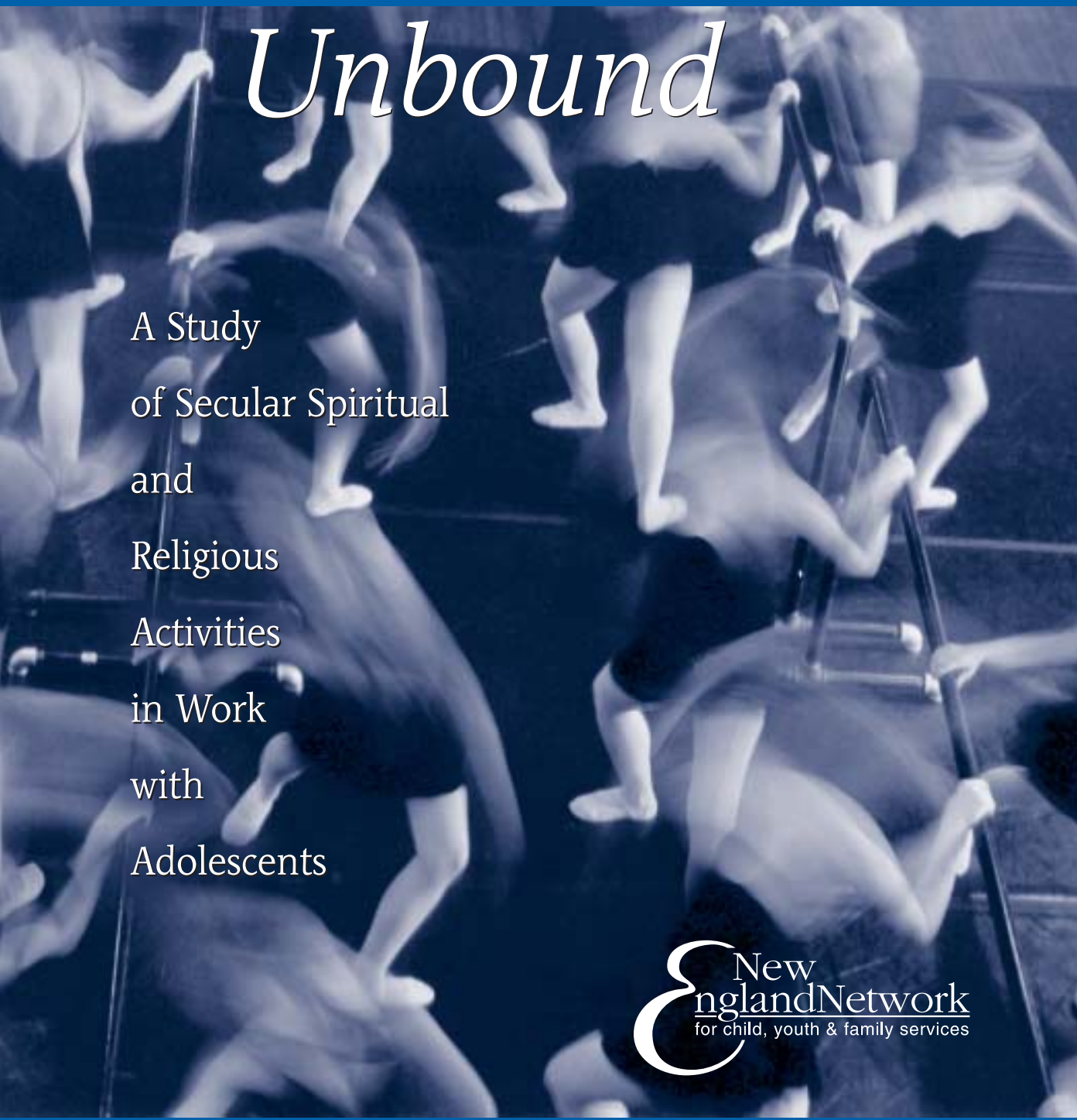
Practice Unbound



A Study of Secular Spiritual and Religious Activities in Work with Adolescents

New EnglandNetwork for child, youth & family services

Melanie Wilson

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Melanie Wilson, M.S.W., is Director of Research and Public Policy at New England Network for Child, Youth & Family Services.

Executive Summary

Spirituality, and the therapeutic use of spiritual practices, is a topic of increasing interest in society. It is thus not surprising that spiritually oriented activities have been adopted by many social service providers as a means of helping troubled individuals cope effectively with their problems. However, a lack of knowledge about the use of such activities in treatment settings has stymied the development of this emerging area of practice. This study seeks to identify and measure the kinds of spiritually oriented activities, both secular and religious, social service providers use with adolescent clients ages 12 to 21. In lengthy interviews with 191 agencies throughout the United States working with a variety of youth populations, the study asked about the use of sixteen activities defined as spiritual in orientation.

For the purposes of this study, spiritual activities were those that were explicitly intended to enhance clients' sense of awareness, wholeness and well-being, and help them tap into sources of inner strength. Spiritual activities in this study encompass both secular and religious practices. The secular activities measured were: education about spirituality; meditation; guided relaxation/visualization; yoga; musical expression; martial arts; 12-step groups; and secular rites-of-passage programming. The religious activities measured were: prayer/Bible groups; clergy programs; religious counseling; religious instruction; and religious rites-of-passage rituals. The study also asked about agencies' policies on offering clients rides to worship services, allowing clients to attend church with staff members, and allowing staff to initiate conversations about religion with clients.

Detailed information was collected on each activity that interviewees named. Analysis of the data shows that over half of youth-serving agencies use one or more secular activities with clients, and a smaller percentage use one or more religious activities. Secular activities tend to be newer to agencies than religious ones, and tend also to have been adopted for clinical reasons; religious activities have generally been offered longer, and in many cases were adopted primarily because they accorded with the religious mission of the agency. Faith-based agencies are more likely to offer religious activities, but less likely to offer secular activities, than non-faith-based agencies. Regions of the country showed marked differences in the use of secular activities, with lowest rates of use in the Midwest and South. Differences between regions were not as apparent in the use of religious activities. Executive-level and direct-service staff tend to be highly supportive of the activities their agencies offer, whether those activities are religious or secular, though some resistance to religious activities was evident among direct-service staff.

Agencies offered remarkably consistent testimony about the benefits of

the activities for their clients: almost regardless of the particular activity in question, spiritually oriented practices were thought to help youth relax, manage their anger, and think constructively about their lives. Agencies generally reported high levels of interest in developing or expanding spiritual programming, but only of the type – secular or religious – that they already offer or philosophically endorse. Agencies indicated that their two greatest needs in developing such programming were training and funding.

Introduction

In July 2000, New England Network for Child, Youth & Family Services convened a focus group of youth-service providers to talk about a topic of increasing interest to our field: spirituality. As a training and research organization deeply interested in the intersection of practice and policy, we had attended workshops on spiritual practice, heard endorsements (and some denunciations) of it, watched as a national debate unfolded about its role in social services. Obviously some change was underway in the field's collective thinking on this topic – but what change, exactly? We hoped our focus group could help us find some answers.

And so we simply asked. What, we wanted to know, were they – a dozen professionals, all working with troubled teenagers – doing with spiritual programming in their agencies? We didn't define our terms, letting "spirituality" mean whatever they interpreted it to mean. And perhaps for that reason, they said nothing. There was only confused silence.

Finally, with a bit of prompting and a few examples of what might constitute spiritual programming, they warmed to the topic. One program director described a drumming group his agency had begun the year before; another talked about the yoga classes her program organizes for adolescent clients. Feeling emboldened to broach religion, one administrator offered that his secular agency had started a weekly prayer group led by a volunteer pastor. Another participant said that his independent living program didn't offer religious instruction per se, but taught comparative religion as social knowledge that its teen clients could take into adulthood.

But as the group became animated and talkative, two women hung back. When questioned, they responded that their agencies didn't like the whole topic of spirituality. It suggested the potential for abuse, or at least for the imposition of personal belief systems on teenagers too vulnerable and needy to make up their own minds. Religious or secular, spiritual activities were strictly taboo in their programs. "The word 'spirituality' isn't even something we let people use," said one of the women, a director of a shelter for runaway and homeless youth. The other woman, director of a teen drop-in center, nodded. "This spirituality stuff is just the latest fad," she said. "It'll pass like everything else."

Would it pass? Should it? If within such a small group there was both great enthusiasm and great skepticism about the topic, what was the field as a whole thinking and doing about spirituality? If there was indeed a trend, what exactly did it look like? Who was doing what, where, and why? And how, and to whom? There were plenty of questions, but no readily available answers. Indeed, as we scouted around for information, we found that no one – neither academics nor colleagues – seemed to know

anything about the scope of spiritual practice beyond what they had heard. It was true that an emerging body of research had suggested the benefits of some spiritually oriented activities with certain adolescent subpopulations, and there was plenty of research on the impact of religious faith on both teenagers and adults. But there was nothing on the prevalence of spiritual programming in youth agencies, on staff or client attitudes toward various spiritual activities, or on best practices and models for agencies that did want to develop such programming. The trend toward spiritual activities – if indeed there was a trend – hadn't been explored or quantified.

The answers to these questions are what this study was designed to provide. Through interviews with nearly 200 youth-serving agencies around the United States, we gathered information on the use and implementation of a broad range of secular and religious activities that are generally thought to enhance spiritual health, and that have been embraced by many agencies for that very reason.

If the concepts at hand seem murky, they are. There is no universal definition of spirituality, as the scores of researchers who have ventured into this area of study can, and do, attest. Though we have done our best to strictly adhere to a commonsense definition of "spirituality" – defined in this study as those activities explicitly intended to enhance clients' sense of awareness, wholeness and well-being, and help them tap into sources of inner strength – we intend neither to identify all activities that might lead to spiritual development in troubled adolescents, nor to suggest that the specific activities we studied have themselves any particular benefit, spiritual or otherwise, for the adolescents who use them. Though, as we have noted, a growing body of research indicates that at least some practices have benefits for some populations of youth, questions of clinical efficacy can only be answered over time, and with more research. Our goal in this study was simply to take a baseline measure of the current state of practice – to understand the basics, as it were – so that professionals working with adolescents have a context for their discussions in this area, and so that future researchers have solid data against which they can measure growth or decline in spiritual practice.

Literature Review

The 1990s saw a small boom in research on the impact of spiritual and religious practices on health and emotional well-being, but little of it focused on children or adolescents. Some of the reasons are obvious: spiritual and religious experiences are difficult in themselves to define or quantify, and little practical research on spiritual development in children has existed upon which to build. Almost no research has evaluated whether spiritual activities of any sort "work" with troubled children, or how, if any are found to work, they could be implemented to maximize their benefit. Indeed, many researchers begin their studies of the relationship of spirituality to health by bemoaning the lack of previous research that might yield even so much as standard, usable definitions.

Considered most broadly, spirituality is that which gives a transcendent meaning to life (Puchalski, 2000). Yet traditionally spirituality has tended to be categorized as either religious or nonreligious, or drawing on elements of both (Saunders, 1998). Thus religion exists along the spectrum of spirituality, but as a more or less distinct discipline or set of practices. That separation is emphasized by the common notion that spirituality refers to a personal experience of the sacred; in this scenario, every individual may design his or her own system of beliefs, which in turn must be respected as legitimate by others. Religion, by contrast, involves subscription to a set of institutionalized beliefs that are practiced by many others as well (Holder, 2000). Whatever one believes about the relationship of traditional religious faith to spirituality, some common themes can nevertheless be found between the two: "spirituality," religious or not, is universal; is concerned with values, perspective, belief and affect; relates self, others and a higher being in some overall framework; and involves beliefs about transcendence (Shapiro, 1999).

Religion

With the relatively recent interest of clinicians and researchers in using spiritual and religious practices as therapeutic tools, new research has begun to emerge, most of it focusing on the impact of religion on health and behavior. A great deal of controversy has attended the question of whether religious faith itself can prevent some of the harmful behaviors associated with adolescence. That controversy continues regardless of ample evidence that children who grow up believing in God do indeed experience fewer of the problems typical of adolescence than children who do not. In an analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Resnick et al. (1997) found that almost 90% of American teenagers claim to "have" a religion. This rather surprising finding is supported by numerous other studies, including one by Donahue and Benson (1995) that reviews the literature and finds that American

adolescents are religious, that the percentage of teenage participation in religion tends to be stable from year to year, but that overall religiosity tends to diminish as youth grow older.

The impact of religiousness on particular self-destructive or "at-risk" behaviors varies, and in some cases is still in question. But a plethora of research has firmly established that religion tends to discourage two of the most consequential problems teens face: use of illegal drugs and alcohol, and engagement in early sex. In a Wayne State University study including both housed and homeless adolescents, researchers found that religiosity has a "significant stress-buffering effect" that protects against drug and alcohol use by teens (Ahmed, et al., 2001) The researchers concluded that "religiosity should be encouraged" in adolescents experiencing a high number of stressful events, and may be particularly important in reducing the likelihood of drug use among male adolescents. Resnick's study found that teens who considered religion important had later sexual debuts and were less likely to use drugs. Within religions, Catholics and conservative Protestants had later first intercourse than mainstream Protestants, and Muslim, Buddhist and Jewish girls were much less likely to get pregnant than mainstream Protestants (Bearman & Bruckner, 1999).

There is also evidence that religion helps adolescents adapt constructively to the adult world. A study of 4,000 tenth-graders in Iceland found that teenagers who participated in religious services and other religious activities were more likely to view the world as a predictable and logical place and were more willing to abide by the rules and expectations of society. The author found it particularly striking that the more supportive parents were, the more religiously active the teenagers were, and thus the greater the benefits of religious participation (Bjarnason, 1998).

A study in the UK found a significant positive relationship between frequency of prayer and perceived purpose in life among both churchgoing and non-churchgoing 12- to 15-year-olds (Francis & Evan, 1996). In a qualitative study of college students, frequency of prayer was shown to be related to identity status, with the authors concluding that prayer might offer revealing glimpses into the psychosocial lives of older adolescents, yielding information about their central concerns and definition of self (McKinney & McKinney, 1999).

For all ages, the health benefits of religion seem to be unequivocal. A meta-analysis of 42 studies on religion and health found that active religious involvement substantially increased the chance of living longer, even when factors such as race, income, education, obesity and mental health were taken into account (McCullough, et al., 2000).

An important proviso is in order, however, and it goes to the heart of the debate over religion and troubled adolescents. While the physical and emotional benefits of religious belief would seem to be firmly established, studies have not shown that encouraging faith in adolescents with no religious background is helpful in ameliorating their problems, or even in preventing problems from emerging. Studies show only that adolescents already indoctrinated in religious belief reap protective benefits from it. (Even in these studies, the directness of the link must be questioned. It could be that children become religious precisely because they are willing to conform to social expectations, a quality that would also make them unlikely candidates for drug use and other behavioral problems.) In any case, after-the-fact religious conversion as a tactic to solve behavioral or social problems is a somewhat dubious proposition; at the very least, its usefulness is unproven.

Secular Spirituality

The topic of secular spirituality – that is, spirituality not rooted in traditional religion – has received far less attention. Though many measures of spirituality have been devised, one of the most promising appears to be the Spiritual Orientation Inventory (SOI), which measures spirituality broadly, using nine subscales that focus on various aspects of interior development such as mission in life, material values, altruism, meaning and purpose, and sense of the sacredness of life. In a study of 183 teenagers aged 16 to 21, those who scored high on the SOI were more likely to report healthy ways of coping with crisis; in particular, they were likely to be proactive, hopeful and introspective, and less likely to engage in destructive behavior (Saunders, 1998). In another study of 141 teenagers at an urban, hospital-based adolescent clinic, those who scored high in "spiritual interconnectedness" on another scale were less likely to engage in voluntary sexual activity, especially if they reported strong spiritual connections with friends (Holder, 2000).

A qualitative study of 12 formerly runaway or homeless youth indicates that spirituality is also a personal asset for youth in trouble, and that the agencies that work with such youth should take spirituality seriously (Lindsey et al., 2000). "Over half of the young people in this study indicated that a relationship with a higher power was a significant factor in turning their lives around," the study's authors wrote. "Yet, only one participant said that the treatment program she was involved with addressed this issue.... Exploring and working with spiritual beliefs, which may not be religious in a traditional sense, can be a way of tapping into a youth's existing resources."

The studies with the most practical application, however, may be the ones that seek to evaluate the impact of specific secular spiritual practices on undesirable behaviors. Below are summaries of current research on the activities considered in this study.

Meditation

Among the various practices that might reasonably be considered to be spiritual in nature, transcendental meditation, or TM, is one of the best studied, though thus far, most researchers have focused on adults. Among research on children, a study in Iowa found that students in grades three to eight improved their standardized test scores significantly after practicing TM during school for a period of several months (Nidich et al., 1986). In another study, a small sample of 13- to 16-year-old boys on probation in Atlanta showed that those who learned TM scored significantly lower on pre- and post-test anxiety measures, while those who did not practice TM actually showed increases in their anxiety scores.

Several studies exploring the potential benefits of TM in prison populations find it a promising therapeutic tool, leading to "consistent and rehabilitative effects" on prisoners, with outcomes that include higher psychological and ego development, lower psychopathology, reduction in disciplinary reports and reduction in recidivism (Dillbeck and Abrams, 1987). Indeed, in a large study of inmates aged 19 to 62, TM was found to more consistently reduce recidivism than prison education, vocational training or psychotherapy (Bleick and Abrams, 1987). To date, however, TM's potential value for juvenile offenders has not been sufficiently studied to draw conclusions about its usefulness with them.

