

Report on the Review of the Regional Education Consultant Program

Submitted to
Great Lakes Unity Regional Conference Board
by the
Program Review Project Team

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Table of Contents

Project Background	3
Next Generation of Unity	4-6
Uniteens	7-10
Youth of Unity	10-13
Children's Programs	13-16

Appendix

Results of Program Review Project Survey	A1-A13
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Project Background

As Unity Ministries throughout the Great Lakes Region develop and implement programs to support the spiritual development of children, youth, and young adult's successes are achieved, lessons are learned, and programs are improved.

One of the values of any regional organization serving affiliated local organizations is the opportunity to accelerate and support resource sharing, awareness of the best and most promising practices, and continuing education in support of that local organization. The Great Lakes Unity Regional Conference has established the Regional Education Consultant Program and has engaged the services of Regional Education Consultants to address that opportunity.

This project focuses specifically on the Regional Education Consultant Program and the work done by the Regional Education Consultants supporting local ministry success with kids, Uniteens, Youth of Unity, and young adults. The Project Team is grateful for the information provided by consultants Dave DeAngelis, Jo Horn, Eileen Patra and Diane Venzera and the commitment they have demonstrated to serving the needs of local ministries.

In establishing this project GLURC President Tom Wendt stated his expectation that the project would gather information from the Regional Consultants and those they serve and result in:

- Greater awareness of Regional Education Consultant program value and impact
- Identification of success stories to drive increased program support and use
- Discovery of program improvement opportunities
- Better use of resources
- Identification of opportunities to share resources among programs
- Identification of policies to support greater program success
- Better information to support program and budget planning

The Project Team also acknowledges the volunteer service of Michael Taggart who managed, coordinated, and compiled this report. Appreciation is also expressed to Judith Johnson for editing this report.

Program Review Project Team

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Consultant Focus: Next Generation of Unity

Regional Consultant, Dave DeAngelis

Next Generation of Unity

Unity ministries recognize that young adults ages 18-35 are seeking connection with a group their age. These young adults also are seeking a positive, practical and progressive approach to spiritual growth. In addition, the Association of Unity Churches, through the Next Generation of Unity initiative, has recognized that there is a critical need to improve the retention of young adult members 18-35 and to attract new members in that same age range. Also, a significant number of Unity churches find a low proportion of their members are in this age range. In short, this age group is underrepresented in Unity ministries. There are a wide variety of factors that likely contribute to this situation. However, one critical factor identified was that many young adults find that their church, or the church they visit, is not prepared to meet the needs of young adults in their age range or help them to build connections with others who are facing similar life challenges.

At the same time, there is a recognition of the need among local Unity ministries for support in building their capacity to more effectively plan and implement successful young adult programs that attract and retain young adult participation in their ministries.

The work of the Next Generation Unity Regional Consultant is focused on both needs.

Consultant Mission

To support the success of local ministries in creating opportunities for learning and connection among young adults seeking a positive, practical, and progressive approach to spiritual growth through the establishment of Next Generation Unity (NGU) groups.

Vision

The vision guiding the Great Lakes Region NGU program is the national goal that by September 30, 2012 there will be over 100 + sustainable Next Generation of Unity (NGU) groups and ministries affiliated with Unity churches in the seven Unity regions. The vision for the Great Lakes Next Generation of Unity efforts is that those efforts will be recognized for significantly contributing to achievement of the national goal.

Those Served by the Consultant

The Regional Consultant works directly with young adults ages 18-35 and the Unity ministries seeking to grow their spiritual

communities by increasing their programs for that age group. Anyone between the ages of 18 and 35 who is on a spiritual path will find participation in a local NGU group a supportive experience, particularly if they are seeking to walk that path with others who are facing similar age-related life challenges.

Consultant Goals

The goals of the work of the Regional Consultant are to:

- Increase the number of NGU groups in the Great Lakes Region,
- Increase the retention of young adults in Unity,
- Increase the capacity of local churches and centers to attract and retain young adults.

Major Consultant Activities

To achieve the above goals, the following objectives have been targeted for completion by 10/1/10:

- To host two NGU retreats (Chicago and Columbus),
- To create and fill a Youth of Unity (YOU) liaison position to help communicate with graduating YOU members,
- To create local NGU groups all around the region that connects young adults with Unity Ministries,
- To work with ministers in the region on how to attract, and more importantly, how to retain young adults in their congregations.

