth workers delve into the collection, and loans were not allowed. About the time the name

was changed in 1999 to honor one of IYI's original board members, the Virginia Beall Ball Library adopted new policies that turned it into an information source more in line with IYI's statewide mission.

Considered one of the best collections of its kind in the nation, the Virginia Beall Ball Library now houses nearly 10,000 books, journals, special reports, videos and DVDs, curriculum guides, and other materials. Among the subjects in the library are educational videos for youth programs, parenting materials, program evaluation tools, and books on nonprofit management, volunteer recruitment, board and community development, and asset building. Some volumes are available in Spanish.

The Indiana Youth Institute also has spent the last ten years ensuring the library's door is wide open. In addition to visiting the library or making requests via phone or e-mail, patrons may obtain a free account by signing up online in the "Library/Reference" section of IYI's website, www.iyi.org. The library's online catalog allows users to view titles in the collection, see images of book covers, read excerpts, tables of contents and reviews, and inquire about the book's availability.

And in the interest of access, every title, save a small number of reference items, is available for free loan anywhere in Indiana. After users make their selections, IYI's library staff mails the items along with a postage paid envelope for easy return. Interlibrary loan requests from outside Indiana also are accepted but include charges to cover expenses and support the library's work in Indiana.

While IYI doesn't have a bookmobile, the library collection often finds itself wandering Indiana. Library selections and sign-up sheets are available at most of the events where IYI sets up its agency display. The Institute also acquires material written by state and national experts whom IYI brings to Indiana as speakers for its annual conference, on-the-road trainings, and Youth Worker Cafés, allowing attendees to leave an event with a head full of ideas and a handful of related reading material.

IYI employs a full-time librarian, who provides

reference and research assistance. The most frequent requests are for material on youth development and nonprofit management. In addition to scouring the collection for resources, IYI's librarian searches for more recent reports and articles to fulfill research requests.

Kids Count Data Book

IYI sees its primary function as disseminating information. The 2008 Kids Count in Indiana Data Book marked IYI's 15th year of producing a snapshot of child well-being in Indiana. While the physical size of the data book has shrunk over the years, IYI has begun posting more data on its website, including the latest state, county, and school district statistics on Indiana children and youth. Youth workers in particular use the Kids Count Data Book to find data to support grant proposals and program initiatives. In its August 1, 2008, edition of "Friday Facts: Government Information You Can Use" e-newsletter, the Indiana State Library listed the data book and online database as resources to use to check out child wellness trends in the counties where librarians reside.

Data Research

The Kids Count Data Book is just one way in which IYI serves as a clearinghouse for Indiana data. IYI provides custom data research, and each year its two data project managers answer more than 200 requests for additional data not found in the data book or IYI's online database.

The data researchers often turn up issues that are of public importance, and IYI publicizes the issues in various ways. IYI uses the information to produce a weekly radio show, heard on seven Indiana radio stations, and 60-second public service announcements, heard on more than 90 Indiana radio stations. In addition, IYI publishes a monthly newspaper column, along with Issue Briefs and Issue Alerts. The Briefs and Alerts analyze data and include resources from various entities studying the issues and references to promising practices. Topics have included the lack of financial literacy skills among youth, mentoring, the pros and cons of full-day kindergarten, the value of summer reading in boosting literacy, and a look at the

academic gender gap. The Briefs and Alerts are archived in the "Reports/Stats/Facts" section of the IYI website, while the newspaper column, radio show and public service announcements can be found in the "Media" section.

College and Career Counseling

Education is one of society's great equalizers, and the Institute has undertaken an informational initiative that aids children in beginning to ponder what they might want to do in life. Created in 2005, again with Lilly Endowment support, Drive of Your Life (www.DriveOfYourLife.org) encourages Hoosier students to think about college and identify possible career choices. The website offers a curriculum based on national and state educational standards. This allows teachers to use Drive of Your Life to meet Indiana's career exploration requirement. Students and parents also can use the website outside of the classroom. Aimed at middle schoolers who are dreaming of turning 16 and earning a driver's license, Drive of Your Life is interactive, posing questions that get children thinking about their futures and showing them careers that match their interests. A trip through the website ends with a student receiving a "learner's permit" that lays out an individualized high school curriculum the student could pursue to earn a state-mandated Core 40 diploma. More than 300,000 students have used Drive since its creation.

Following that roadmap to college is made easier through the companion site to Drive, Trip to College (www.TriptoCollege.org). More than 170,000 parents have taken advantage of this resource. They are drawn by the straightforward explanations of various ways to save for a child's education and the practical steps parents can take to plan educationally and financially for college during each year of their child's K-12 education. Trip includes information on degree programs and costs at each of Indiana's higher education institutions, giving students ideas about where to pursue a degree after the "learner's permit" guides them through high school.

Consulting Services

Nonprofits in need of guidance often turn to IYI's consulting service, which offers

custom-tailored assistance at a cost of \$30 per hour. Organizations, including libraries and library foundations, have used IYI consultants for help with strategic planning, program evaluation, board development, fundraising, leadership development, marketing, and technology support.

Consulting projects that take longer than 80 hours or six months to complete or are not youth-related are handled by IYI's Custom Solutions at low market rates. Among the clients accessing Custom Solutions are Indiana youth-serving agencies, school systems, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers. Most Custom Solutions projects are for evaluation planning, tools, and implementation that are too small for a university research department or too large for an independent evaluator to undertake.