Martial Arts

Martial arts, with its ready appeal for many youth, is another area of increasing interest to researchers and clinicians. Here again, the activity seems promising as a therapeutic tool, with participating youth showing significant improvements in self-control and a variety of social skills. Karate, for instance, has been found to lower aggression (Layton, et al., 1993) and increase levels of self-reliance and optimism. Further, the longer the student studies and the more proficient he becomes, the greater those effects (Kurian et al., 1994).

In another study, high suspension rates and bullying in a Kansas City school were addressed through an intervention that included a martial arts program called "Gentle Warriors." The program taught martial arts techniques and philosophies, coping skills, meditation, and self-control. The martial arts instructor also read stories relating to the Bushido Code, which emphasizes respect and compassion. Mentorship programs, parenting classes and hallway posters were used as well. After 18 months, suspension at the school dropped 50% (Smith et al., 1999).

Not all forms of martial arts appear to have equal benefits, however; several studies have attempted to differentiate the impact of traditional martial arts,

with its emphasis on respect and self-discipline, from newer forms stripped of that philosophical focus. In Minnesota, for instance, three groups of juvenile delinquents participated in a study of the impact of martial arts on delinquent behavior. The first group received traditional taekwondo training, the second a "modern" version of martial arts training with no emphasis on psychological or philosophical dimensions, and the third a control group. On two personality measures done before and after, the group receiving traditional taekwondo training showed decreased aggressiveness and anxiety, and increases in self-esteem, self-adroitness and value orthodoxy. By contrast, the group receiving modern training actually showed an increase in aggressiveness. The control group showed no differences (Trulson, 1986).

Yoga

Adjudicated youth were the subjects of another study, this one a first-time examination of the effects of yoga and meditation on adolescent sexual offenders. In this study, 14 adolescent offenders were trained in yoga, breathing and meditation. After nine months of practice, subjects reported that the program had had a calming effect on their minds and made them feel safe and rested, and that the program helped them to recognize and control their feelings. Most boys in the sample said they thought the training would help them avoid re-offending, and all said that they had continued to use yoga techniques on their own, even after the program had ended (Derezotes, 2000). In a controlled three-group study, Wolf (1999) found that mantra-chanting, a yogic technique, was useful in alleviating stress and depression, and other researchers have found that yoga promotes motivational change in substance abusers (Lohman, 1999). Yoga has been found to improve attitude and behavior, enhance communication skills, and decrease impulsivity in adolescent inpatients at a mental health center; it may also be of particular benefit to children with psychomotor deficits (Zipkin, 1985).

Guided Visualization

Guided visualization, an introspective technique in which individuals are directed to imagine themselves in a particular scenario, has been known for decades to improve certain physical and psychological conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorders, childhood anorexia, drug addiction, and academic problems. Less studied as an intervention for troubled adolescents, guided visualization was nevertheless the subject of a well-controlled California study examining its effect on clinically depressed teenagers. Here a control group of teens hospitalized for depression received standard treatment – occupational, recreational, group and individual therapy – while subjects in an experimental group received the same treatment but also participated in guided visualization sessions. (The sessions were held twice a week and, in them, subjects were asked to visualize a variety of standard scenes, including

one in which they were to picture themselves climbing a mountain, another in which they followed a stream to its source.) At the end of a month, analysis of pre- and post-test depression scores revealed that the adolescents who received guided visualization along with standard treatment had significantly improved, whereas teens receiving standard treatment alone had not (Briscoe, 1990).

Musical Expression

Music is finding increasing acceptance as a therapeutic tool in work with a variety of populations, including senior citizens, Alzheimer's patients, heart patients and prison inmates. Indeed, its seemingly powerful effects on mood, memory, anxiety and other dimensions of well-being have prompted scientists to investigate the impact of music at the biological level. New evidence, for instance, suggests that music increases blood flow to areas of the brain linked to motivation, emotion and arousal, accounting for the state of euphoria a favorite piece of music can sometimes induce (Blood et al., 2001). In the first controlled experiment of its kind, another recent study found that group drumming stimulates the immune system to fight cancer (Bittman, 2001). Still another study compared levels of energy and depression among individuals engaged in group drumming and those engaged in other group activities. The drummers were found to be more energetic, confident and elated, and more willing to take part in meaningful discussions with their peers (Segall, 2000). The effect of music on adolescents' behavior has not been well-studied, but some benefits have been reported. Michel (1985) describes using music – in this case, the promise of guitar lessons – as a way to build constructive therapeutic relationships with juvenile delinquents, and Darrow (1994) discovered that adolescents in an intergenerational choir developed more positive attitudes toward senior citizens.

Rites-of-Passage Programs

Rites-of-passage ceremonies or rituals, generally meant to mark the transition from one stage of development to another, often weave strands of religion and culture together, and can be potent transmitters of meaning as well as mediators of personal and community problems. While not yet well-studied in adolescent populations, research does suggest that, among other uses, they can be effective in helping teenagers overcome addiction. An evaluation of an adolescent substance abuse treatment program in the Northwest found that a rites-of-passage program that included gender-based rituals, myths, storytelling, and initiation rites had a positive impact on the coping skills and self-esteem of participants (Mason et al., 1995). Transmission of cultural values through rites-of-passage rituals plays an important though difficult-to-quantify role in reducing alcohol and drug use in minority youth. While more research needs to be done, studies to date have yielded promising results. In the mid-1990s more than 200 middle-school students on an Indian reservation in the Southwest participated in a

drug prevention program, one component of which involved storytelling and cultural symbols. The program was successful in lowering drug use, particularly among Native American males. Another study in Rhode Island found that strengthening cultural identification of Native American youth also led to decreased use of substances (Sanchez-Way et al., 2001).

Methodology

Spirituality and religion are controversial topics – at least insofar as their clinical uses are concerned – not only because people cannot agree on what the terms mean, but also because, used as separate terms, they imply mutual exclusivity. Many people believe, indeed insist, that one has nothing to do with the other, and that the two concepts operate on different levels and in different ways. This study does not take a position on that question. Instead it seeks to define the two areas in ways generally accepted by other researchers and then to identify common activities that fall into each category. The categories, as such, are not all-inclusive, nor are they meant to be. They simply satisfy the needs of the project by providing a framework for dialogue about the kinds of practices currently in use, by which agencies, and with what youth. This study is an attempt to profile an emerging trend, not to promote or defend any particular type of activity, either secular or religious.

Survey Instrument

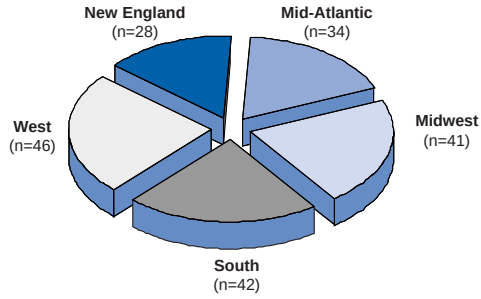
As shown in Appendix A, the survey defines "spiritual activities" as those activities that are explicitly intended to enhance clients' sense of awareness, wholeness and well-being, and help them tap into sources of inner strength. The secular spiritual activities we asked about were: **routine education about the spiritual self; meditation; yoga; self-reflection through guided visualization/relaxation; musical expression; traditional martial arts; 12-step groups; and secular rites-of-passage programs.** The religious activities we asked about were: **Bible or prayer groups; clergy programs; curriculum-based religious instruction; religious counseling; and religious rites-of-passage rituals.** We also asked about agencies' policies on **proactively offering clients rides to places of worship; allowing clients to accompany staff to staff's own place of worship;** and **allowing staff to initiate conversations about religion with clients.** (For definitions of each of these activities, see Glossary, p. 60.) The selection of these particular activities was informed by the research literature and by a common understanding of the state of spiritual practice in the youth-service field. As the literature review indicates, many of these activities have been found, to one degree or another, to be clinically useful with adolescents. In addition, the activities are generally well-known to agencies working with youth, and, in agencies that have embraced spiritual activities, are certainly among the most common and best accepted.

Study participants were asked a series of questions about each activity that their agencies made available to clients. Specific questions concerned the length of time the agency had used the activity; the primary reason the agency had adopted it; the percentage of eligible youth participating in it; the perceived importance of the activity to the program's overall goals; and the reactions to the activity of youth, direct-service staff and executive-level staff. Agencies were also asked to name any other activities offered to youth that were, in the agency's view, spiritual or religious in nature. Notes were taken about these additional activities, but the standard follow-up questions were not asked. Follow-up questions also were not asked about policies on rides to worship, staff initiating religious talk, and clients accompanying staff to staff's worship. Since these policies do not represent "activities" in the usual sense, agencies that allow them but offer no other religious activities on the list were not considered to have developed religious programming.

The Sample

Interviews were conducted with 191 randomly selected youth-serving agencies in 47 states, Washington, DC, and Guam. The sample was selected from 1,100 agencies on the combined membership lists of the Child Welfare League of America; Empire State Coalition of Youth & Family Services; Illinois Collaboration on Youth; Mid-Atlantic Network of Youth & Family Services; M.I.N.K. Network of Youth Services; Mountain Plains Network for Youth; New England Network for Child, Youth & Family Services; Northwest Network for Youth; Southeastern Network of Youth & Family Services; Southwest Network of Youth Services; and Western States Youth Services Network.

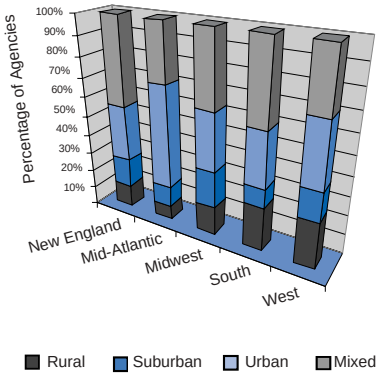
Fig. 1.
Number of Agencies in Sample by Region



Determined efforts were made to secure the participation of all agencies on the original sample list, and about 90% ultimately agreed to interviews. Replacements for the remaining agencies were randomly selected according to region. Public agencies were excluded from the study, as were those serving only children under age 12. All other agencies, regardless of specific adolescent client population and type of service, were included. All participating

agencies were promised confidentiality. Although there was, as might be expected, considerable overlap in the kinds of populations being served within and between agencies, about 19% of agencies reported abused or neglected children as their primary client population; 18% runaway or homeless youth; 15% at-risk youth and families; and 26% emotionally or behaviorally disturbed youth. The sample was skewed slightly in favor of agencies serving runaway and homeless youth because the regional organizations providing membership lists tend, to varying degrees, to concentrate on those agencies. (The decision to draw a sample from a diverse range of agencies rather than a narrowly defined subcategory was based on the assumption that, though adolescents may receive services in a variety of different settings, the youth themselves are substantially similar, with a core set of problems that are common to most. For the advantages and disadvantages of this approach, see Limitations, p. 57.)

Fig. 2.
Agency Settings by Region
(n=191)



The agencies in the sample were well-distributed throughout the country, with highest numerical concentrations in the West, South and Midwest. They were almost evenly divided between urban and nonurban settings, and both faith-based and secular agencies were represented. In this study, faith-based agencies are those that reported a formal religious affiliation with a church. Agencies with a tradition of religious programming but without a church affiliation were not considered to be faith-based. Details of the demographic characteristics of the sample appear in Figs. 1, 2 and 3. For a description of the regions by state, see p. 61.

Data Collection and Analysis

The survey was implemented between January and July 2001. Information was gathered by six paid interviewers, all of whom were experienced social service practitioners, trainers or researchers. Interviews were conducted by phone using a script, though interviewers were instructed to probe for additional information when warranted. Interviews typically lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Follow-up calls were made as needed to fill in missing data and collect additional details. Data was then analyzed via SPSS using

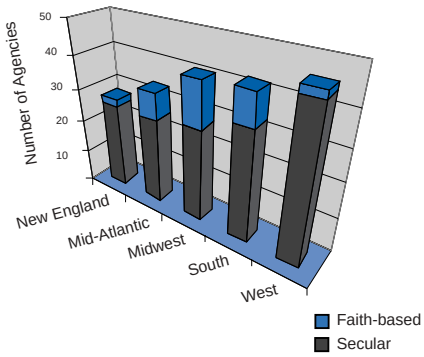
descriptive statistical methods. Where noted, statistics are based on the total number of programs, not agencies, offering an activity (many agencies offer the same activity in more than one program). Data was collected from up to three programs per activity per agency.

Key Findings

This study was designed to answer questions about the use of secular and religious spiritual activities in agencies serving troubled adolescents. It seeks to measure the prevalence of certain activities, and to discover details about their use: why and when agencies adopted them, with which clients they use them, and how both clients and staff have responded to them. It also seeks to describe agencies' plans about implementing such programming in the future.

The first set of findings presented below, "Trends and Variations in Use: Secular Spiritual and Religious Activities," looks at differences in the way secular and faith-based agencies use spiritual programming; differences in use between large and small agencies; and differences in use among regions of the country. The next two sections offer a detailed examination of the nature and prevalence of the 16 particular activities being studied, and provides illustrations of how various agencies have utilized those activities. The section ends with a consideration of the future of both secular spiritual and religious programming, focusing in particular on what agencies say they plan to do, and on what they say they must have if they are to achieve their goals.

Fig. 3.
Number of Secular and Faith-based Agencies in Sample by Region (n=191)



An important proviso is in order. Most descriptions of spiritual programming that appear in this section are positive in tone. In a sense, this should not be surprising; agencies might be expected to be enthusiastic about any activity, spiritual or otherwise, they choose to offer their clients. Examples were not, however, chosen on the basis of agency enthusiasm. Rather, we selected vignettes for the wide variety of client populations and geographical

settings they represented, and for the richness of detail they provided. It should be remembered that, though many agencies are almost passionately committed to spiritual programming, others remain highly resistant to it. Those agencies' views are presented in "The Problem with Secular Spiritual Programming" and "The Problem with Religious Programming," both of which also appear in this section.

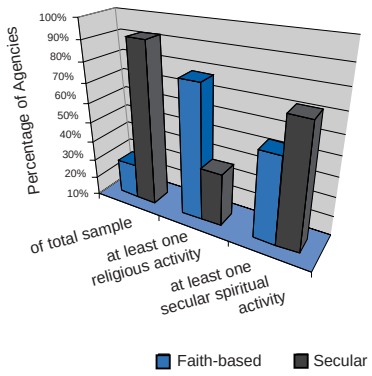
Trends and Variations in Use: Secular Spiritual and Religious Activities

Both secular and religious spiritual activities are common in youth-serving agencies, and are becoming more so. About 60% of all agencies offered at least one secular spiritual activity included on our list; 34% of agencies offered at least one religious activity. The majority of agencies already offering secular activities planned to offer more of them in the future. Fifty percent of agencies already offering religious activities plan more of them. (See "Outlook for Secular Spiritual Programming" and "Outlook for Religious Programming," p. 56.)

Secular and faith-based agencies differ in their use of secular and religious activities. Secular agencies are more likely than faith-based ones to offer secular spiritual activities, though, depending on the activity, differences are often small. The use of religious activities is far less balanced. They are common, though by no means universal, in faith-based agencies, but much more limited in secular ones (see Figs. 4 and 5).

A trend toward the use of at least some secular activities can be clearly established, but the trend is not apparent for religious activities. Many secular spiritual activities are clearly new to the agencies using them. For example, 71% of programs offering musical expression introduced the activity in the last four years; 93% of programs offering yoga likewise began doing so in the last four years. By contrast, only 26% of agencies offering religious counseling began the activity within that period; 50% have been offering it more than 10 years. The same pattern holds true for clergy pro-

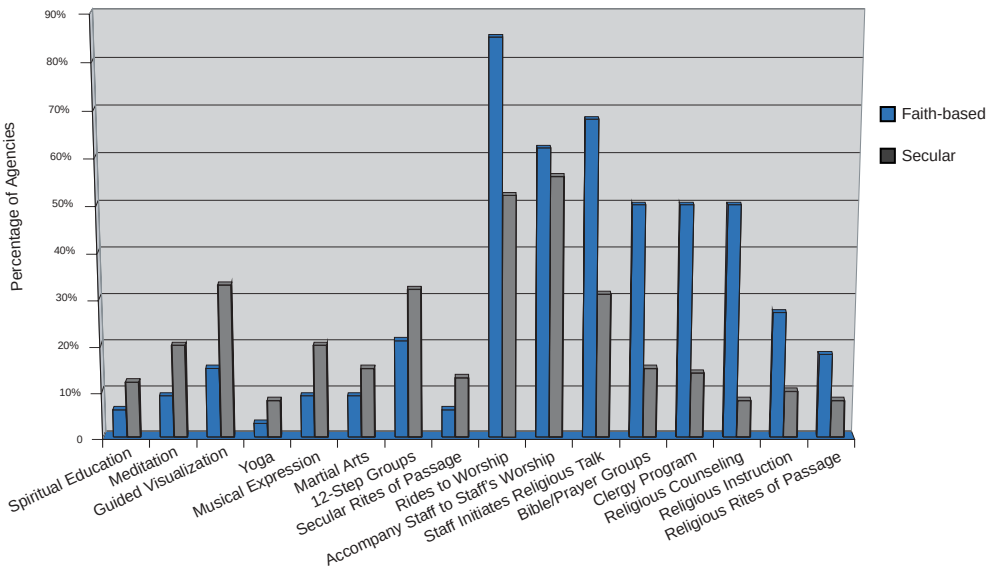
Fig. 4.
Percent of Agencies Offering Secular and Religious Spiritual Activities, by Religious Status (n=191)



grams and religious instruction: they tend to be old and well-established activities, part of the standard repertoire of the agencies that use them.