Young adults and local ministries learn about NGU groups and the assistance available to support starting new groups through the outreach of the Regional Consultant who uses a variety of means, including Facebook, and the web site www.greatlakesngu.com. Newsletters are also developed and distributed quarterly.

Two retreats have been designed to reintroduce young adults to Unity and promote the establishment of local NGU groups. An important focus is the development of strategies to reconnect former YOU members with Unity ministries.

A liaison position is being developed to promote continued engagement of former YOU members with local Unity ministries. A YOU graduate will be selected for this position in June, 2010. The consultant and liaison will be reaching out to ministers and providing information that will support the launch of new NGU groups.

The recent retreat, which was held in Toledo, created a lot of “buzz” about what is going on with the NGU movement. The Regional Consultant also spoke at the Unity Ministry in Ann Arbor in March and found a great deal of enthusiasm and support for the NGU movement. The retreat in Chicago at the end of March was also viewed as highly successful.

More than just creating groups, the Regional Consultant wants to raise awareness among as many Unity churches as possible about the creative, passionate young adults who want to contribute their talents and can make a big difference to any Unity ministry.

Service Improvement Efforts

Surveys are distributed at each NGU event to provide feedback that can contribute to the improvement of the work of the Regional Consultant and the NGU. Also, the Regional Consultant contacts local ministries to offer assistance in establishing NGU programs and solicits ideas on how to improve the effectiveness of the NGU initiative. NGU participants are actively engaged in setting goals and making plans for their groups.

Results

An NGU retreat that was held in Toledo, Ohio, in 2009 was attended by 13 young adults. The second retreat will be held in 2010. A training meeting was held with an NGU group at Renaissance Unity in Warren, Michigan, which was attended by 14 persons. Through March, 2010, the NGU consultant worked with three Unity ministries, Renaissance Unity of Detroit, Unity of Toledo, and Unity of Columbus, on a regular basis. The young adults involved with the meeting recognized that there was a strong need to create a group at Renaissance Unity and realized that it would take some work. A few decided they would step up and take the initiative and put their passions behind creating a group.

As Regional Consultant Dave DeAngelis said, "Ultimately we are creating the congregants, the teachers, the leaders and the ministers of tomorrow." Dave also noted that, "Along with others in the Next Generation of Unity we will carry the torch of the Unity movement and that is what we are doing with every step and every action we take."

Challenges

Often efforts to quickly connect young adults to service opportunities in the local ministry precede the efforts to help them to get comfortably connected in their spiritual community. Also, some local ministries are seen as more aware than others of the unique needs of young adults. Many ministries do not have focused strategies to attract and support the Next Generation group.

One challenge identified by the Consultant is that NGU has been dormant for a few years and many people are not convinced that it can be successful. Another challenge is how to make the most of the Internet as a communication resource to support NGU program development.

Consultant Focus: Uniteens

Regional Consultant, Eileen Patra

Uniteens

Uniteens programs serve the spiritual and emotional needs of middle school youth throughout the Great Lakes Region. As programs are implemented, there is a recognized need to improve the capability of Unity ministries throughout the region to serve the needs of middle school youth. The work of the Uniteen consultant addresses both needs.

The Regional Consultant provides training and support for Uniteen Leaders and Youth Directors who work with this age group throughout the region. Additionally, the Consultant strives to provide networking opportunities for the adult volunteers and opportunities to build lasting, healthy friendships for the youth.

The Regional Consultant provides support for events and workshops. The Consultant also provides resources that support the middle school youth experience in Unity and encourages the youth to continue their involvement in Unity through their teen years and into adulthood.

Consultant Mission

To promote the spiritual growth of middle school youth and build the capacity of Unity Ministries to support that growth.

Vision

Unity Ministries in the Great Lakes Region will be widely known for their strong and growing middle school age youth programs. The Youth and the programs that serve them within every Unity ministry will be highly valued. Youth Ministry will be a clearly stated part of the vision and mission statement of each local ministry.