Trainings

In IYI's annual customer surveys, training is cited consistently as the service for which IYI is most known, and respondents said that training, along with providing useful information, is one of the top two ways that IYI makes people more effective in their work with youth.

In recent years, IYI has used two training methods: traditional "on-the-road" trainings and the newer Webinars. On-the-road trainings bring nationally known instructors to eight sites across Indiana to address topics such as fundraising, working with kids, and engaging parents. The full-day trainings cost only \$45, and attendees can receive Continuing Education Units (CEUs) or Continuing Renewal Units (CRUs) required to maintain certification and licenses for social workers, teachers, counselors, and others. The National Association of Social Workers, Indiana Association of Prevention Professionals, Indiana Department of Education, the National Council on Family Relations, and the Indiana Parks and Recreation Association traditionally approve IYI's trainings. Library Education Units also may be provided if the training directly relates to library work.

Webinars feature an audio component, along with related online visuals. The advantages of Webinars include the ease of securing

top national instructors and eliminating the need for youth workers to travel to a training location. IYI is planning to host 11 Webinars per year at no charge to participants.

Professional Development Grants

One way many nonprofits try to save money is by reducing professional development spending. But IYI offers Professional Development Grants of up to \$750 to help pay for educational opportunities that fit the mission of IYI to promote the healthy development of children and youth. With these grants, youth workers can attend national conferences or pay a portion of the cost of college courses leading to degrees or certifications. Application guidelines can be found on IYI's website. Awarded monthly, past grant recipients have included librarians and teachers. The grants cannot be used for IYI trainings or IYI's Kids Count in Indiana Conference.

Youth Worker Cafés

IYI's Youth Worker Cafés also are free, and are local gatherings where attendees meet regularly, learn from speakers, and network informally over a meal. IYI's five regional field staffers work with community champions to establish Cafés and help publicize them. IYI provides a free breakfast or lunch and assists with bringing in information, relevant speakers, and other resources to meet specific community youth worker needs.

Some Cafés are just for youth workers; others are true community gatherings, with participants from business, health, religion, government, schools, and media, as well as the youth work sector. The beauty of the Café concept is that the communities choose topics aimed at improving local efforts to support kids and families. Additionally, attendees learn about local resources that can aid in their work. Previous topics have included teen suicide, working with the Hispanic community, and how to network and collaborate.

Since the Youth Worker Café program began in 2005, IYI's field staff has helped to form 28 Cafés, and a goal was set to have 40 in operation by July of 2010.

Youth Investment Award

The Indiana Youth Investment Award is a recognition program that brings positive attention annually to 10 outstanding youth organizations and their programs. Each winner receives \$5,000 to use for programs and professional development, and IYI provides support to promote each recipient's award in local media. In fact, many recipients later have told IYI that because of the media coverage of their award, they have received tangible benefits, including increased funding, more volunteers, and greater visibility in the community.

Kids Count in Indiana Conference

The Kids Count in Indiana Conference is an annual time for Indiana youth workers to gather, learn from expert instructors, browse a Resource Center of about 100 exhibits, take a collective breath, and gather momentum for their rewarding but difficult work.

Each December, this two-day conference brings to Indianapolis participants from nearly every one of Indiana's 92 counties. The 2009 conference had 1,496 attendees, 111 more than the previous year. In 2008, over half of the attendees were youth organization administrators and fundraisers. About one third had jobs that involved working face-to-face with kids, including teachers, guidance counselors, youth ministers, social workers, librarians, and juvenile justice officers.

The conference is a signature event for IYI, and 95 percent of the attendees who responded to a survey about the 2008 conference reported that what they learned will improve outcomes for kids with whom they work. In addition to learning from national experts, attendees can receive CEUs, CRUs, and LEUs.

While most attendees come for the workshops, the conference also offers speakers who inform and inspire. Previous keynoters have been entertainer Marie Osmond, astronaut Sally Ride, and 2008's main attraction, Coach Ken Carter, who inspired the movie *Coach Carter*. The 2009 conference featured plenary speaker Victor Rivas-Ramos, one of the leading male voices on domestic violence, recounted his

story of youth workers inspiring him to rise from gang member to class president. The keynote address was delivered by Liz Murray, who went from a homeless teen to Harvard graduate and credits dozens of individuals for helping her overcome her early life struggles and turn her life around.

Weekly Update

With so much happening, the easiest way for interested parties to keep tabs on youth and nonprofit issues as well as IYI events and initiatives is through the award-winning IYI Weekly Update. This free one-page e-mail bulletin reaches nearly 7,500 subscribers and provides at least one weekly grant tip, as well as information about new youth reports, free resources, upcoming trainings, and updates on IYI services. The Weekly Update earned a Silver Award in 2002 from the BKD Indiana Excellence Awards. Current and past issues of the Weekly Update can be found on the IYI website.

Having just celebrated its 20th anniversary, the Indiana Youth Institute is strategically developing new ways to help improve the quality of life for Hoosier children. While looking to enhance existing services, IYI also is building an endowment to fund its Professional Development Grant program and is in the planning stages of a statewide initiative to promote mentoring. As it moves forward, IYI is guided by its mission statement: The Indiana Youth Institute promotes the healthy development of children and youth by serving the institutions and people of Indiana who work on their behalf.

Author

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