Secular activities are usually adopted for clinical reasons, but religious ones are adopted because of agency mission. Agencies tend to adopt secular spiritual activities – meditation or musical expression, for example – for the clinical benefits clients may derive from them. But agencies that offer religious activities – and particularly faith-based agencies – do

Fig. 5.
Percent of Agencies Offering Secular and Religious Spiritual Activities, by Activity (n=191)

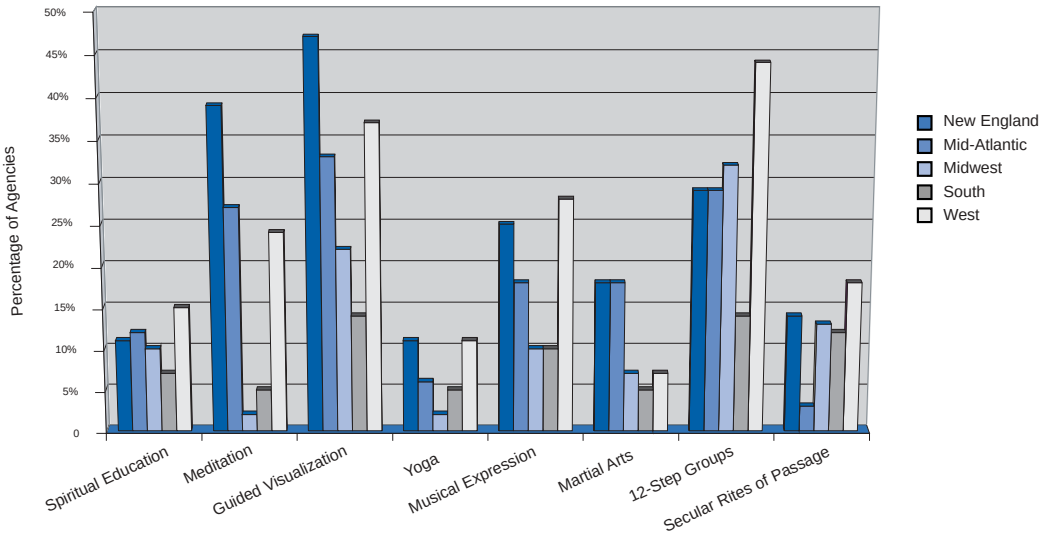


so primarily out of a sense of historical mission. Nearly 75% of all programs offering guided visualization did so for clinical reasons; 86% of all programs offering 12-step groups did the same. Conversely, only 31% of programs offering religious counseling adopted the activity for therapeutic benefits; most agencies offering them do so for reasons of religious tradition. It should be noted that often activities are adopted for neither reason, but instead because either staff or clients themselves simply wanted to try them. Thirty percent of programs using musical expression launched activity because of staff or client interest; 35% of programs offering prayer or Bible groups did the same.

Regions show wide variations in the use of secular spiritual activities. In a breakdown by region, differences in the use of secular activities were

sometimes extreme. For instance, 47% of agencies surveyed in New England offered guided visualization to adolescent clients; only 14% of agencies in the South did so. Twenty-four percent of agencies in the West offered meditation, while just 2% of Midwestern agencies did. Most secular activities, in fact, were more prevalent in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and West, and least prevalent in the Midwest and South. An exception was 12-step groups, which were offered in about 32% of Midwestern agencies (see Fig. 6). For a breakdown of regions by state, see "The Regions," p. 61.

Fig. 6.
Regional Variations in Use of Secular Spiritual Activities Among All Agencies (n=191)

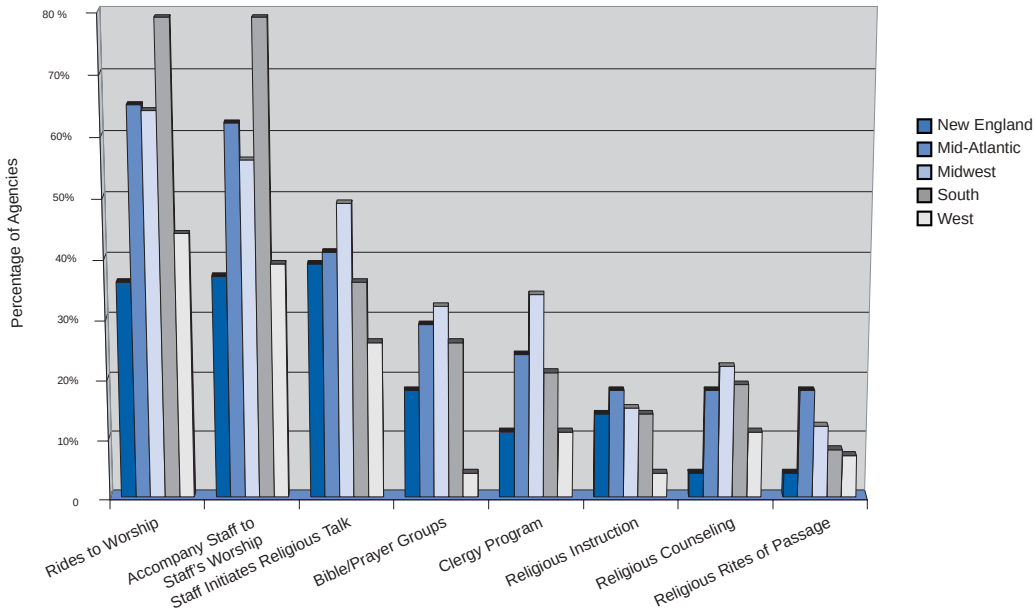


Regional variations in the use of religious activities were generally slight. Agencies showed less difference by region in the degree to which they offered religious activities to clients. The two exceptions concerned policies on offering clients rides to worship services, and on allowing clients to accompany staff to worship services. Both were far more common in the South than in other regions. All religious activities were least prevalent in New England and the West (see Fig. 7).

Religious activities, where offered, were voluntary for clients. Despite frequently voiced fears among secular providers that religious programming is almost by nature coercive, this study finds that religious activities in fact are almost always optional for clients. In a few agencies, the local culture so strongly supports certain activities that youth and agency staff accept them

without question; all adolescents in a Texas agency, for instance, go to church on Sunday, and do so as a matter of course, according to the agency. But no agency in our survey, this one included, made any religious activity mandatory. In fact, most agencies readily acknowledged that only a minority of teen clients eligible to participate in a given religious activity actually did. The percentage of teens opting to participate in prayer or Bible groups, for instance, was typically under 25%. The same was true for the percentage of teens who request religious counseling.

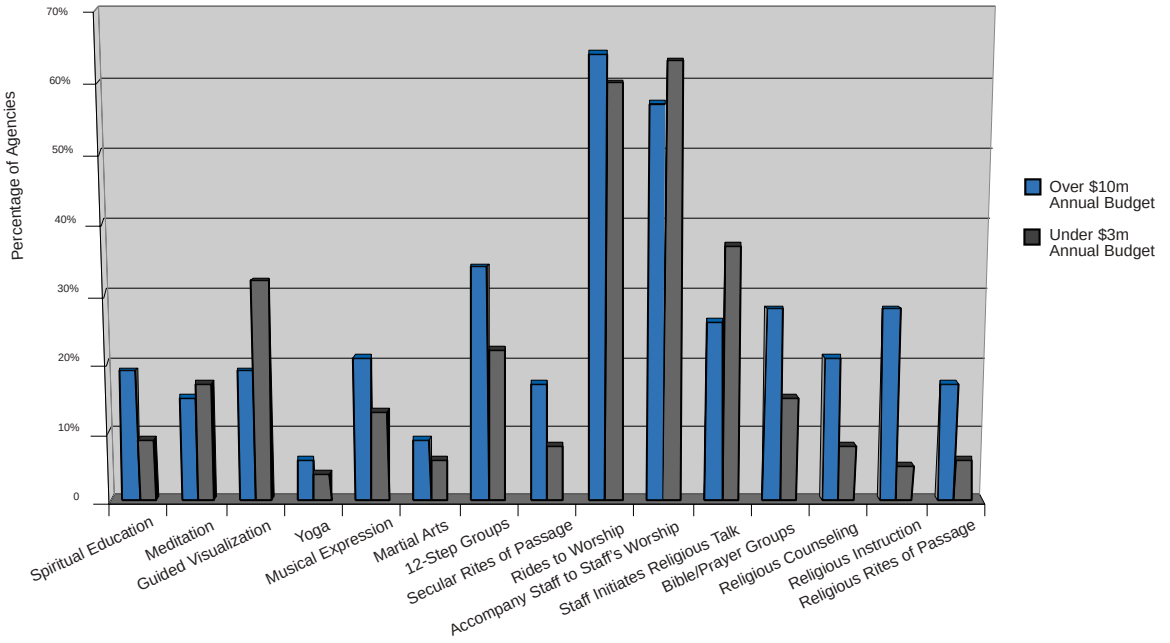
Fig. 7.
Regional Variations in Use of Religious Activities Among All Agencies (n=191)



Direct-service and executive-level staff tend to be highly receptive to most activities, both secular and religious, though some resistance to religious activities is evident. The vast majority of programs offering secular activities reported that executive-level staff were very receptive to them. Direct-service staff – the workers actually implementing or supervising the activities – were only slightly less receptive. For religious activities, receptivity was still high for executive-level staff, but sometimes markedly lower for line staff. For instance, 86% of programs offering clergy services said their executive-level staff were very receptive to the idea; only 46% said direct-service staff were very receptive.

Religious programming is more common in large agencies. In this study, the likelihood that an agency provided religious activities for clients increased with its size, with at least one religious activity offered by 22% of small agencies (budgets under $3 million), 34% of midsized agencies (budgets of $3-$10 million), and 55% of large agencies (budgets of over $10 million). The difference does not hold true for secular spiritual activities, which were offered in about 60% of both large and midsized agencies, and 51% of small ones. Fig. 8 shows differences in the uses of specific activities in large and small agencies.

Fig. 8.
Percent of Agencies Offering Secular and Religious Activities, by FY 1999 Budget
(Small n=78 Large n=47)



Prevalence and Details of Use: Secular Spiritual Activities*

Education About the Spiritual Self

For the purposes of this study, education about the spiritual self is defined as any educational activity, presented either one-on-one or in a group format, that is offered routinely to almost every client. What agencies meant by spiritual education varied, of course. Some agencies ran several-session groups to

*Statistics appearing in the sections "Prevalence and Details of Use: Secular Spiritual Activities" and "Prevalence and Details of Use: Religious Activities" are drawn from a sample of 191 agencies in 47 states, Washington, DC and Guam. Within each section, statistics from "How Long Offered" through "Funded" are drawn from all programs, not agencies, offering the activity in question. (Many agencies offer the same activity in more than one program.) Data was collected from up to three programs per activity per agency. Due to missing data and rounding of statistics, some charts do not total 100.

explore concepts of wholeness and spiritual wellness, while others had adopted overall clinical approaches that themselves tended toward spirituality. One agency with sites in four states has incorporated Nicholas Hobbs's spiritually oriented philosophy of care into its standard clinical approach and written new language into its client-rights handbook emphasizing client well-being and wholeness. A small Colorado foster-care agency relies on the theories of family therapy pioneer Virginia Satir to inform its work. For this study, though, we included only those efforts that were discreet, formal programmatic elements. Agencies that said they sought to create a spiritual environment, or that a spiritual element was always present but hard to define, were not included.

An Oklahoma agency uses spiritual education in the leadership development program it runs for gay and lesbian youth, saying it helps program participants to center themselves and reduce their stress.

Agencies: 21
Programs: 27

General Prevalence
Of all agencies **11%**
Of secular agencies..... **12%**
Of faith-based agencies **6%**

Prevalence in Regions
Mid-Atlantic **12%**
Midwest..... **10%**
New England..... **11%**
South **7%**
West..... **15%**

How Long Offered
Four years or less **33%**
More than 10 years **22%**

Reason for Adopting
Clinical/youth development benefits **70%**
Interest of staff or youth **15%**
Organizational mission **11%**

Response of Youth
How many participate:
70% of programs attract over 75% of eligible youth
4% of programs attract less than 25% of eligible youth
What youth think:
67% of programs say most youth find it beneficial

Receptivity of Staff
Line staff..... **63%** very receptive
Executive staff ..... **74%** very receptive

Importance to Overall Program
Indispensable **44%**
Very important..... **22%**
Moderately important..... **26%**
Occasionally produces positive results..... **4%**
Funded..... **4%**

- In Minnesota, one midsized urban agency launched a spiritual education program after conducting a research project designed to identify the factors that make families strong. The study looked at families of different configurations and ethnic backgrounds, but one of the indicators of strength that held true across the board was spiritual faith - clearly religious in nature for most families, but secular for some. The agency took its findings and used them as the underpinning of its "Family Strengths Program," which brings at-risk parents and their children into group settings to work on a variety of issues, including spiritual beliefs. Now the agency is making inroads into its local faith community by collaborating with churches in new ways; the agency has found that partners and funding are readily available.
- A 20-staff agency serving foster-care and at-risk youth in Idaho does spiritual education in a group context in its long- and short-term programs. The curriculum for the groups draws on the 40 assets for healthy youth development created by the Search Institute. The agency calls the groups very

important for its long-term clients and indispensable for its short-term ones.

- A large and well-funded Pennsylvania school providing free education and room and board to "socially needy" children between the ages of 4 and 15 requires all of its clients to attend student-led morning "devotions" in which students focus on issues ranging from community life to the self. Students are required to participate, and the agency believes that most of them find it useful. "It's a non-threatening way for kids to air their concerns or struggles."
- An Oklahoma agency uses spiritual education in the youth leadership development program it runs for gay and lesbian youth, saying it helps program participants to center themselves and reduce stress.

Meditation

Meditation is challenging for agencies, which probably explains why it is less popular than guided relaxation/visualization, a practice that is also meant to produce calmness and enhanced awareness. Unlike guided visualization, which uses tapes or scripts and thus requires little training to implement, meditation must be practiced and perfected over time; both teacher and students must be relatively good at it for its benefits to emerge. Nevertheless, many agencies do indeed offer meditation to adolescent clients.

A Pennsylvania school for 'socially needy' children requires all clients to attend daily student-led 'devotions' that focus on a range of topics, from community life to the self.

Agencies:	**34**
Programs:	**36**

General Prevalence
Of all agencies **18%**
Of secular agencies **20%**
Of faith-based agencies **9%**

Prevalence in Regions
Mid-Atlantic **27%**
Midwest **2%**
New England **39%**
South **5%**
West **24%**

How Long Offered
Four years or less **58%**
More than 10 years **19%**

Reason for Adopting
Clinical/youth development benefits **69%**
Interest of staff or youth **22%**
Funding became available **3%**
Other **5%**

Response of Youth
How many participate:
56% of programs attract over 75% of eligible youth
14% of programs attract less than 25% of eligible youth
What youth think:
91% of programs say most youth find it beneficial

Receptivity of Staff
Line staff ..... **72%** very receptive
Executive staff ..... **83%** very receptive

Importance to Overall Program
Indispensable **8%**
Very important **39%**
Moderately important **42%**
Occasionally produces positive results **8%**
Funded **6%**

- A small faith-based agency in upstate New York serving runaway and homeless adolescents and teen parents has offered meditation for more than 10 years in its shelter and long-term residential program. Most teens are willing to participate, and the agency says the activity has proven useful in teaching

introspection and helping clients manage their anger and impulsivity.

- A large multi-service agency in western Massachusetts offers meditation almost every day to women substance abusers and their teenage children. According to an agency executive, meditation is a "very important" piece of an overall program emphasizing wholeness and wellness, the thrust of which is to help clients "find out ways to relax that aren't drinking or drugging." The program's staff is trained in meditation, but they offer it because they want to and not because the agency encourages it. Indeed, of the many programs the agency operates, the one for substance-abusing mothers is the only one offering the activity.
- A faith-based agency in southern California providing shelter to runaway and homeless adolescents offers meditation tapes to youth who are grieving; the tapes help them relax and fall asleep more easily. Fewer than half the agency's youth choose to use the tapes, but the agency finds it so helpful for those who do that it considers the tapes indispensable to its program. A small foster-care agency in Colorado has observed the same benefit, saying its clients with histories of molestation also sleep better after meditating.
- A few years ago, an agency in Massachusetts began offering meditation to adolescent girls who were cutting themselves or who had attempted suicide. Although the agency did not adopt the activity for clinical reasons, and fewer than 25% of the girls take part, the agency nevertheless considers it indispensable for its ability to help teenage clients "feel more at peace."
- A small Nevada agency uses meditation in its residential programs for emotionally disturbed youth. According to an agency executive, the activity, which is offered a few times a month and is popular among the teens, helps clients gain control and "be more aware of their inner lives." A small family and youth crisis center in Wyoming also has begun offering meditation to emotionally disturbed youth, and considers it moderately important as a way to build compassion and self-esteem, and to boost the long-term success of clinical interventions.
- A community-counseling center in southern California offers meditation every day to adolescents being treated for mental illness and substance addiction. The agency launched the activity a few years ago when it learned it could collaborate with a meditation teacher from the community, and says that outcomes include increased concentration, self-awareness and self-esteem.
- A large school for mentally disturbed and neglected children in Pennsylvania uses meditation with its most acutely disordered teenage population. Over 75% of youth eligible for the activity choose to participate; indeed, the activity is so popular that youth actually ask to join in.

Meditation in a Massachusetts agency augments an overall program that aims to help clients 'find ways to relax that aren't drinking or drugging.'

Staff believe that the activity helps the teens calm themselves, and the agency is seeking funding to continue it. As clients' needs grow, the agency says that its commitment to spiritual activities will grow as well.

- A large Boston agency offers meditation in its program for teens with long histories of emotional disturbance and delinquency. It adopted meditation for clinical reasons, and finds that its primary benefit is in "getting young clients involved and engaged." It has also had positive impacts on anger and stress.
- A midsized community agency in Harlem offers meditation stressing breathing, positive thinking and progressive relaxation in its group for 13- to 16-year-olds who have been sexually abused or are in foster care. The agency started meditation because of a staff member's expertise, and says it has observed clinical benefits, especially in teens with panic disorders.