Those Served by the Consultant

The program serves Unity middle-school youth, Uniteen Leaders, and Youth Ministry Directors throughout the Great Lakes Region.

Consultant Goals

The goals of the program are to:

- Increase the number of Uniteen programs in the region,
- Increase the number of youth in the Region's Uniteen Programs,
- Increase the capacity of local ministries to attract and retain youth ages 11-13.

Major Consultant Activities

To achieve the above goals the following overall objectives are being pursued.

- To facilitate the planning and implementation of regional events,
- To provide program and curriculum-development assistance,
- To support local Uniteen events, service projects, and fund-raising,
- To provide advice and consultation to local ministries to support the establishment of new Uniteen programs.

Regional youth retreats (Unitreats) are an essential element to support the youth and local programs. These events enable youth to experience an environment of unconditional love while learning about Unity Principles. They also learn how to apply Unity Principles to their lives and their issues. The events provide a safe space for inner exploration and the building of social skills in a safe, Unity environment. The events also serve as a model to Uniteen Leaders on how to work with this age group and often inspire them to become more involved and more committed to their volunteer position. For adult chaperones who are not currently involved in the ministry, it often proves to be the inspiration for them to get involved.

Regional training events are an important part of the strategy to support the success of local programs. Two Regional training events are offered. These training events are specifically designed for Uniteen Leaders and the Youth Directors who support them.

Support is also provided through the Uniteen Leader/YOU Sponsor Forums currently being held in the eastern and western sub-regions. Support is provided for these groups by advertising their events through electronic updates and e-newsletters and by following and commenting on their online Yahoo discussion group.

Consultation is provided by phone and email offering support, guidance, and information on program development and in addressing special circumstances that require a customized intervention. Customized plans are developed as needed. Follow-up contact is made to provide any additional support and to evaluate the outcomes. Ongoing telephone and email support is available to all ministries.

Marketing and communication efforts include development and distribution of e-newsletters and website information, including downloadable registration forms for events and training programs.

Information is posted on the Uniteen website, including staff application forms and registration packets for the upcoming Unitreat. Conversations that take place through the YOU/Uniteen Leader Yahoo group are a source of information about the needs of the youth that can be addressed in program planning.

Those interested in receiving regular Uniteen information can join the email list via the Uniteen website (www.glruniteens.org) or they can email the Uniteen Consultant directly at epatra@gmail.com

Training, networking and consultation services are provided to the regions Uniteen Leaders, Youth Directors, and Ministers. Support is also provided for churches who would like to host an area-wide or sub-regional event for Uniteens and their Leaders/chaperones.

Training, networking, and consultation services are provided to the region's Uniteen Leaders, Youth Directors, and Ministers

Regional collaboration is promoted between Uniteens and YOU on a regional level. YOUers who have been participants at Unitreats often apply to be on staff when they reach YOU. Several have gone on to become regional officers in YOU. Feedback received indicates that Uniteens coming into YOU who have been active in these events are more comfortable in the YOU event setting and are more prepared to benefit from the experience.

Service Improvement Efforts

Program improvement needs are discovered through observation, event evaluations and general surveys. Decisions on services to be offered or changes to be made are determined in part by reviewing evaluations collected, face-to-face feedback when offered, and by return participation. Ideas for improvement are also generated by networking with consultants in other regions and by keeping in touch with current trends in youth ministry and teen issues in general. Evaluations from the Unitreats are recorded and summarized showing the actual scores of each program within the event and listing the comments of all participants.

Results Achieved

Unity ministries throughout the region are building their capability to implement effective Uniteen programs. Staff and volunteers that support local program are building new levels of confidence and effectiveness. The Uniteens are experiencing spiritual growth and gaining self-confidence and leadership skills. They are learning how to apply Unity principles in their lives, and they are discovering the value of service. They are participating in the full life of their churches.

Leaders and Youth Directors are finding new ways of working with the kids, and are being inspired and encouraged to continue their work with the Uniteens and turn to other Uniteen Leaders for support.

Challenges

Financial factors have an impact on the Unitreats. The cost of the facilities continues to rise making it difficult for some participants to attend. Scholarships are sometimes offered as long as the ministry is also helping the student to attend.