A Harlem agency offers meditation to teenage girls who have been sexually abused or are in foster care, and finds the practice especially helpful for girls with panic disorders.

Self-Reflection Through Guided Relaxation/Visualization

Of all the activities we asked about, self-reflection through guided relaxation/visualization is one of the easiest to do, which probably accounts for its relative popularity. It requires no practice, only a willingness to follow instructions and concentrate on the images and scenes suggested by the narrator, who in most cases is either a group leader or therapist. Some agencies also use cassette tapes that clients can listen to individually.

Agencies: 56
Programs: 65

General Prevalence
Of all agencies **30%**
Of secular agencies **32%**
Of faith-based agencies **15%**

Prevalence in Regions
Mid-Atlantic **32%**
Midwest **22%**
New England **47%**
South **14%**
West **37%**

How Long Offered
Four years or less **47%**
More than 10 years **14%**

Reason for Adopting
Clinical/youth development benefits **73%**
Interest of staff or youth **20%**
Other **2%**

Response of Youth
How many participate:
56% of programs attract over 75% of eligible youth
21% of programs attract less than 25% of eligible youth
What youth think:
75% of programs say most youth find it beneficial

Receptivity of Staff
Line staff ..... **74%** very receptive
Executive staff ..... **83%** very receptive

Importance to Overall Program
Indispensable **8%**
Very important **59%**
Moderately important **15%**
Occasionally produces positive results **14%**
Funded **8%**

- A midsized agency for boys in northwestern Indiana does both meditation and guided relaxation/visualization in the psycho-educational group it runs for its long-term residents. In this case, the two activities work in tandem, with guided visualization giving the boys a focal point for their meditation. Of the

two, however, the agency considers guided visualization both more popular and more important, helping the boys understand that they have control over their lives.

- A Boys & Girls Club in Massachusetts uses guided relaxation/visualization in five groups it runs for youth experiencing problems with peers, families and substance abuse. The agency considers the activity indispensable for its power to help teens develop better coping skills.
- A small Colorado agency teaches guided visualization to all of its foster parents so they in turn can practice the technique with the children in their care, most of whom have experienced domestic violence or molestation, or been delinquent. "It's utilized differently by foster parents; some do it regularly, some seldom. If the parents aren't very interested in it, it doesn't happen," the agency director said. For those foster parents who practice it, though, the benefits to the youth are important: empowerment and an improved ability to reflect on life issues.

A Pennsylvania agency uses guided visualization to train summer-camp counselors, saying it 'helps develop empathy in a population of kids who are not always empathetic.'

- A Pittsburgh agency providing programs for African-American families and children uses guided visualization not with its clients, but with the teenagers it trains to be counselors at the summer camp it runs. The camp is open to children from both regular and foster homes, and requires counselors who understand clients whose backgrounds are different from their own. In two training sessions, counselors are asked to visualize "the story of living in poverty, of moving, of getting evicted." The goal is to "develop empathy in a population of kids who are not always empathetic, and to help other kids come to terms with their own backgrounds."
- Though it is generally leery of secular spiritual activities, an agency in an Alabama city serving abused and neglected youth has recently begun guided visualization in two of its programs, including one for teen mothers and their babies. The mothers are young – one became pregnant at age 11 – and have a great deal to worry about, which often leads to friction in the group. Guided visualization helps reduce that friction. "It works well with kids if you can get them to stop, relax, and look at what's going on. None have homes, and they transfer their anxiety about that to others in the group. That's when you hear: 'She wore my blue jeans,' and things like that."
- A small agency for runaway and homeless youth in North Dakota uses guided visualization in a support group it runs for high school teens, saying it gives them "silence, and a way to get in touch with their inner selves."

Yoga

Yoga is a relatively uncommon offering in agencies working with adolescents, probably because it can be a demanding and physically difficult activity – and one that also requires a trained instructor. Along with martial arts, it frequently

was offered to adolescents cyclically, as part of a rotating program of recreational activities. Yoga and martial arts share another characteristic as well: both tend to be new to the agencies using them. Yoga in particular is a recent arrival; our study found only 14 programs offering it and almost all of them had adopted it within the last four years. No program had offered it for more than 10 years.

Agencies:	**13**
Programs:	**14**

(numbers were too small to provide all information)

General Prevalence
Of all agencies **7%**
Of secular agencies.....**7%**
Of faith-based agencies **3%**
Prevalence in Regions
Mid-Atlantic **6%**
Midwest.....**2%**
New England.....**11%**
South **5%**
West.....**11%**

How Long Offered
Four years or less **93%**
More than 10 years **0%**
Receptivity of Staff
Line staff.....**79%** very receptive
Executive staff .....**72%** very receptive
Funded.....**29%**

- A Connecticut agency began using yoga with its pregnant teens when a volunteer teacher from the community stepped forward. All girls are required to participate, and according to the agency, most find it beneficial. The program believes the bending and slow stretching helps to physically prepare them for labor and delivery.
- A midsized community agency in New York City offers yoga to clients in its all-girl after-school youth development program. The program, which typically attracts about a quarter of the girls eligible, finds that yoga fosters a spirit of "sisterhood" and a "sense of community" among participants.
- A Colorado agency makes yoga mandatory for its abused, neglected and runaway youth: it is a "calming factor" for teens "who are beyond the control of their parents." In fact, yoga has been so well-received by the youth that the agency intends to introduce other spiritually oriented activities soon.

A community center in New York City offers yoga in its all-girl after-school program. Yoga fosters a spirit of 'sisterhood' and a 'sense of community' among participants, a staffer says.

Musical Expression

Agencies reported organizing a wide range of musical activities for teenage clients, including drumming, religious dancing, humming, even drum-and-bugle corps. In this activity more than in many others, programming was sometimes sporadic; drumming circles, for instance, are often held once or twice a year, or restricted to special events or trainings.

Agencies:	**34**
Programs:	**38**

Musical Expression, cont.

General Prevalence
Of all agencies **18%**
Of secular agencies.....**20%**
Of faith-based agencies **9%**
Prevalence in Regions
Mid-Atlantic **18%**
Midwest.....**10%**
New England.....**25%**
South **10%**
West.....**28%**
How Long Offered
Four years or less **71%**
More than 10 years **3%**
Reason for Adopting
Clinical/youth development benefits **66%**
Interest of staff or youth **29%**
Other **3%**

Response of Youth
How many participate:
40% of programs attract over 75% of eligible youth
16% of programs attract less than 25% of eligible youth
What youth think:
82% of programs say most youth find it beneficial
Receptivity of Staff
Line staff.....**74%** very receptive
Executive staff .....**84%** very receptive
Importance to Overall Program
Indispensable **16%**
Very important.....**37%**
Moderately important.....**34%**
Occasionally produces positive results **11%**
Funded.....34%

'Our population can't afford weekly music lessons and a variety of violins as they grow. So we teach them to make percussion and string instruments from recycled materials.'

- A large Massachusetts agency uses group drumming for adolescents with emotional/mental illness and behavior problems. Staff find it increases self-awareness, manages stress, and is a useful alternative to aggression and a channel for self-expression.
- A large agency in southern California working with developmentally disabled children and teenagers enthusiastically offers a drumming class once a week that is open to clients from all nine of its programs. The class usually totals about 40, and kids are broken into smaller groups of eight or fewer, with a staff member supervising each group. The agency hires an outside drummer to do the teaching. The agency began the classes only because a staff member was interested in it, but now considers it a critical program element. "It's great for nonverbal clients, clients with language deficits, and for anger management," said a program director.
- At an urban New England Boys & Girls Club, youth from the community – both those with identified problems and those without – have access to a variety of instruments and play together. "They're energized by it; we see a rise in their self-confidence," said the club's director.
- Because of staff interest, a small Idaho agency began organizing drumming circles for its adolescent clients, most of whom are abused, neglected, or addicted to substances. The agency's enthusiasm for drumming was sparked by a training led by "a guy who goes around the world teaching it; the trainer taught different rhythms, some that mimicked heartbeats." The groups take place about every two weeks from spring to fall, when the youth can go outside and make all the noise they want. "The sound is incredible – trash can lids, paint buckets, everything you can imagine, are used."
- A large West Coast agency doing a wide range of work with gay and les-

bian youth runs a music program for runaway, homeless and at-risk teenagers. The program, which the agency calls indispensable, is supervised by volunteers and culminates in an annual talent show that works to build self-esteem and courage.

- Boys at a Hawaii agency perform prayer-like native chants before nearly every activity. Chanting is a critical component of the program because it instills cultural pride in youth who, with their histories of psychiatric disorders and adjudication, are the highest-risk adolescents outside of secure institutional settings.
- For four to seven months every year, the long-term adolescent residents at a large New Hampshire agency rehearse for a musical variety show that the agency produces annually. Performing before an audience gives the youth "a sense of mastery they didn't think possible." The agency has funding for its music program, and considers it moderately important to its overall work with adolescents.
- A small agency in rural Wyoming serving tribal youth runs a native drumming and dancing group for its long- and short-term adolescents, most of whom have been abused or neglected. The drumming, which is taught weekly by a tribal instructor, calms the youth, "makes them more interested in learning," and "helps them not be embarrassed about who they are." Agency staff occasionally take the teens to sun dances and bear dances as well – all, like the drumming, are a way of teaching them about a culture from which they have become estranged.
- An eight-staff agency in Philadelphia that provides a wide range of non-residential programming for African-American families has developed a cultural arts program called "Nia" (Swahili for "purpose"), a component of which has children and teenagers construct their own instruments. The program has given birth to a youth steel drum ensemble that travels widely for performances. The idea of focusing on music came from the agency's conviction that musical instruction is critical for children, but that clients like theirs are often left out of such standard childhood education. "Kids who can make their own music turn out to be very well-rounded people," the agency's executive director said. "But our population can't afford weekly music lessons and a variety of violins as they grow. So we teach them to make percussion and string instruments from recycled material." But teaching their youth, who range in age from 8 to 18, was harder than they thought. "We were hoping that by 16 they could make their own drums, but we were off. Kids don't have hammers, nails, or saws at home, and don't know how to use them." Thus the instruments the young people make vary in complexity with their age, but all require some facility with math to construct. The results have been astounding. "Kids who never thought about college before are doing it. Kids are thinking they could repair instruments for a living."

Tribal drumming calms youth, 'makes them more interested in learning,' and 'helps them not be embarrassed about who they are,' says a Montana director.

Martial Arts

In our sample, martial arts instruction was used in a wide variety of program settings and with diverse populations, including youth in state child welfare systems and court diversion programs, teens in afterschool programs, youth aging out of foster care, and emotionally or behaviorally disturbed youth. Even so, agency executives seem to be conflicted about the value, or even wisdom, of using martial arts with the troubled adolescents they serve. Those who use it are by and large sold on it as a way of building confidence and self-esteem; some others, however, laughed out loud at the very suggestion that martial arts could be appropriate for their adolescents. Typical was one program director at a small Indiana agency: "These kids are already dangerous," she declared.

A Kansas City agency offers martial arts to nonviolent male sex offenders and female delinquents in its long-term residential program. 'They love it!' the director says.

Agencies: 19
Programs: 26

General Prevalence
Of all agencies **10%**
Of secular agencies **9%**
Of faith-based agencies **14%**

Prevalence in Regions
Mid-Atlantic **18%**
Midwest **7%**
New England **18%**
South **5%**
West **7%**

How Long Offered
Four years or less **48%**
More than 10 years **8%**

Reason for Adopting
Clinical/youth development benefits **56%**
Interest of staff or youth **32%**
Other **8%**

Response of Youth
How many participate:
20% of programs attract over 75% of eligible youth
32% of programs attract less than 25% of eligible youth
What youth think:
92% of programs say most youth find it beneficial

Receptivity of Staff
Line staff ..... 88% very receptive
Executive staff ..... 88% very receptive

Importance to Overall Program
Indispensable **4%**
Very important **40%**
Moderately important **36%**
Occasionally produces positive results **16%**
Funded **40%**

- A Hawaii agency calls martial arts classes an indispensable part of the youth development program it runs in a low-income housing project. The volunteer instructor, who teaches classes of about 20 youth once a week, also acts as a mentor, following up on students who get in trouble. "I look at two of our high-risk boys, and they'd gone through some rough periods – early adolescent stuff. Now we see strong, confident young men, and I think it's a direct result of Matt [the instructor] being there for them. One of our boys was starting to fight, and Matt was just on his case. It's the whole package: He's on call to go to school, talk with teachers, anything." Now the agency says it will likely adopt other spiritually oriented activities for its teens. "We see the need to not impose control, but give kids a means to control themselves," the program director said, "and spiritual things can help with that."

- A large faith-based agency in Chicago working with emotionally disturbed children and adolescents offers martial arts to clients in its short-term and non-residential programs. The agency adopted the activity for its clinical value, and considers it an important component of both programs, though – as in many other agencies – its residential clients participate in higher numbers than do its non-residential ones. It also echoes other agencies' observations that the classes promote "self-control and focus."
- A faith-based agency in Kansas City has recently begun offering martial arts to nonviolent male sex offenders and female delinquents in its long-term residential program. The agency launched the classes, which are offered in cycles four to five times a year, when a volunteer teacher from the community came forward. Initially the agency was worried about the appropriateness of the activity. "There was a concern that kids would become more aggressive, but that hasn't happened," said the agency's executive director. More than 75% of eligible youth participate, and the activity is extremely popular among those who do. "They love it!" the director said. However, some staff members are still resistant to the classes, and the agency believes the activity only occasionally produces positive results.
- At a large agency in western Massachusetts, boys aged 12 to 21 in a state youth corrections program have been offered martial arts for over 10 years. Typically, all eligible boys choose to participate, and the agency believes that over 75% find it beneficial. The agency considers the classes moderately important – valuable in the same way that any other constructive, interesting activity might be – and not at all dangerous. "Nobody walks out of here with a black belt, busting bricks. The focus is on discipline," said one executive.
- A small shelter for runaways in rural Georgia recently launched a class in taekwondo. The class is taught cyclically by a volunteer instructor from the community, but the agency's executive director considers it so valuable that she would like to make it a regular, funded program component. Youth wear their own clothing for the classes, prompting the agency to add martial arts uniforms to its wish list. "We deal with a lot of kids who need a release of energy – positive energy. We thought it might develop aggression, but it went the other way."
- A small runaway and homeless youth agency in Maine has an arrangement with a local martial arts studio that allows its teenage clients to go to classes whenever they wish. Fewer than 25% of the youth who could participate do, but for those, the classes teach self-discipline.
- A community center in Harlem hires a martial arts teacher to work with youth in its after-school program. "They learn to focus," said an agency executive. "They're proud of their belts and look up to the instructor."

'Nobody walks out of here with a black belt, busting bricks. The focus in on discipline,' says one executive.

- An agency in Rhode Island contracts with an instructor to teach martial arts to 9- to 17-year-old boys referred by a local court for truancy and delinquency. Boys take the classes several times a week, and the agency says it has made a difference. "Kids do better across the board – academically, at home, in the community." Because the agency is unable to provide transportation for youth in outlying areas, the martial arts program is limited to one county.

12-Step Groups

The spiritual basis of 12-step groups, which require as a prerequisite that participants acknowledge their own helplessness against addiction and surrender to a higher power, is well-known, and the groups themselves are generally respected as a successful therapy for alcoholics and other substance abusers. In this study, 12-step groups were widely used for substance-abusing youth, and were far more likely to be mandatory for youth than any other spiritual activity, either secular or religious. In all, over a quarter of the programs providing 12-step groups made them mandatory, and although youth were reported to be less enthusiastic about the groups than some other activities we asked about, agencies themselves considered the groups to be among the most effective of all activities. The 12-step groups that youth agencies run are often adapted from the traditional Alcoholics Anonymous framework, with a special youth focus, adult speakers, or other features that represent departures from the standard model. Referral to outside 12-step groups is a common practice in most agencies, and does not in itself constitute actual provision of the service. For that reason, in this study we counted only those agencies that were committed enough to the 12-step approach to either host groups on-site or take affirmative steps to get youth to meetings off-site. Several agencies said that 12-step groups were particularly valuable for youth in care because the groups provide a safety net for clients after they leave treatment: the groups are easy to find in the community, provide ready support, and are free.

At a central Massachusetts agency, 12-step language was originally 'very problematic for the kids to get their minds around' and thus was modified with the teens' help.

Agencies:	**57**
Programs:	**64**

General Prevalence
Of all agencies **30%**
Of secular agencies **32%**
Of faith-based agencies **21%**

Prevalence in Regions
Mid-Atlantic **29%**
Midwest **32%**
New England **29%**
South **14%**
West **44%**

How Long Offered
Four years or less **36%**
More than 10 years **27%**

Reason for Adopting
Clinical/youth development benefits **86%**
Interest of staff or youth **8%**
Other **6%**

Response of Youth
How many participate:
46% of programs attract over 75% of eligible youth
19% of programs attract less than 25% of eligible youth
What youth think:
75% of programs say most youth find it beneficial

Receptivity of Staff
Line staff.....**87%** very receptive
Executive staff.....**91%** very receptive
Importance to Overall Program
Indispensable **28%**
Very important.....**42%**
Moderately important.....**22%**
Occasionally produces positive results.....**5%**
Funded.....**30%**

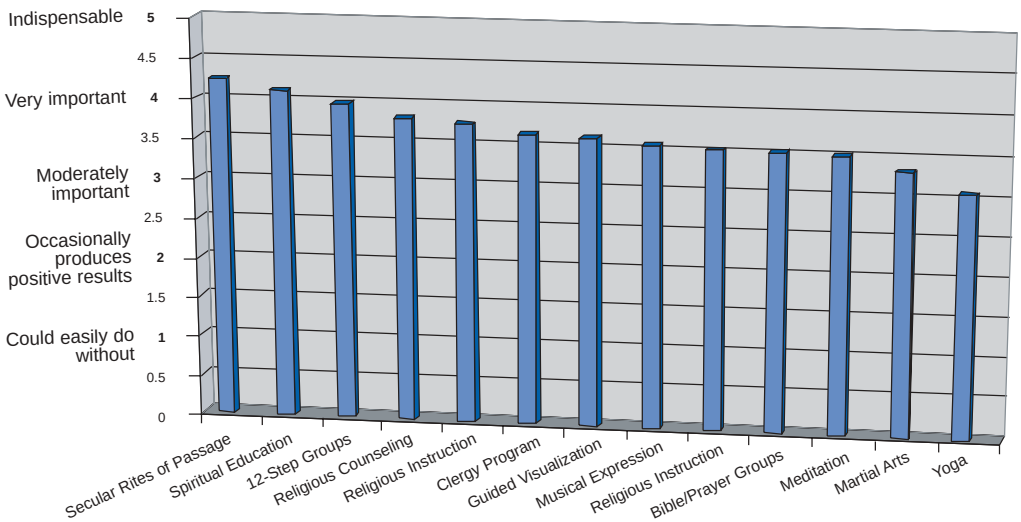
- A small agency in Montana for runaway and homeless teenagers makes twice-a-week 12-step groups mandatory for clients with alcohol problems. The groups become springboards for therapeutic talk within the program. "Most of the kids are dealing with alcohol or drugs, either with themselves or with family or friends," the agency's executive director said. "These kids love their parents – they have to learn how to detach with love. We talk about changing themselves, not others. We read through the steps and traditions, and talk about how we can make our lives better.... If they're having a problem with their attitude, we'll take the 'One Day at a Time' book, and we'll look up 'attitude' in the back." Despite her almost fervent belief in the value of 12-step work, she said she sees "no huge changes" in her agency's youth as a result of it, generally because of their limited length of stay. "In a short-term program, we're like farmers – we never get to see the harvest," she said.
- A faith-based agency in upstate New York has a new 12-step group for substance abusers and teens who have experienced violence. The program director says the group, which he calls indispensable, is adapted from the standard 12-step model. "It's not totally focused on an adult leader. The group runs itself. That's beneficial for the kids."
- A large agency in central Massachusetts makes 12-step groups optional for its substance-abusing adolescents, but for teens in its court-diversion program, attendance is mandatory. The 12-step language was originally "very problematic for the kids to get their minds around" and thus was modified with the teens' help, a program director said. Every group begins with a speaker – often someone from one of the local sober houses who is fulfilling a community service requirement. Before the group gathers, the speaker has dinner with the youth; inevitably, a dialogue ensues. "If that person is interesting, and the kids don't have other big distractions, they're very into it," the director said.
- A large, multi-service Boston agency offers 12-step groups to its long-term delinquent youth who have histories of serious violence. The groups "reduce recidivism with addictive behaviors and enhance social skills," and teach "self-control and discipline." For those reasons, the groups, which

'We read through the steps and traditions, and talk about how we can make our lives better. If they're having a problem with their attitude, we'll take the 'One Day at a Time' book, and we'll look up 'attitude' in the back.'

attract over 75% of eligible youth, are considered indispensable.

- Instead of taking a traditional 12-step approach, a midsized Tucson agency offers the "Seven Challenges" program, which, like the 12-step program, focuses on personal responsibility, but drops the "higher power" language in favor of an emphasis on rationality and decision-making. The program's curriculum was written by a pediatrician with the input of adolescents, and asks youth to open up and talk honestly about their drug use, and to examine the relationship between drug use and problems in other areas of their lives. Even though the groups are voluntary for the agency's substance-abusing youth, staff nonetheless consider them critically important.

Fig. 9.
Importance of Secular Spiritual and Religious Activities Among Agencies Offering Them, as Reported by Staff



Secular Rites-of-Passage Programs

Some rites-of-passage programs are oriented around a curriculum: adventure-based programs that last six weeks, for instance, or groups for young men that meet for several months and culminate in a planned celebration. Often, however, agencies celebrate transitions in teenage clients' lives more informally, with parties marking a first prom, a first job, a new driver's license. Only particularly elaborate celebrations, or ones that were a planned and integral part of a program, were included in this study.

Agencies:	**23**
Programs:	**23**

General Prevalence
Of all agencies **9%**
Of secular agencies.....**13%**
Of faith-based agencies **6%**
Prevalence in Regions
Mid-Atlantic **3%**
Midwest.....**12%**
New England.....**14%**
South **12%**
West.....**17%**
How Long Offered
Four years or less **29%**
More than 10 years **17%**

Reason for Adopting
Clinical/youth
development benefits **65%**
Interest of staff or youth **17%**
Response of Youth
How many participate:
78% of programs attract over 75% of eligible youth
Receptivity of Staff
Line staff.....**78%** very receptive
Executive staff .....**78%** very receptive
Importance to Overall Program
Indispensable **30%**
Very important.....**39%**
Moderately important.....**13%**
Funded.....**22%**

- The New Hampshire campus of a multi-site regional agency has developed a rites-of-passage program based on normative culture philosophy, which recognizes that individuals need to belong to groups. In the shelter, youth can achieve senior resident status, and thereby assume a leadership role. "Ace of the Week" is an award granted to the youth doing particularly well in work/chore groups. Winners get their names posted, are allowed to request special items on the menu, and take a role in co-facilitating groups. The rites-of-passage program is a way of providing goals and rewarding those who achieve them, and is indispensable to the agency's work.
- A suburban Pennsylvania agency for adjudicated foster care youth makes its elaborate rites-of-passage program mandatory for all clients. The program, which is fully integrated into the agency's overall work, provides a ladder for advancement toward an ultimate goal: independence. Indeed, everything the agency does in all programs is designed to lead up to a point – called "the career phase" - where clients can begin to do activities on their own. From a youth's entry into the program, a developmental plan is outlined and all work, whether in school or in a group context, is kept in a book. When the youth feels he or she is ready, and the group and developmental team agree, an enormous celebration takes place in which the entire agency recognizes the youth's ascendance to a new level of maturity. The program is considered indispensable for youth, helping them "monitor their own growth, take responsibility for themselves, and give them something concrete to hold onto."
- A midsized Chicago agency works in dozens of public schools, where it focuses on youth in gangs and on teens having academic or family problems. The program's rites-of-passage work is integrated into its

As the boys in a Hawaii agency move through the program, they also move physcially closer to the sea, to 'voyaging houses' where they can earn the right to participate in canoe or sailing trips between islands.

youth leadership and community service programs. The passages component has youth talking about family history and cultural identity, and recognizing benchmarks in their own lives.

- A midsized agency in Miami recently was awarded a grant to continue running the rites-of-passage component of its after-school program. The program, which serves 25 youth at a time, draws on African-American heritage, and includes drumming and arts.
- A small Texas agency offers an elaborate version of a common rites-of-passage ritual: a ceremony for youth exiting the program. There youth can "express their feelings and hug each other," the agency's director said. "They've moved on so many times without having the chance to grieve, forgive and be forgiven." The ceremony is mandatory for youth, and is a key component of the program. A Minnesota agency has a similar idea: when a teenager is ready to transition out of its drop-in program for at-risk youth, the agency throws a big party with food, live music and testimonials. Most eligible teens choose to have the party, and the agency calls the celebrations very important to its overall program.
- A Hawaii agency for boys has designed a program – called Kailana, or "calm seas" – that is structured as a series of challenges that clients must meet on their way to graduation. As the boys – they are between 14 and 18 years old, and typically are receiving comprehensive treatment for mental health and education issues – move through the program, they also move physically closer to the sea, to "voyaging houses" at which they can earn the right to participate in canoe or sailing trips between islands. At the end of the program they move again, this time to the "House of Change," where they work toward reintegration into the community.

Other Secular Spiritual Activities

Some of the most interesting spiritually oriented activities agencies offered their teenage clients, and the ones they themselves felt most proud of, fell outside the categories we had established. Some of these efforts included dance/music/poetry programs, journaling, mentorship programs and animal companion programs. Many agencies turn to geographic or cultural assets to help their adolescent clients develop a sense of spiritual strength: An agency in California incorporates Aztec teachings into its work with Hispanic clients; others tap into the richness of African-American history through cultural celebrations. Some other activities are described below.

- A community center in New York hosts "dream fairs" in schools as a foil to traditional science fairs. "In large school districts kids are intimidated

Secular Spiritual Programming: One Agency's Experience

Of all the agencies interviewed for this study, those offering residential services with schools on site were the most likely to have developed spiritual programming. One such agency in rural Pennsylvania – founded in the early 1900s as an orphanage for girls, but now serving youth of both sexes who are emotionally disturbed or who have been abused or neglected – offers an unusually elaborate smorgasbord of spiritually oriented activities. Youth in its residential and day treatment programs get education about spirituality as part of the standard curriculum. Teens in three long-term residential programs – the most disturbed youth the agency treats – are offered meditation several times a week, and many find the experience so beneficial that they ask to take part. Those teens also may attend 12-step groups, which the agency says helps them see the negative consequences of drug use and provides them with the support of

Continued on next page

by science fairs," the agency's executive director said. "In dream fairs, kids express their dreams through crafts or exhibits – you see a sense of energy and light in their eyes when their secret dreams can be expressed. Maybe one kid wants to be a trucker, the other a bricklayer." Showing off their dreams gives them the courage to try to attain them, she said.

- In addition to an unusually rich repertoire of secular spiritual activities, a community center in New York offers a spiritual mentorship program wherein mentors – there are five altogether, all volunteers from the community – work one-on-one with first-time offenders referred by the district attorney's office.
- A small agency near Chicago organizes "family circles" before meals and in the evening in its shelter program. In the circles, youth and staff hold hands and participate in a call-and-response technique that helps set off the activity as a time of sharing. For instance, one teen may turn to another and say, "It was a good day," cueing that teen to repeat the phrase, then turn to the next person and continue the cycle. The circles, which the program launched several years ago, are also helpful when the day has been particularly stressful, or when a new youth comes into the program.
- The pernicious influence of colonization has stripped many adolescents in Guam of their sense of cultural uniqueness; one agency there attempts to counter it by introducing teens to indigenous crafts such as weaving, dying, and carving. As part of its arts workshops, it also organizes field trips to ancient sites, where the adult leader begins by saying a chant or prayer to elders.

The Problem with Secular Spiritual Programming

Agencies that offer no secular spiritual activities cite many reasons, some philosophical, others practical, for why they don't (see Fig. 10). Many agencies lack the expertise to offer activities such as meditation, yoga, or guided visualization; others fear that staff, board, or families would object to them as too "New Age-y." Still other agencies point out that among all the techniques at their disposal, spiritual ones rarely leap to mind as the most important or efficacious for treating troubled youth.

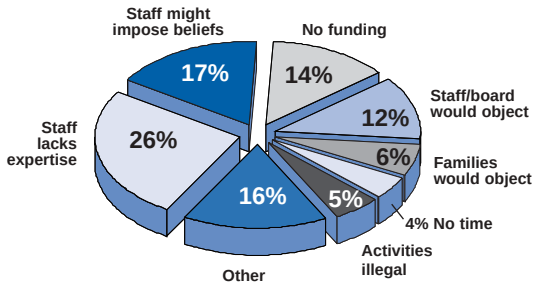
A large California agency that places and oversees foster-care children is an example. There, if a problem arises with a foster child or family, agency workers always choose a more targeted intervention; a school problem, for example, would suggest a need for tutoring, not for some spiritually based activity that might only help indirectly. The agency prefers such no-nonsense solutions because of time constraints, but also because more generalized interventions – such as meditation, for instance – have a tendency

peers. Youth in all programs are offered guided visualization and martial arts, and one program for girls offers yoga: it helps them "feel better and relax more easily," an executive said. Youth in residential programs also may take part in music and dance led by a staff member. Though the agency is more conflicted about its religious programming, all clients are assessed upon intake for their religious needs, and the agency both offers its residents rides to worship and allows clients to accompany staff to worship. It will also provide religious instruction to youth who ask for it, though fewer than 25% do. Staff are only "slightly receptive" to such instruction in any case, and the agency, which calls itself "non-sectarian," plans to make no further religious activities available in the future. On the other hand, it is enthusiastic about its secular spiritual work, and says it very likely will do more. Why? Three reasons: The agency considers the activities successful as clinical interventions; the needs of its clients are growing; and staff members themselves are becoming more interested in using the techniques.

to leave out foster families. "When families aren't involved in kids' activities, they can't make use of it," a program director said. Despite its lack of interest in spiritual activities, the agency does have a strong moral orientation, and seeks to transmit its values to its clients, the director said. If chronic problems arise that can't be addressed in any other way, the agency organizes a group of caring adults to confront the child, to in essence exert its moral authority over him or her. "The fundamental issue for anyone who works with kids is what can you give them in skills and information that will make it more likely that they'll administer their lives well? In terms of behavior, this agency has a strong position on what doesn't work well: lying, stealing, self-deception. Also, if you don't do the work, you're not going to get what you want."

Clinical priorities were also cited by a Michigan agency to explain its lack of spiritual programming. The executive director there said that in the absence of compelling evidence that spiritually oriented activities are beneficial, he cannot justify asking his staff to spend time on them. After all, the agency's homeless adolescent clients have half a dozen urgent needs, and during their brief stay in the agency's shelter, a lot has to happen quickly. "My staff would be saying to me, 'Why are we doing relaxation, when we should be doing crisis intervention?' "

Fig. 10.
Reasons Agencies Give for Not Offering Secular Spiritual Activities (n=78)



Still others are interested in the topic but simply have not moved on it yet. A New Hampshire agency working with emotionally and behaviorally disturbed adolescents is waiting for evaluation literature on spiritual practices, and would need training to understand "how to integrate them into the life of the program." But even if that information were available, adopting spiritual practices still could prove to be a hard sell to the agency's direct-care staff. Despite the executive director's enthusiasm for the idea, a staffer said, "Our kids aren't emotionally stable enough for these techniques. Sometimes it's best if kids don't go down that road (of

introspection). We use attachment theory, and our philosophy is that as they develop healthy attachments, they begin to give back to the community, and be more focused on getting help from others." The director of a small program in Illinois for runaway and homeless teens voiced a similar sentiment. "I'd say we're moving away from spirituality, though we might be swimming upstream. We're using cognitive-behavioral techniques in our work. Research shows that's what's most effective."

For a minority of agencies in our study, religion is the primary obstacle to the development of secular spiritual programming. A small faith-based agency in rural Texas working with at-risk, abused/neglected, and pregnant and parenting teens eschews secular spiritual practices because "we're a Christian-based agency and these things are sometimes viewed as contradictory." Some other faith-based agencies, all of them in the South, indicated the same, reporting that their religious worldview was antithetical to secular practices. "We don't do them because they don't fit with our mission, our focus, or our religious beliefs," said another Texas program director, adding that his agency had already investigated the potential benefit of such activities and rejected them. Other religious agencies, however, weren't so much opposed to secular practices as ignorant of how they might be used. Like secular agencies, they simply wanted to learn more about them. "If we could be taught how they might be beneficial, we would use them," said the director of spiritual programming at a Catholic agency in New York. The director of a highly religious agency in Illinois expressed a similar view. "The kids have profound needs and are here all the time, so it's just a matter of reviewing what the options are and how we could incorporate them."

Perhaps the most common reason, though, for the absence of secular spiritual programming in youth-serving agencies concerned the conservatism of board members, executive-level staff, or direct-service staff. One agency worker in San Francisco lamented that her executive director was so conservative that no spiritual activities could take hold at the agency, but hoped the bias would change as the agency moved toward more long-term programming. An agency executive in Las Vegas said both the community and agency were so traditional in their views that such activities would never fly, unless, perhaps, the agency could raise the funds to have an outside expert come in to implement them on a piecemeal basis.

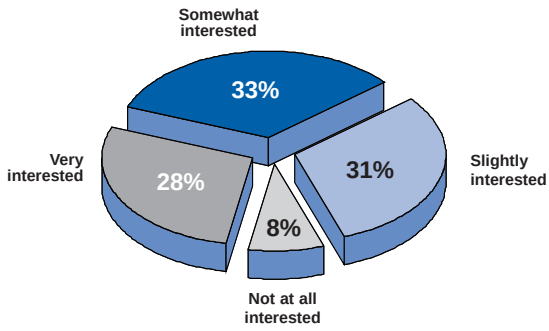
The Outlook for Secular Spiritual Programming

Social service agencies are clearly interested in using secular spiritual activities with their adolescent clients, but does that necessarily mean that more of them will be doing it? More than half of the agencies not currently doing such programming say they are very or somewhat interested in doing so in the

future. Well over half of those already offering at least one secular spiritual activity say they will certainly or very likely do more (see Figs. 11 and 12).

Still, the trend toward such programming might easily falter. Difficulties peculiar to spiritually oriented activities make this so. More than with other therapeutic interventions, spiritual activities tend to be initiated by staff members with either special interest or expertise in them; when the workers leave the agency, so do the activities. This is true even when the agency has come to see the activity as worthwhile in a clinical sense. "In our community-based programs, the person who did meditation and guided relaxation left us," said a Massachusetts program director wistfully. "That was his big interest. It was excellent, but at this point we haven't had a staff person who has this as a talent. I do intend to reintroduce these, though, in the future." Interestingly, the same agency runs a school for special-needs students that has made yoga, guided relaxation, and musical expression a foundation of its curriculum.