Adult volunteers also have an impact on participation. For safety reasons, two adults are required to travel with the group and stay with the group. Sometimes it is difficult to find two willing adults from the Unity Ministry to accompany the kids to the event.

Another challenge that is currently being addressed is the decline in the number of 5th graders entering the program. This is an issue

that surfaces from time-to-time at different churches. It is evidenced by Uniteen groups who graduate a large number or percentage of their group at the spring Unitreat and then have few or no Uniteens to attend a fall event. A new training program addressing this challenge has been recently developed and facilitated.

As only two regional training events for this program are offered each year, it is imperative that ministers and youth directors encourage and support their Uniteen Leaders in attending Uniteen Leader Trainings, YOU/Uniteen Leader Forums, and other Youth and Family Ministry Conferences as available. Networking with other Uniteen Leaders, learning new skills, and being recognized by the ministry are key in helping leaders avoid “burn-out.”

Consultant Focus: Youth of Unity

Consultant Jo Horn

Youth of Unity (YOU)

There is an unmet need of youth ages 14-18 to explore their beliefs and understanding of spiritual principles, to learn how to apply spiritual principles in their lives, and to find a safe environment in which to question and discuss spiritual principles. There is also a need for youth to feel they have a voice and are a part of their ministry/congregation. Youth need to find connection with persons their age who are also seeking a positive, practical, and progressive approach to spiritual growth. Local YOU programs are addressing these needs with innovative quality programs supported by capable staff and volunteers. There is a recognized need among Unity Ministries to support the growth and effectiveness of YOU programs. The Youth of Unity consultant seeks to support that objective through the services being offered.

Consultant Mission

To promote the spiritual growth of youth ages 14-18 and build the capacity of Unity Ministries to support that growth.

Vision

The vision held for the YOU consultant’s work is that Unity Ministries in the Great Lakes Region will be widely known for their strong and growing youth programs. The youth and the programs that serve them within every Unity ministry will be highly valued. Youth Ministry will be a clearly stated part of the vision and mission statement of each local ministry.

Those Served by the Consultant

The Regional Consultant provides services to those who support the success of the YOU program for teenagers 14-18 years of age. This includes adult sponsors that direct and guide the individual church programs, parents, Youth Directors, and Ministers.

Consultant Goals

The goals of the work of the Regional Consultant are to:

- Increase the number of YOU programs in the region,
- Increase the number of youth in YOU programs in the region,
- Increase the quality of the YOU programs,
- Increase the capacity of local ministries to attract and retain 14-18 year old youth.

Major Consultant Activities

To achieve the above goals, the following objectives are being pursued:

- To facilitate the planning and implementation of regional events,
- To provide program curriculum and program development assistance,
- To provide adult and teen leadership training,
- To support local YOU chapter events, service projects, and fund raising,
- To provide advice and consultation to local ministries to support the establishment of new YOU Chapters.

Local YOU Chapters call upon the Regional Consultant for training and assistance to support the ongoing success of their programs. This includes assistance in gaining a full understanding of the vision and mission of YOU and the expectations for those who support the program. The Consultant also helps individual ministries set up Policies and Procedures for their programs and provides supportive information for both their adult sponsors and the teen participants. The consultant helps individual ministries coordinate and implement events at the local level and also at the sub-regional level.

The Regional YOU consultant, along with two elected teen officers, supports achievement of the program objectives. To achieve the goals, they provide services, support, publications, and training to facilitate visionary spiritual education, leadership, and ministry development.

The YOU website offers support and current information regarding activities, registration forms, and also provide lessons to support the individual program. The regional team sends out a weekly inspirational message to the sponsors and a large mailing list of YOUers as a means of weekly communication.

YOU programs provide the opportunity for participants to explore Unity principles and learn how to apply them in their lives in an atmosphere of openness, freedom, and unconditional love. They are able to discuss with other Truth-oriented teens the challenges they face growing up and becoming independent. They develop a variety of skills by helping to plan and implement lessons, service events, fundraisers, and social events. Their participation in Regional and Sub-Regional events where they can get to know other like-minded teens from other Unity Churches is extremely helpful and is encouraged.

Like any successful program there is a need for ongoing planning, staff training, problem solving, and continuous program improvement. The Regional Consultant provides assistance in all these areas.