Fig. 11.
Interest in Secular Spiritual Activities Among Agencies Currently Doing None (n=78)

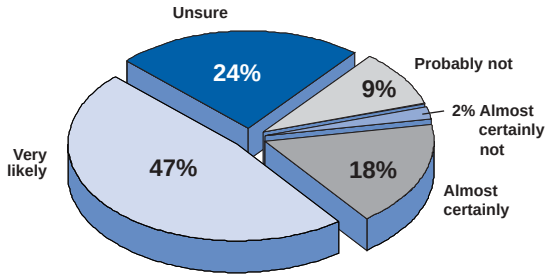


Such unevenness in spiritual programming is typical in agencies, because the champions of such activities are often concentrated in a single program. A Michigan agency is an extreme example. It runs programs for teen parents, grieving families, sex offenders, substance abusers and many other populations, but offers secular spiritual activities in only one program: a group for mentally/emotionally impaired youth, and there only because staff want to. Youth in that group practice yoga and guided visualization, and are taught to play drums by a specialist in African percussion. Even though those activities are valuable, the agency says it does not know if it will do more – mostly because it cannot get reimbursed for them. In order for Medicaid to cover spiritual activities, their clinical benefits would have to be more widely accepted, a program director said. In other words, spiritual activities, so long on the fringe of acceptable clinical practice, "need to be legitimized."

Still, enthusiasm abounds in many organizations. "It's become more recog-

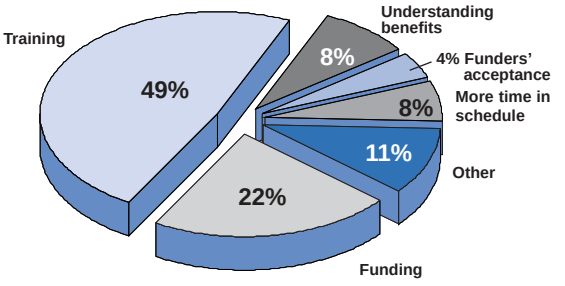
nized by the agency and by professionals that the spirituality of youth is one of the pillars that their lives are resting on," said a program director at a New York agency. An executive director in Connecticut said his agency, which already offers yoga and guided visualization, will depend even more on spiritually oriented techniques in the future. "I think it's an arena that transcends age, authority, limits – all the issues adolescents struggle with. Kids who are initially resistant find [spiritual activities] rewarding. It's an area that's been neglected in their personal lives. It helps them deal with the pain and hurt they've experienced since childhood."

Fig. 12.
Likelihood of Offering More Secular Spiritual Activities Among Agencies Currently Offering at Least One (n=111)



Indeed, of all agencies, the ones already offering secular spiritual activities are the most enthusiastic about doing more. Typical was a rural Wyoming agency working with emotionally disturbed teenagers. It uses meditation, guided relaxation, education about the spiritual self, and 12-step groups, all of which "complement the overall program" by helping build compassion and self-esteem. The agency is likely to adopt more such practices. "Spirituality is part of a healthy, whole being, and the agency is committed to looking at and integrating this aspect of the person," a staffer said. A New Jersey program director agreed, saying simply, "It's the trend of the future."

Fig. 13.
Primary Need of Agencies Not Currently Offering Secular Spiritual Activities That Are Somewhat or Very Interesting in Doing So (n=43)



But what do even the most interested youth-serving agencies need in order to further develop their programming? The answer is unequivocal: money and training. Of all agencies doing some secular spiritual programming that intend to do more, 53% said they need funding to hire extra staff – sometimes a spiritual director to organize a range of extracurricular spiritual activities, sometimes an outside expert who could come teach a specific activity. About a quarter of these agencies said their primary need is training: generally, training in how to choose appropriate spiritual activities, how to lead them, and how to integrate them into their clients' crowded schedules. This last is not a small point, agencies said. Their clients go to school, work part-time jobs, see therapists, sometimes have their own babies to care for. In short, they are busy, and shoehorning one more activity into the schedule – however worthwhile that activity might seem – is a chore for everyone. "These programs are busy. Doing another thing means selling it to staff, so I don't push it," said one New Hampshire director.

For those agencies that don't do such programming but hope to, the primary needs are the same, but in reverse order: half said their most urgent need is training – often to better understand the benefits they assume can be attained – and about a quarter cited funding. With these agencies, there is an additional twist: they also need a way to overcome the resistance of staff, the board, the community, or parents.

'Around here, if it's Sunday, you scrub up, put on your good clothes, and go to church.'

Prevalence and Details of Use: Religious Activities*

Offer Rides to Worship

Almost all agencies give adolescent clients rides to worship services upon request. The question here concerns how actively agencies pursue the issue with clients. Does the agency ask teenage clients up front whether they want a ride to worship services, thus seeking to facilitate attendance for interested youth, or must youth take the initiative to arrange a ride? The answer to this question likely has an impact on whether or not youth actually get to worship services; it is almost certainly a measure of an agency's feelings about the importance of religion to their clients.

General Prevalence	
Of all agencies	**58%**
Of secular agencies	**52%**
Of faith-based agencies	**85%**

Prevalence in Regions	
Mid-Atlantic	**65%**
Midwest	**63%**
New England	**36%**
South	**79%**
West	**44%**

*Statistics appearing in the sections "Prevalence and Details of Use: Secular Spiritual Activities" and "Prevalence and Details of Use: Religious Activities" are drawn from a sample of 191 agencies in 47 states, Washington, DC and Guam. Within each section, statistics from "How Long Offered" through "Funded" are drawn from all programs, not agencies, offering the activity in question. (Many agencies offer the same activity in more than one program.) Data was collected from up to three programs per activity per agency. Due to missing data and rounding of statistics, some charts do not total 100.

- Every Sunday a large, well-funded agency in Pennsylvania transports half its clients to 25 different places of worship in surrounding communities; mid-week it transports clients to youth services at local churches.
- Though it is not affiliated with a particular church, a rural Kentucky agency has a strong religious tradition and thus considers worship vitally important for its clients. Each week it provides Sunday school for its youth, and then transports them to one of 175 local churches, a different one each week. The agency's residential clients – all teens between the ages of 14 and 18 – are expected to go, and do. It is not that church-going is mandatory, per se; it's that no one has ever objected to it. "Around here, if it's Sunday, you scrub up, put on your good clothes, and go to church," an agency executive said.
- One agency in the urban Midwest was so concerned that church-going would become a norm in its shelter program – therefore making all clients feel they should attend, whether or not they really wanted to – that it created an attractive counter-opportunity in the form of a Sunday-morning brunch available only to youth not going to church. "We didn't want staying home to be a penalty," the agency's clinical director said.

One agency was so concerned that church-going would become a norm that it created an attractive counter-opportunity in the form of a Sunday-morning brunch available only to youth not going to church. 'We didn't want staying home to be a penalty.'

Accompanying Staff to Worship

This question relates to agencies' policies on allowing teen clients to accompany a staff member to that staff's worship services. In some agencies the very idea raises some eyebrows, suggesting violations of the boundaries staff are supposed to carefully draw between themselves and their clients. A few agencies in our sample said the issue had never come up; a few more said it monitored such requests carefully. But in most parts of the country, it was a fairly common practice.

General Prevalence

Of all agencies	**56%**
Of secular agencies	**55%**
Of faith-based agencies	**62%**

Prevalence in Regions

Mid-Atlantic	**65%**
Midwest	**56%**
New England	**37%**
South	**79%**
West	**39%**

Staff Initiating Religious Discussions

Are staff in youth-serving agencies allowed to initiate conversations about religion with clients? At most faith-based agencies, yes, at most secular agencies, no. But many agencies in our sample, including faith-based ones, said they recognize the potential for proselytizing in such conversations, and expressly forbid it.

General Prevalence

Of all agencies	**38%**
Of secular agencies	**31%**
Of faith-based agencies	**68%**

Prevalence in Regions

Mid-Atlantic	**41%**
Midwest	**49%**
New England	**37%**
South	**36%**
West	**27%**

Bible/Prayer Groups

This activity encompasses any group that meets, generally with a clergyperson as leader but sometimes without, to pray, study a religious text or discuss theological issues. In this study, such groups were distinct from religious instruction, church services or religious counseling, though groups may in fact feature elements of all three. All prayer groups we discovered – even those in strongly faith-based agencies – were voluntary for clients, and most attracted only a small minority of the youth eligible to participate. But for those, the groups were often considered very important.

Agencies: 41
Programs: 48

Many agencies, including faith-based ones, say they recognize the potential for proselytizing in religious conversations, and expressly forbid it.

General Prevalence
Of all agencies **22%**
Of secular agencies **15%**
Of faith-based agencies **50%**

Prevalence in Regions
Mid-Atlantic **29%**
Midwest **32%**
New England **18%**
South **26%**
West **4%**

How Long Offered
Four years or less **46%**
More than 10 years **35%**

Reason for Adopting
Clinical/youth development benefits **25%**
Interest of staff or youth **35%**
Historic mission **29%**
Other **8%**

Response of Youth
How many participate:
33% of programs attract over 75% of eligible youth
15% of programs attract under 25% of eligible youth
What youth think:
89% of programs say most youth find activity beneficial

Receptivity of Staff
Line staff ..... **65%** very receptive
Executive staff ..... **81%** very receptive

Importance to Overall Program
Indispensable **0%**
Very important **10%**
Moderately important **31%**
Occasionally produces positive results **50%**
Could easily do without **8%**
Funded **21%**

- A large religious agency in Texas offers Bible study once a week led by local church volunteers who bring their own curricula. Over half the youth in the agency – most come from the child welfare or juvenile justice system – choose to participate in the groups, and according to the agency, most find them beneficial.
- A midsized agency in urban New Jersey arranges prayer groups for its long-term youth with serious emotional disturbances and for its "no eject-no reject" shelter population. The groups are led by volunteer clergy from the community, one a white pastor who comes once a month, the other a Hispanic minister who comes once a week.
- Though it is strictly secular in its other programs, a Massachusetts agency organizes a once-weekly prayer group for clients in a program it runs for youth offenders. The agency calls the groups very important for these teens, but acknowledges that they exist for one reason only: because prison accreditation standards require that all offenders, including adolescents, be

offered the opportunity for religious expression. Ironically, legal concerns keep the agency from considering prayer groups in its other programs.

- A large secular agency in Ohio invites volunteers in once a week to lead prayer groups with both clients and staff, and to offer beginning and advanced levels of Bible study. The agency's religious programming is limited to its short-term program for adjudicated boys, and is only two years old. The agency adopted the activities for their clinical benefit; it believes they, in conjunction with some of the secular spiritual activities it has also adopted in its short-term program, help youth make more successful transitions to life in the community when they leave.

Clergy Programs

Clergy programs in youth-serving agencies – defined here as programmatic efforts by agencies to regularly put their clients in contact with paid or volunteer clergy – takes many forms. In some faith-based agencies, staff chaplains or spiritual directors serve a variety of functions: they offer religious counseling, run prayer groups, officiate at chapel services, or simply act as role models and provide an informal religious presence. But increasingly, secular agencies are hiring spiritual directors as well, and while they may not perform all the functions of clergy, they nevertheless are charged with developing and organizing religious activities for youth in the agency's care. Sometimes those tasks involve developing supportive relationships with area churches, or designing religious activities attractive to teenage clients. Though the tasks vary, agencies in our sample that lacked such a key organizer felt unable to develop the religious activities they wanted. Indeed, several agencies in our study reported that they could not go further in developing spiritual components – whether it be connecting youth to church-led volunteer work in the community, finding a way to get youth to worship services, or organizing volunteer clergy to lead discussion groups with youth – without a dedicated staff member working on those issues alone.

A large religious agency in Texas offers Bible study once a week led by local church volunteers who bring their own curricula. Over half the youth in the agency choose to participate in the groups.

Agencies:	**39**
Programs:	**44**

General Prevalence
Of all agencies **20%**
Of secular agencies..... **14%**
Of faith-based agencies **50%**

Prevalence in Regions
Mid-Atlantic **24%**
Midwest..... **34%**
New England..... **11%**
South **21%**
West..... **11%**

How Long Offered
Four years or less **39%**
More than 10 years **46%**

Reason for Adopting
Historic mission **41%**
Clinical/youth development benefits..... **23%**
Interest of staff or youth **23%**
Other **5%**

Response of Youth
How many participate:
35% of programs attract over 75% of eligible youth
11% of programs attract under 25% of eligible youth
What youth think:
55% of programs say most youth find activity beneficial

Clergy Programs, cont.

Receptivity of Staff
Line staff.....**48%** very receptive
Executive staff.....**86%** very receptive
Importance to Overall Program
Indispensable **18%**
Very important.....**41%**
Moderately important.....**21%**
Occasionally produces positive results.....**11%**
Could easily do without.....**2%**
Funded.....**46%**

- The staff chaplain at a large Pennsylvania school for "socially needy" children and youth works with a core of 25 students, teaching them a range of skills from group dynamics to various spiritual disciplines. "These kids are being trained to be spiritual leaders" who will in turn lead groups among the broader student body.
- A midsized agency in suburban Indiana meets with local religious leaders on a quarterly basis to describe the agency's work and issue invitations to talk with teen clients. Those invitations result in guest-speaking engagements at least four times a year, or more often if clergy approach the agency. In addition, a church in the area comes in every Wednesday night to lead non-denominational Bible study with youth offenders in the agency's long-term residential program. The group began because of youth interest, and only 30% of eligible teens attend. Nevertheless, the agency considers the activity very important. Indeed, although the agency has strayed from its religious origins in recent years, it is now discussing ways to be more deliberate about its faith programming.
- Several years ago, a Baptist agency in Texas that offers an array of religious programming dropped its chaplain and on-site church services, deciding that because youth won't stay with the agency forever, integrating them into the religious life of the community was a priority. "We want children to be involved in local churches, retreats, youth groups, seminars," an agency executive said.
- A secular agency in Colorado working with homeless and runaway teenagers has found a novel way to make clergy available to youth in a manner that doesn't appear to promote religion. Every year the agency accepts two interns from a local seminary who are seeking experience in social work. The interns aren't allowed to initiate conversations about religion with the agency's teen clients, but must wait for the teens to ask questions, which they do. "So you believe in God?" is a common one, the agency's executive director said. Rich discussions sometimes follow.
- A midsized agency in upstate New York serving abused and neglected teenage girls has guest clergy come on campus every other month to visit the girls in their cottages. The agency, which isn't officially affiliated with a church but was founded by nuns and thus has a strong religious tradition, views the visits as a way to expose girls to a caring religious influence. When (the pastor) comes, "about half of the cottage will barrage

Secular But Not: Getting Creative With Religion

Labels, or lack of them, are often misleading. Some church-affiliated youth-serving organizations offer no religious activities; some secular ones offer a wide variety. An example is a midsized Tennessee agency for youth. It has no formal ties to a church, but nevertheless, it has built an unusually diverse and creative religious program. The array of religious activities it offers is all the more unusual because, with only a shelter and various non-residential programs, it sees youth for relatively short periods of time – a fact that many agencies use to explain their lack of such programming. The agency offers rides to worship services; allows clients to worship with staff; allows staff to talk about religion with clients; offers Bible study led by clergy from the community; has "inspirational

Continued on next page

her," the agency's chaplain says. "The staff love it. They love to see the response of the girls, because it's always positive. There's an afterglow after a presentation; we hear the girls in cottages are treating each other very nicely afterwards." Because the agency is committed to creating such experiences for its clients, it will continue to expand its religious programming. But it wants to do it thoughtfully. "We don't want staff to change who the children are, but to increase their capacity for faith. If kids come in with their own religious tradition, we want to build on it; if they come in with nothing, naturally we want to give them something. How to do that with integrity is the question."

Religious Counseling

Half of all faith-based agencies offer religious counseling, generally made available by clergy on staff who offer their services to teenage clients who want them. Alternatively, a few agencies require therapists on staff to be trained in religious issues and thus able to counsel youth from a religious perspective if desired. Most agencies offering religious counseling acknowledge that relatively few youth ask for it; on the other hand, they say, for those few it is a critical service.

Agencies: 29
Programs: 39

General Prevalence
Of all agencies **15%**
Of secular agencies **8%**
Of faith-based agencies **50%**

Prevalence in Regions
Mid-Atlantic **18%**
Midwest **22%**
New England **4%**
South **19%**
West **11%**

How Long Offered
Four years or less **26%**
More than 10 years **49%**

Reason for Adopting
Historic mission **62%**
Clinical/youth development benefits **31%**
Interest of staff or youth **3%**
Other **3%**

Response of Youth
How many participate:
13% of programs attract over 75% of eligible youth
51% of programs attract under 25% of eligible youth
What youth think:
71% of programs say most youth find activity beneficial

Receptivity of Staff
Line staff ..... **64%** very receptive
Executive staff ..... **87%** very receptive

Importance to Overall Program
Indispensable **18%**
Very important **57%**
Moderately important **13%**
Occasionally produces positive results **11%**
Funded **56%**

- Youth in all programs at a faith-based Iowa agency can see staff clergy for counseling whenever they wish – every day, if need be. The agency has provided religious counseling for only a few years in its shelter, but longer elsewhere in the agency. Fewer than 25% of the youth in any given program take advantage of it, but nevertheless the agency says the counseling is an important component of its work.
- A Kentucky agency with a strong religious tradition offers faith-based group time" where youth study scripture and relate how it applies to them; and has a new program in which local church groups visit to enact religious drama or perform music. New efforts include a "spiritual host families" program whereby youth can request to be partnered with a family who will provide two to four hours a week of religious support; and a "spiritual Big Brother/Big Sister" program, modeled on the traditional program but with a Christian focus. In another new program, the agency asks community groups to pray in general for the agency, or for specific youth and families. Youth too may make prayer requests. The agency says it will definitely organize more religious activities for its clients in the future, and indeed is already planning them. As to secular spiritual activities, it simply isn't interested in them. The agency doesn't feel they have much to offer clients, and in any case, knows there would be objections from staff and clients' families.

Religious Programming: Grace Upon Grace

A midsized Lutheran agency in an Ohio city offers a range of religious programming, including two "spiritual life" groups a week that focus on the Bible and other Judeo-Christian teachings. Like the agency's other religious activities, the groups are voluntary, and tend to attract only a minority of youth. But among those who attend most consistently are teenage sex offenders. They are smart – "you've got to be smart to pull off some of the things they've done," says the agency's pastor – and for that very reason are eager partners in the discussions he wants to have with them.

The groups are not an opportunity for a religious hard-sell, the pastor says; indeed, he is so aware of the potential abuses of religion that he will not allow evangelical groups on campus, fearing they might end up shaming the agency's youth. In the spiritual life groups, his intent is to use Biblical stories as a lens through which the teens can see their problems more clearly.

"For me, the creation story is a parable and the parable is, the serpent talks to Eve who in turns talks to Adam, and says you can have your cake and eat it too. That is to say, you can have this wonderful garden,

Continued on next page

counseling in residential and non-residential programs, and has always done so. Like many agencies providing religious counseling, this one adopted the practice because of its historical mission, but staff also believe that the counseling has discernable clinical benefits for youth. It is available every day to teens in all programs, though the agency has difficulty getting non-residential clients, whose lives are invariably chaotic, to take advantage of it.

Religious Instruction

Though the phrase can be variously interpreted, in this study religious instruction meant something very specific: a curriculum-based course of study intended either to teach about religion generally, as in comparative religion courses, or to teach the doctrines of a specific religion. We did not include prayer groups or Bible discussion groups in this category, though instruction may indeed take place in those venues.

Agencies: 24
Programs: 30

General Prevalence
Of all agencies **13%**
Of secular agencies **10%**
Of faith-based agencies **27%**

Prevalence in Regions
Mid-Atlantic **18%**
Midwest **15%**
New England **14%**
South **14%**
West **4%**

How Long Offered
Four years or less **37%**
More than 10 years **40%**

Reason for Adopting
Historic mission **44%**
Clinical/youth development benefits **33%**
Interest of staff or youth **9%**
Other **4%**

Response of Youth
How many participate:
31% of programs attract over 75% of eligible youth
21% of programs attract under 25% of eligible youth (21% cases missing)
What youth think:
62% of programs say most youth find activity beneficial (24% cases missing)

Receptivity of Staff
Line staff ..... **47%** very receptive
Executive staff ..... **63%** very receptive

Importance to Overall Program
Indispensable **20%**
Very important **37%**
Moderately important **27%**
Occasionally produces positive results **3%**
Funded **30%**

- A Catholic agency in New York offers Catholic, Protestant and Lutheran religious instruction to its clients, most of whom are court-adjudicated boys. Students may be released early from school to attend.
- An upstate New York agency working with teenage girls invites a volunteer Catholic educator to instruct clients in Catholic doctrine. Fewer than 25% of eligible girls attend, but for those, the agency calls the instruction important.
- A midsized Catholic agency in California working with runaway and homeless adolescents offers religious instruction in the form of weekly interfaith

study groups and Bible studies that follow a "very fluid curriculum." The agency has offered the groups for just a few years, and says it started them because of the interest of the youth themselves. Though only a minority of youth attend, the agency said the instruction is nevertheless valuable to its overall program.

- A Jewish agency in the Midwest caring for emotionally disturbed boys would like to begin a yeshiva program, but so far lacks the funding to do so. A shortage of teaching rabbis is also an issue, an executive said. Another Midwestern agency – this one secular – offers adjudicated boys in its short-term residential program once-a-week classes to help them prepare for bar mitzvahs and confirmation.
- A small secular agency in Michigan has brought on clergy as volunteer staff; they provide a variety of services, including counseling, prayer, meditation, and religious instruction. The instruction is non-denominational, and is provided either one-on-one, or in a group or family context. The instruction isn't offered classroom-style; "we can't afford it," the executive director said.

Religious Rites-of-Passage Rituals

By religious rites-of-passage we meant those rituals such as confirmation, baptism, and bar and bat mitzvahs that are arranged by agencies and sometimes held on site as a routine, integrated part of programming. While most agencies will make arrangements upon request, only a minority pursue the issue aggressively, accommodate the ceremonies on site, and do follow-up; those are the agencies that we included in this study.

Agencies: 23
Programs: 23

General Prevalence
Of all agencies **9%**
Of secular agencies **8%**
Of faith-based agencies **18%**

Prevalence in Regions
Mid-Atlantic **18%**
Midwest **12%**
New England **4%**
South **7%**
West **7%**

How Long Offered
Four years or less **23%**
More than 10 years **59%**

Reason for Adopting
Historic mission **55%**
Clinical/youth development benefits **27%**
Interest of staff or youth **9%**
Other **9%**

Response of Youth
How many participate:
5% of programs attract over 75% of eligible youth
31% of programs attract under 25% of eligible youth
What youth think:
59% of programs say most youth find activity beneficial

Receptivity of Staff
Line staff ..... **55%** very receptive
Executive staff ..... **68%** very receptive

Importance to Overall Program
Indispensable **14%**
Very important **27%**
Moderately important **14%**
Occasionally produces positive results **18%**
Too new **9%**
Funded **27%**

you can be in this relation with God, and you can do what you want as well. You do not have to subject your behavior to any limits.

"You have no way to decide upon what's right or wrong, evil or good, without fundamentally getting into a kind of system that typically is religious. The group discussion is wide-ranging, free-ranging, and the closing prayer in a session like this [has] the kids saying, 'Dear Lord, give me strength to understand that my victims are people, and that you want us to live together in harmony and care for people, and something like sin intervenes in my life and makes me want to take advantage of people.' "

The agency also offers short chapel services four times a week, during lunch hour. Youth may each attend one service. Rituals are observed, with one teen lighting a candle, another reading a lesson from Scripture. The pastor then stands with them to lead a discussion focusing not on abstract ideals, but "on these kids in this place." They might discuss the meaning of peace – peace at school, peace in their cottages, peace in the gym. They might discuss what Jesus wants of them, and can give to them. No matter what the topic, for the pastor, the bottom line is always "grace upon grace upon grace. God loves you, God loves you, God loves you."

- An agency in Kentucky plans to build a chapel on campus where it will perform a variety of religious rituals upon the request of adolescent clients. For now, it arranges any requested rituals off site, and follows up to make sure clients connect to appropriate worship services.
- A large Jewish agency in a Midwestern city routinely arranges bar and bat mitzvahs for the emotionally disturbed youth in its care, and also has rabbis available for Orthodox Jewish youth who want religious counseling.

Other Religious Activities

Many religious offerings fell outside the categories we established for this study. They included obvious and common activities such as observing holiday rituals, saying prayers before meals, making Bibles and rosaries available, holding church services on site either regularly or occasionally, and connecting youth to local church groups. Other programs sent youth to local church choirs or to religious summer camps, hosted church retreats or required therapists to be trained in religion. But other activities were more unusual. One religious agency in Illinois has posted religious "drop-boxes" around the agency for youth with special prayer requests; staffers there participate in their own prayer chain e-mail and ask nearby churches to pray for them when they must make major hiring decisions. A secular agency in Texas gives youth in its residential program incentive points for watching "Touched by an Angel" on television; one in Minnesota that works with Native American youth is considering setting up a smudging room for its clients who want to perform the ritual, which involves the burning of sweetgrass or sage. Other agencies take Indian youth to sun dances, bear dances and sweat lodges. A program in Vermont even runs goddess groups.

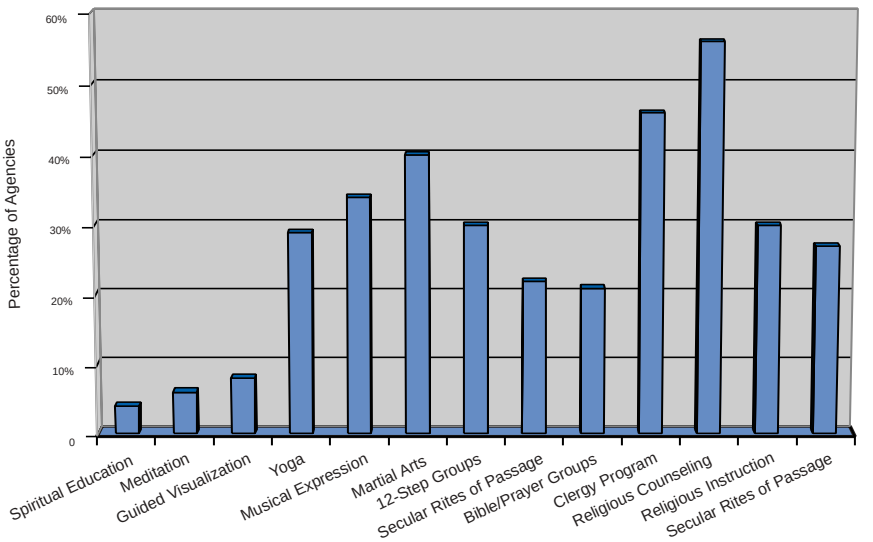
A faith-based agency in Illinois has posted drop-boxes around the agency for youth with special prayer requests.

The variations go on. A foster care agency in California gives its youth the option of being placed in a religious home, with churchgoing an expected part of the routine. A Connecticut agency hosts a community-wide ecumenical prayer breakfast once a month, and has a large rock on its property that has become known among staff and clients as a place of prayer. An agency in upstate New York with a strong religious tradition has begun to offer "spiritual dance," which is taught to abused/neglected girls once a week by a group of women who come in from an area church. The dance can be either meditative or jazzy, but focuses on prayer and motion. "It's a gentle form of religious expression," the agency's chaplain said.

But the relationship of youth agencies to churches is more complex and subtle than the above list suggests. Given the fears of so many youth agencies about religion, it is ironic that most agencies, secular or not, committed to religious activities or not, tend to rely heavily on local churches for support. Agencies reported getting free recreational and meeting space from churches, turning to them for donations of gifts at holiday time, working through congregations to recruit foster parents, and naming clergy to their

boards of directors. Even the agencies most philosophically opposed to introducing religious ideas or activities into their work with young people acknowledge that they routinely tap into the goodwill of community churches. Given that reality, the line between government-funded social service programs and religious groups seems considerably more fuzzy than is generally recognized.

Fig. 14.
Percent of Agencies Reporting Funding for Secular and Religious Activities



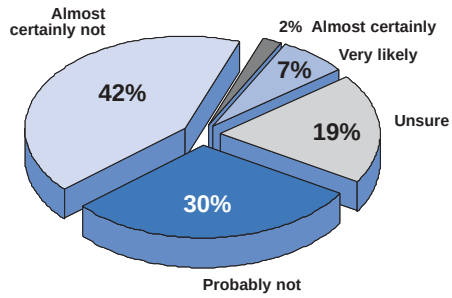
The Problem with Religious Programming

A surprising number of agencies in our sample reported a belief that religious programming of any sort is illegal, or at least prohibited by their public funders. (In terms of federal funders, this is not the case. See "Religion in Publicly Funded Agencies," p. 56.) Correct or incorrect, this firm conviction about the illegality of religious activities seemed in most cases to neatly end agencies' consideration of the issue; in their view, religious programming was simply not permitted, and that was that. Underlying this belief, however, seemed more nebulous, cynical assumptions about the nature of religious programming itself, and of the people who would likely support it. Secular agencies that were philosophically opposed to religious activities often justified their stance by declaring that they were "non-denominational," or that they were loathe to force their beliefs on their clients. The subtext was that faith-based agencies necessarily do push a theological agenda, that in those agencies religious programming is likely to be forced on clients. If true, the aversion to religious programming would be understandable. The fact that it does not seem to be true does not make the fears, however uninformed, less potent. Indeed, of all agen-

cies surveyed, the ones not currently offering any religious activities were the ones opposed to offering them in the future, suggesting, in many cases, an unwillingness to even consider the topic (see Fig. 15).

Though anxiety about the insidious influence of religion is deeply ingrained, the majority of secular agencies in our study seemed to believe that religion, and especially religious institutions, can be valuable resources. Occasionally the internal conflicts over the issue were painful. A vivid example can be seen in the comments of a woman who runs a shelter for runaway and homeless teenagers in a small town near the coast of Georgia. A northerner who is relatively new to the Bible Belt, she has become known, to her chagrin, as the "heathen executive director" for her refusal to allow local church groups to proselytize her clients. She made the decision one day after discovering a visiting Baptist group literally laying hands on youth staying at the agency's shelter.

Fig. 15.
Agencies Currently Offering No Religious Activities: Plans to Do So in Future
(n=126)



She was stunned, then furious. "I thought, 'I'm going to get arrested,' " she recalled. "I went into my office to calm down, and later I quietly spoke to the group's leader, and they left. The kids never knew what happened." Now, despite the new no-proselytizing rule, the staff "sits on the edge of their seats" when church groups visit, waiting for a problem to arise. "Spirituality is an important part of life, but religion is a choice," the director said. "So when groups come, we tell them, 'Live your faith, and if your faith is being loving and giving, do that, but you don't have to tell the kids how you got there.' " If this had been the end of the issue, the agency's relationship with local churches might at least be clear. But it is not the end. The churches, burdensome to the agency in one way, are exceedingly valuable in another. They give important donations of money, time and materials; the agency holds meetings in a church, and two of its board members are ministers. And so, for better or worse, no clear line of demarcation is possible. "It's been very hard to strike a balance," the director said. "It's been stressful."

Not so for a small Montana agency. It doesn't do any religious programming, and sees an upside to the policy. "Saying no to talking about religion means saying no to the couple of kids a month we get who are Satanists," the direc-

tor said. Unlike some agencies, the Montana program has refused to allow teens to put up Satan posters in their bedrooms.

Although more than 95% of its clients are African-American, an urban Pennsylvania agency utterly rejects the notion of doing religious programming – or doing much of it, in any case. Via a partnership with the local Unitarian church, the agency arranges for younger children and a few adolescent counselors to participate in a weekly discussion group, led by a lay person, about the overlapping principles of Kwanzaa and Unitarianism. But there the agency draws the line, suggesting that religious hypocrisy is one reason why. "We share a building with religious and spiritual-based programs," the executive director said. "We don't present ourselves as either, but there are days when we seem more like them than they do." That is because her agency accepts everyone, regardless of religious affiliation, she said; those other agencies do not.

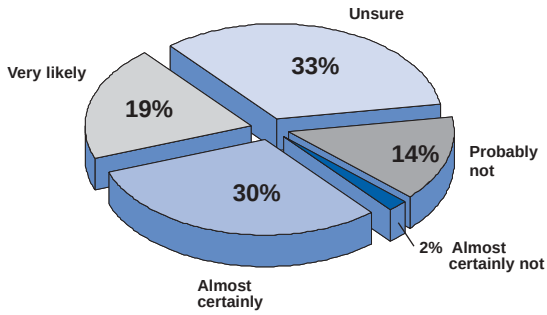
Some staff in a faith-based agency in an Ohio city feel tyrannized by the agency chaplain, who demands that his programming – worship services, prayer groups and religious counseling – take priority on the schedule. "The chaplain doesn't realize that therapeutic needs are more important than his services," an executive said. But, while the staff is only "somewhat receptive" to the chaplain's presence, and only a minority of clients take advantage of him, the decision makers at the executive level remain enthusiastic about religious programming. The chaplain is apparently not the only source of friction over religion, either. The agency has also run into trouble with volunteers from local churches, who have "good intentions" but are untrained and therefore unequipped to supervise emotionally disturbed youth on trips outside the agency. Aside from those concerns, though, he finds the whole idea of extensive contact between the agency and the religious world to be potentially exploitative. "A lot of churches want to bring their youth groups here. Why would you want to do that? Our kids are not here to be on display – they're not here to show what happens to bad kids, or kids who have become mentally ill."

The Outlook for Religious Programming

Secular and faith-based agencies that already offer their clients religious activities tend to be deeply committed to such programming, and half of them intend to do more (see Fig. 16). A program director in Texas explains why his agency, which already offers a wide range of religious activities, plans to increase the number further. "Our relationship with (our clients) won't continue, but their relationship with God will," he said.

It remains to be seen what influence, if any, the federal government's new interest in faith-based services will have on religious youth-serving agencies. What seems clear, at least in this study, is that most agencies that want to offer prayer groups, religious counseling, or other religious services already do so; they do not feel restrained by funders, and therefore are not waiting to be unleashed by them. An executive at a faith-based organization in New York emphasized that his agency simply assures public funders of two things: that the Bible study groups his agency arranges for teenage clients are voluntary, and that all youth – the tiny fraction who attend and the majority who do not – receive the same housing and clinical services regardless. And those assurances have always been enough, he said. A director at a Texas agency agreed. Though his agency is widely known for its religious orientation, it has always received state and federal money, and has never had to compromise or explain. The social climate of the state partly explains the ease with which the agency wins public contracts, but not entirely. The truth seems to be that many agencies all over the country simply find religious programming a rather mundane matter, easy to establish and sustain. If government funders have not actually encouraged such programming, they have at least acquiesced to it. The new mood in Washington toward faith-based programming virtually assures that, unless aggressively challenged by citizens' groups seeking to draw a bright line between church and state, that line will become less distinct than ever. Indeed, according to one federal official, faith-based programming may begin to be seen as a plus by government funders; in any case, it will never hurt an agency's chance to win a grant, or cause an agency to lose one.

Fig. 16.
Likelihood of Offering More Religious Activities Among Agencies Currently Offering at Least One (n=64)



Religion in Publicly Funded Agencies: Legal or Not?

There is, unhelpfully, no set of guidelines telling publicly funded social service agencies precisely how to legally develop religious programming. Rules on church/state separation tend to be established as a result of legal challenges, and court decisions in this area are situation-specific. The bottom line is that if tested in court, some religious activities would be permitted while others would be considered unconstitutional. The verdict would turn on the details.