The success of the YOU program starts with the individual ministries having an understanding of the importance of youth ministry, including a commitment to youth ministry in their vision and mission statements. Success is supported when a ministry has budgeted positions, such as Youth Director, to direct and implement the youth program and when the church leadership is knowledgeable of youth ministry.

Also, the Consultant contacts ministries that do not have YOU programs and provides information about how to successfully launch a program. If a ministry needs assistance with their individual program they can easily contact the Regional Consultant for assistance.

The Regional Rallies are important events that enable local youth to see that they are part of a larger community. This provides them an opportunity to connect with like-minded youth and adults throughout the region. The Consultant supports the success of these events.

Service Improvement Efforts

Communication by the Regional Consultant with the ministers, youth directors, and adult sponsors help determine the needs of individual ministries. Communication by the teen regional officers with other teens in the region also helps determine what may be the needs of the teens.

At the regional events, evaluation forms are used to collect helpful information to support program improvement. Also, “sponsor forums” are held at both Eastern and Western Sub-regional levels where the adult sponsors meet on a quarterly basis to evaluate the program and determine unmet needs and develop solutions to those needs.

Results Achieved

The YOU programs continue to grow in each ministry and new YOU programs are being established. There is continued improvement within the ministries of the quality of their individual program along with an improved understanding of the structure and intention of the YOU program. Improvement has also been seen in the communication within the region among the sponsors and teens through the weekly mailings and sponsor forums. More individual Chapters are taking on the responsibility of having Chapter-

sponsored events and including other Chapters in their area. Through the “required reading” for June Rally and support lessons provided, the Chapters are more connected in their program of study. There are now three quarterly sponsor forums in Minnesota, Michigan, and Illinois. These forums support needs of the sponsors. Improvement has also been seen in some ministries with the visibility of the teens in active service in the church by including them in service roles and participation in the Sunday service.

Challenges

As Regional Consultant Jo Horn has noted. “Our youth are the future of Unity. They should be viewed as congregants and part of the church. It is our responsibility to provide our youth with a spiritual based program to support them in their development at all levels - at the local level and also at the regional level.”

The success of any YOU program is largely dependent on the adult sponsors that direct and guide the program. There is a challenge with adults volunteering in this area because of a lack of understanding the needs of teenagers. There is a need to do a better job in individual ministries in educating volunteers about the program and helping them to understand teens and their stages of development. The sponsor role needs to be clearly defined before an adult enters the program, along with proper procedures of interview and background checks. Consistent review, support and accountability of sponsors within the ministries and a clear understanding that the YOU program is under the umbrella of the ministry and not a separate entity are seen as very important. This is helped with a Youth Director overseeing the program. If there is no Youth Director then either the Minister or Board Member needs to be in consistent communication with the YOU sponsors to ensure the success of the program.

A strong relationship between the Minister and Board Members with the YOU Program is essential. Most teens know very little about the leadership of their church and have little communication/contact with them. Youth are the future of Unity and need to know they are an important part of their church. YOU sponsors are volunteers and need parent support with the many responsibilities of their position and parents can be a vital part of this.

Financial support for the program and events is critical. The YOU program needs to be informed as to what their budget is. Established fund-raising activities for the year can include congregants and possible community involvement. For the regional and sub-regional retreats, a clear understanding on how those costs will be met through church support and fund-raising is key.

Consultant Focus: Children's Programs

Regional Consultant, Diane Venzera

Children's Program

There is an on-going need to support and encourage Youth Directors, ministers, teachers, leaders, and sponsors in developing best practices that promote the spiritual growth and development of children and youth. This is driven by the need to have high quality spiritual education programs within Unity ministries. There is also the desire to continuously improve the knowledge and skills of youth directors, teachers, sponsors, and leaders so that they are enabled to be more effective in the classroom and so that they have on-going opportunities to experience their own personal transformation.

Consultant Mission

To support the growth, development, and empowerment of children and the adults who serve them. To integrate the youth and family ministry programs into the larger vision of the entire church community so that it is one community working together, and to develop strong local leadership that will lead to the success of the local ministries and programs seeking to achieve those results.