Nevertheless, agencies getting public money are probably on safe ground offering religious activities if the activities are optional for clients (meaning truly optional, with no special rewards for those who participate), and if the activity itself is not funded by public money. For instance, if possible, clergy or religious educators should be paid with private funds. If there is no money involved – if the activity is done by volunteers – then, according to one source, the question of legality begins to fade.

While lawsuits by citizens' groups can always be filed, agencies' biggest fear – of

Continued on next page

Limitations

The purpose of any research project is to advance knowledge in a given area; by nature, research is an incremental process, with each study building on a previous one until a solid body of data – reliable if not unassailable – exists. This study, which attempts to establish a baseline measurement of spiritual practice among youth-service providers, is something of an exception. By its very definition, it has very little upon which to build, and therefore the questions it does not answer are far more numerous than the ones it does. This is perhaps to be expected from such an exploratory effort, but nonetheless the problems involved with such a broad survey are real.

The most serious limitation of this study concerns its breadth. We chose to survey many different types of youth agencies – from long-term residential programs for mentally ill youth to short-term shelters for runaways – because troubled adolescents are not neatly divided into clinical categories, but instead tend to bounce from one type of program to another as their custody status changes, or their needs become more or less acute. Teenagers in foster care one day can, and do, land in programs for homeless youth the next; substance abusers in outpatient programs spiral down to inpatient psychiatric programs and back up, sometimes to the street. Troubled youth have so much in common – the same sad histories, the same predictable problems – that, for the purposes of this study, we treated them as one large pool rather than as separate subpopulations. Yet this approach introduces its own problems, the greatest being that the resulting data is useful for drawing only the most general conclusions. In some cases, numbers are so small that they are not useful at all. So while we can say with certainty, for instance, that youth-serving agencies are increasingly interested in secular spiritual activities, we cannot say which activities are most favored in long-term residential settings, or with dual-diagnosed adolescents, or with teen mothers. For that information, additional studies must be conducted focusing only on such groups.

But more important than the trend toward the use of spiritually oriented activities is the question of whether such activities work in any clinical sense. And, as the literature review indicates, while that evidence is beginning to trickle in, it is far from conclusive and, in any case, cannot answer the practical how-to questions that agencies say they want and need: who, precisely, can benefit from any given activity, and how must it be implemented to derive that benefit? This study asks only what the agency – or, more specifically, the executive-level staff member giving the interview – has observed about clinical benefits. Such impressions almost certainly have some validity, but unless they are backed up by true evaluation data, they remain unreliable in any scientific sense.

losing their government funding – is entirely unfounded. "You cannot lose money for that," says Bobby Polito, the federal Administration for Children and Families' faith-based liaison. "That's a false read of the law."

He suggests that agencies interested in offering prayer groups or other religious programming run the idea by their government contract manager beforehand. Because the Bush administration's pro-faith policies have established a climate friendly to such programming, the response should be positive. But if it is not, there are other ways to go about implementing religious activities. "If you get a 'no' and you still want to do it, research the faith-friendly foundations in your neighborhood that would appreciate that kind of proposal. Say, 'We want $15,000 for a minister to come in one day a week; would you supplement our government funds that way?'"

In any case, agencies should not worry about government disapproval of such activities. "No way" will agencies be penalized, he said.

For more information on faith-based programming, Polito can be reached at bpolito@acf.dhhs.gov.

Conclusion

Secular Spiritual Activities

There is no doubt that most agencies working with troubled adolescents are intrigued by the notion of using spiritually oriented activities to help their clients. Such techniques are attractive for many reasons: they are generally inexpensive and easy to implement, they carry almost no identifiable risk, and they can, at least to some degree, help manage the chronic mood and behavior problems that can make teenage clients particularly difficult to treat. And, despite the obvious differences in client populations, agencies already using spiritually oriented activities offer remarkably similar testimony about their benefits, consistently claiming that they calm youth, help them focus, help them think more clearly about their lives, and help them let go of bad memories and painful relationships.

Yet it is also true that, while most agencies using such activities believe in their clinical benefits for youth, many initially adopted them only because a staff member wanted to. No body of scientific knowledge informed their decision to use the techniques, and very little evaluation has taken place within these agencies to measure their actual success. The implications of this knowledge vacuum are profound. Interventions that cannot be legitimized through outcome evaluations will likely never gain the acceptance they need to become true mainstream practices. Agencies heavily invested in them will to some extent remain on the fringe, while agencies in socially conservative areas may never try them at all. As long as such activities remain outside the mainstream, studies that could refine them will not take place, and curricula that could provide much-needed training to agencies will not be written. Needless to say, unproven interventions will also remain unreimbursable ones, and the cry of agencies for more funding to provide them will go unanswered.

This Catch-22 can be broken only by more, and more specific, research. As our literature review attests, such work is taking place, but slowly, and sometimes by organizations seeking to promote a particular practice. These studies, while hardly worthless, are obviously no substitute for well-controlled studies by credible, objective researchers. Until a body of such work emerges, spiritual practice will continue to be driven by anecdote, guesswork and personal zeal – hardly the basis on which to build a multifaceted and complex therapeutic approach.

Religious Activities

Most agencies not currently providing religious activities show no great eagerness to do so in the near future; on the other hand, those already providing them want to provide more. As the government launches its plan to make more faith-based organizations eligible for funding, it is unclear to

what extent these agencies – already in many cases the recipients of public money – will benefit. It is conceivable that they will not benefit at all, or that they will even be hurt by new competition from religious groups that will take advantage of the government's new largesse by getting into the youth-serving business themselves. The risks inherent in that scenario are outside the scope of this study, but, needless to say, must be taken seriously.

The agencies considered in this study are already established providers of services to teenagers, and have in many cases either developed the kind of religious programming that the government wants to encourage, or would like to develop such programming. Therefore they, and not churches or other inexperienced religious groups, would seem to be more appropriate beneficiaries of targeted government support. With more money for faith-based programming, these agencies could begin or expand responsible religious services, and also evaluate them for the outcomes that could inform intelligent social policy on the issue. That data, which must necessarily be gathered by agencies with sufficient infrastructure and internal controls, are urgently needed; without it, empirical evidence of the value of religious activities in clinical work with adolescents simply will not exist.

Glossary of Terms

Education About the Spiritual Self: Refers to any consistent and routine effort on the part of an agency to educate adolescent clients, usually in group presentation format, about the spiritual dimension of their lives.

Meditation: A method of relaxation in which an individual focuses on a single thought, vision, sound or movement in order to quiet the mind.

Self-Reflection Through Guided Relaxation/Visualization: A technique, generally designed to enhance self-understanding, in which a therapist or leader narrates a relaxation exercise and then directs participants in the elaborate visualization of particular images or scenarios.

Yoga: A system of exercises, ultimately meant to lead to spiritual enlightenment, that incorporate physical postures, breath control, mental concentration and deep relaxation.

Musical Expression: Musical activities, such as chanting, drumming or the playing of other instruments, that are explicitly meant to enhance a sense of awareness, wholeness and well-being.

12-Step Groups: Using the model developed by Alcoholics Anonymous**,** these support groups stress surrender to a higher power as a necessary component in overcoming addiction.

Secular Rites-of-Passage Programs: In this study, ceremonies and rituals designed to mark specific nonreligious transitions occurring in the lives of youth between the ages of 12 and 21.

Offer Rides to Worship: Refers to whether agencies, as matter of policy, proactively offer rides to worship services to youth living in residential programs.

Accompany Staff to Worship: Refers to whether clients may, as a matter of policy, accompany a staff worker to that staff's worship services.

Staff Initiating Religious Discussions: Most agencies will allow staff to engage in discussions about religion with clients. This question refers to whether staff are allowed, as a matter of policy or practice, to initiate such conversations.

Bible/Prayer Groups: Any group that routinely meets, often with a clergy or lay leader, to pray, study religious texts or discuss theological issues. In this study, Bible or prayer groups are distinct from religious instruction, church services or religious counseling, although the groups may in fact feature elements of all three.

Clergy Programs: Any programmatic effort by an agency to regularly put adolescent clients in contact with a clergyperson, either volunteer or paid. Clergy may offer religious counseling, prayer groups, religious services, or religious instruction, or simply provide an informal religious presence.

Religious Counseling: Refers to the availability of counseling by clergy, or by secular therapists trained in religious perspectives.

Religious Instruction: A curriculum-based course of study intended either to teach about religion generally, as comparative religion courses do, or teach the doctrines of a specific religion.

Religious Rites-of-Passage Rituals: Refers to ceremonies and rituals – confirmation, baptism, bar/bat mitzvahs, and some Native American rites – that are arranged by agencies for clients and sometimes held on site as a routine, integrated part of programming.

The Regions

The geographical regions of the United States to which this study refers are defined below:

New England
Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont

Mid-Atlantic
Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Washington, DC

Midwest
Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin

South
Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia

West
Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming

Appendix: The Survey Instrument

Contact name:

Agency:

City and State:

Phone:

Date:

Interviewer:

As you know, New England Network is conducting research on community-based and faith-based youth-serving agencies. The questionnaire should take about [illegible] hour. Some of the questions are open-ended, so please elaborate on your answers. Stop me at any time if you don't understand something or want more time to clarify a question for you.

This survey is intended to provide a broad overview of the practices, design, and delivery of [illegible] for children aged 12 to 21. We are interested in both residential and non-residential programs.

1. Do you have programs designed for clients age 12 to 21? Yes No

If No:
We're not currently researching services for children under 12. Thank you very much for your time. Have a good [illegible]

2. Does your agency provide:
   - long-term residential programs? Yes No
   - short-term residential programs? Yes No
   - non-residential programs? Yes No

3. Many agencies offer their clients activities that are explicitly meant to enhance their sense of [illegible] well-being, and to help them grow into mature, [illegible] strength. Some people call these activities "spiritual," others use different names. I want to ask you about a variety of these activities, and also about certain religious activities. Please feel free to elaborate on your answers, especially if you feel that some of the activities we ask about are not relevant to your agency's work with clients. For example, some agencies do not consider [illegible] such as drumming. Although we realize there is an overlap between spiritual and religious activities, in this section we are not focusing on [illegible] We will ask about religious activities later.

YOUTH'S RIGHT TO SPIRITUALITY Page

I'm going to read a list of activities that some agencies offer. Please say 'yes' or 'no' to indicate whether your agency offers any of these.
(Check only the 'yes' responses)

1. Reading, in terms of education about the spiritual self
2. Meditation
3. Self-reflection through guided relaxation visualization
4. Yoga
5. Musical expression through drumming, chanting
6. Martial arts with philosophical components
7. Service-learning projects (Briefly describe)
8. Leadership opportunities integrated into programming

4. Are there other activities your agency offers that you feel are spiritual in nature? If YES, what are they? *(Probe: Are there any other activities that you feel are spiritual in nature? Are there activities that you do not consider spiritual but others might? Are there activities that you do not consider spiritual but others might? Are there activities that you do not consider spiritual but others might?)*

(If the agency offers spiritually oriented activities, skip to question 6. Otherwise, continue with question 5.)

5 IF THE AGENCY OFFERS NO SPIRITUALLY ORIENTED ACTIVITIES, OR OFFERS THEM VERY SPORADICALLY

I'm going to read a list of common reasons agencies give for not offering these kinds of activities, or for offering them very sporadically. Please tell me if any of these statements are true of your agency.

1. Staff lacks expertise about such activities
2. Youth is not interested in such activities
3. Staff has other priorities and responsibilities
4. Agency has no funding to support such activities
5. Staff and youth might misunderstand, misinterpret, or misconstrue these activities to impose their personal beliefs on others
6. Agency has no space to implement such activities
7. Staff & youth would not be interested in such activities

6. Rate your agency's interest in learning more about offering these kinds of activities to youth in your agency.

1. Very interested
2. Somewhat interested
3. Slightly interested
4. Not at all interested

7. If you are interested in offering spiritually oriented activities in the future, what would you need to realize that goal?

GO TO RELIGIOUS SECTION

[illegible]

AFTER ALL SPIRITUAL ACTIVITIES FORMS HAVE BEEN FILLED OUT:

20. In the future, do you see your agency increasing the number of spiritually oriented activities it offers?
    1. Almost certainly
    2. Very likely
    3. Unsure
    4. Probably not
    5. Almost certainly not

21. Why?

22. If you see your agency possibly increasing the number of spiritually oriented activities, what would you need to realize that goal?

RELIGIOUS SECTION[illegible]

23. Now we're going to move on to another topic. I'd like to ask about religious activities that some agencies offer. Please say 'yes' or 'no' to indicate whether your agency does any of these:

    1. Proactively offer clients a church, synagogue or other religious service*
    2. Allow clients to accompany staff to church or other religious service*
    3. Allow staff to participate in conversations about religion with clients*
    4. Offer prayer groups
    5. Offer a chapel or prayer room of any kind
    6. Offer religious instruction [illegible]
    7. Offer religious or faith-based counseling
    8. Offer to [illegible]

21. Are there other religious or faith-based activities your agency offers? If so, describe them.

[illegible]

IF AGENCY OFFERS NO RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES:

28. Do you see your agency offering religious or faith-based activities in the future?
1. Almost certainly
2. Very likely
3. Unsure
4. Probably not
5. Almost certainly not

29. If offering religious or faith-based activities is a possibility, what would you need in order to realize that goal?

GO TO LINE 40 TO FINISH INTERVIEW

WHEN ALL RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES FORMS ARE FILLED OUT:

38. In the future, do you see your agency increasing the number of religious or faith-based activities it offers?
1. Almost certainly
2. Very likely
3. Unsure, but it's a possibility
4. Probably not
5. Almost certainly not

39. If increasing the number of religious or faith-based activities is a possibility, what would you need to realize that goal?

40. The last thing I'd like to do is check that we have all the information from your Agency Profile, which I believe you filled out and faxed back to us.

If not, read off items on fax sheet and note information you receive in the questions. If never received, provide fax # and ask them to fax.

Thank you so much for taking the time to answer these questions. Your help will greatly assist us in our research. We expect to publish the study in the spring, and we'll mail you a copy. In the meantime, if I have questions about anything we've talked about, I'd like to get back in touch with you. Would it be best to call or email you?

APPENDIX

[RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES SHEET]: ACTIVITY 1

Name the activity: _____.

27. In which program do you use it? (click all categories that apply)
   1. Secure/maximum residential (judges decision, secure, specialized treatment programs, often locked doors)
   2. Long-term residential (this group has residential stay over 3 months, specialized treatment)
   3. Short-term residential (includes emergency shelter, transitional housing, detention, psychiatric programs)
   4. This activity is not done in one particular program, but is scheduled separately (i.e., it occurs at the same time)
   5. Other (please describe, e.g., is it done by [illegible] or other outsiders, or the program uses [illegible] to [illegible])

LONG-TERM RESIDENTIAL

If you offer this activity in more than one long-term residential program, how many programs is it done in?

28. What population do you serve in this program? (name 3 or 4 groups, maximum)

29. How long have you offered ACTIVITY 1 in this program?
   1. Less than 1 year
   2. Between 1 and 2 years
   3. Between 2 and 5 years
   4. Between 5 and 10 years
   5. More than 10 years

30. What is the primary reason for offering the activity? (CHECK ONE, or write in your own)
   - Has clear value for youth's development
   - Youth will receive benefits for years to come
   - Part of basic mission of program (always done)
   - Funding becomes available
   - Other

SHORT-TERM RESIDENTIAL

If you offer this activity in more than one short-term residential program, how many programs is it done in?

28. What population do you serve in this program? (name 3 or 4 groups, maximum)

29. How long have you offered ACTIVITY 1 in this program?
   1. Less than 1 year
   2. Between 1 and 2 years
   3. Between 2 and 5 years
   4. Between 5 and 10 years
   5. More than 10 years

30. What is the primary reason for offering the activity? (CHECK ONE, or write in your own)
   - Has clear value for youth's development
   - Youth will receive benefits for years to come
   - Part of basic mission of program (always done)
   - Funding becomes available
   - Other

NON-RESIDENTIAL

If you offer this activity in more than one non-residential program, how many programs is it done in?

28. What population do you serve in this program? (name 3 or 4 groups, maximum)

29. How long have you offered ACTIVITY 1 in this program?
   1. Less than 1 year
   2. Between 1 and 2 years
   3. Between 2 and 5 years
   4. Between 5 and 10 years
   5. More than 10 years

30. What is the primary reason for offering the activity? (CHECK ONE, or write in your own)
   - Has clear value for youth's development
   - Youth will receive benefits for years to come
   - Part of basic mission of program (always done)
   - Funding becomes available
   - Other

AGENCY PROFILE

Agency _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Your name _____

What year was your agency founded? _____

How many full-time staff did you have in 1999? _____

In 1999, what was your total agency budget? (circle one)

1. Under $3 million
2. Between $3 and $10 million
3. Over $10 million

What primary population(s) does your agency serve (name basic presenting issue):
_____

Approximately what percentage of your total budget is devoted exclusively to youth services? _____

Is your agency in a: (circle one)

1. Rural setting
2. Urban setting
3. Suburban setting
4. Different programs/mixed settings

In 1999, approximately what percentage of your clients were:

1. White (non-Hispanic) _____
2. African-American _____
3. Asian _____
4. Hispanic _____
5. Native-American _____
6. Other _____

Does your agency have a religious affiliation? (circle one) Yes No

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NEN provides training and support services; strengthens interagency collaborations; influences public policy; conducts research on issues related to children and adolescents; and shares resources and expertise.

New England Network
for Child, Youth & Family Services
25 Stow Road
Boxboro, MA 01719
(978) 266-1998

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