Vision

To have strong, vibrant, and thriving Youth and Family Ministry programs in local Unity ministries that support the growth and spiritual unfoldment of children and teens, as well as, provide personal transformation opportunities for the adults who serve in these ministries. As a result of experiencing thriving youth and family ministry programs, the local Unity ministries have the opportunity to experience growth, prosperity and abundance and to extend their support beyond the church walls, out into the homes and surrounding community.

Those Served by the Consultant

This program serves the Youth directors, ministers, teachers, leaders, sponsors, parents and board of trustee members from local Unity Ministries.

Consultant Goals

The goals of the program are to:

- Advance the leadership skills of the youth directors and youth ministers,

- Increase the success of the spiritual educators in the classrooms,
- Increase the success of local ministries in attracting and retaining education program staff,
- Increase local awareness of best practices for planning and implementing successful education programs,
- Increase awareness in the church community that children and teens are members of the current congregation, and the programs created are there for their spiritual learning and life skills development.

Major Activities

To achieve the above goals, the following objectives are being pursued:

- To provide opportunities for leadership development for the directors and youth ministers,
- To provide training for ministers, board members, teachers, leaders, and sponsors to support implementation of quality spiritual education programs,
- To provide easy access to training materials and curriculum resources.

Ministries across the region learn about the services of the Regional Consultant through phone calls, direct e-mail, a website, an electronic newsletter, announcements of upcoming trainings made at every training session held, and by signing up for e-links and Educationlinks services provided by the Association of Unity Churches . Ministry updates received from the Association of Unity Churches enable the Consultant to keep track of leadership changes within the region.

A wide variety of resources and support services are provided to support the success of local ministries in planning, implementing, and improving spiritual education programs. These include information made available on the website and through the electronic newsletter, workshops, trainings, e-mail support, phone support.

Every person attending a training program receives an extensive manual of information and resources to support their success. Each training is highly interactive and designed so that participants have the opportunity to practice some of what they have learned during the training class.

A continuing effort is made to stay in touch with the needs and expectations of those being served. Local ministries are encouraged to communicate their needs by phone and email. This information is used in the design and development of training programs and in the delivery of other services.

Service Improvement Efforts

Information is gathered from those receiving services and those interested in services. This information indicates that those who receive services expect the support and training offered to reflect current best practices that will enable them to create and support thriving ministries in their own churches.

Personal support to deal with very specific issues in a particular ministry is also an important need. Everyone is encouraged to continue on their own path of personal growth and make good use of the training they receive.

Information received from individual feedback and survey responses is used to add new training offerings and modify existing ones. Research by the Consultant on cutting-edge resources and best practices also results in changes to the program offering.

Factors determined to support the success of youth ministry include support of the youth ministry staff/programs by the ministers and boards, the knowledge level of Ministers about the needs of the youth ministry program, and the presence of trained and empowered leaders.

Factors that inhibit the success of youth ministry are church leadership or staff who do not pass resource information on to their youth leaders, lack of appropriate financial support for the youth ministry programs, lack of education in ministerial school regarding the needs of youth ministry, and ministry leaders who allow fear to guide them in their decisions regarding youth and family ministry.

Results Achieved

There have been nine trainings offered in 2009 and 2010 with 10 to 30 people attending each. Each training serves from 3 to 6 churches. One purpose of the training is to train the Youth Director so that they can in turn train their teachers so the information can be shared with others.

Records indicate that the electronic newsletter that details available resources is opened by 50-60% of recipients. It is estimated that 60-75% of Unity Ministries in the Great Lakes Region have used the services provided. Feedback received from those accessing the available resources indicates those youth ministry programs and their leadership are stronger and more effective. More youth ministry directors/teachers are entering into the Certified Spiritual Education program. Personal spiritual growth of the directors & leaders is reported.

The more the youth ministry directors and teachers practice what is shared, the sooner they achieve results. Support of the directors/teachers by the ministers and their Boards is essential to the success of the programs.

Challenges

Ministers and Boards must encourage participation and provide some financial support. Support of the directors/teachers by the Minister and Board is essential to the success of the programs. One challenge is that many ministers seem to be overwhelmed by the responsibilities of adult ministry. As a result children and youth programs receive more limited attention. Helping the adult congregation understand how essential youth and family ministry is to the health of their community is also needed.