

The background of the top right section is a collage of images: a small green seedling in a pot of soil, a map of the world with a yellow pencil and a silver compass, and a green handprint on a light-colored surface.

BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT. BE IT.

EXPANDED EDITION NOW WITH **BE IT.** FOR YOUTH WORKERS

The background of the bottom left section is a collage of images: a dark blue space scene with planets labeled "Earth" and "Jupiter", and a colorful illustration of a bird with a blue head and yellow body perched on a branch with pink and white flowers.

Minnesota's Guide to Effective Afterschool Practices

 [IgniteAfterschool](https://www.facebook.com/IgniteAfterschool)  [@IgniteMN](https://twitter.com/IgniteMN)
[IgniteAfterschool.org](https://www.IgniteAfterschool.org)

CONTENTS

WELCOME	1
SAY WHAT?	2
USE THIS BOOK!	3
WE BELIEVE IT.	5

BUILDING BLOCKS

1 / INTENTIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN	7
2 / SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS & ENVIRONMENT	11
3 / YOUTH VOICE & LEADERSHIP	15
4 / RESPONSIVENESS TO CULTURE & IDENTITY	19
5 / COMMUNITY & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT	23
6 / ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT, STAFF SUPPORT & YOUTH SAFETY	27

ARE YOU READY TO BE IT? A

CORNERSTONES OF YOUTH WORK B

THRIVING STRATEGIES

1 / SELF AWARENESS	C
2 / BOUNDARIES	E
3 / SELF CARE	G
4 / LIFE-LONG LEARNING	I
5 / COLLABORATION & COMMUNITY	K
6 / ADVOCACY	M

CONTINUOUS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT (CPI)

WHY CPI?	45
PLAN	47
DO	49
CHECK	51
ADJUST	53

GUIDED REFLECTION 55

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & RESOURCES 61



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT. guide was made to be used.

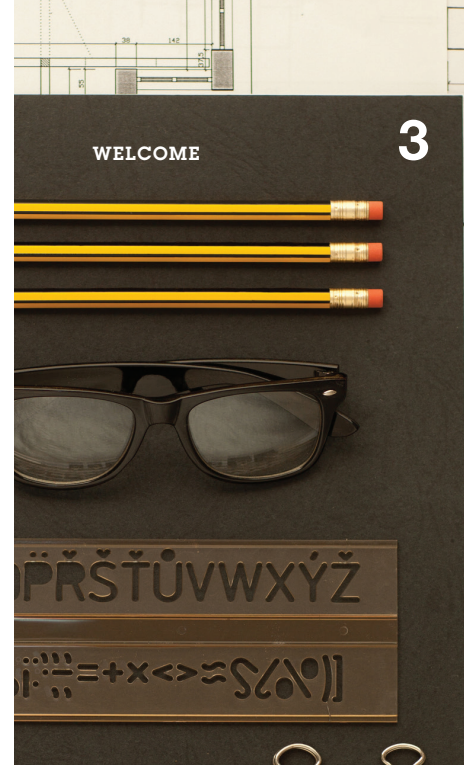
It's yours to mark up, photocopy, share, remove pages, add content from other seminars and sources...really, truly USE this book. This is an open-source workbook-style piece so you can pull apart and put together the pieces you need to help your program be the very best it can be.

The BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT. guide is divided into four main sections:

- 1. WE BELIEVE:** a shared set of principles and beliefs that guide our programs and Minnesota's afterschool community.
- 2. BUILDING BLOCKS:** six basic elements that build high-quality programs, with a list of research-based effective practices you can use to shape your program.
- 3. BE IT:** Shared values and six strategies to thrive as youth workers.
- 4. CONTINUOUS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT (CPI):** an ongoing process to help your programs continuously raise the bar on quality.

Each section was carefully vetted and selected by the network, for the network. We came together as a statewide community of afterschool providers to review the research, determine the most effective, up-to-date practices in afterschool, and create this guide so we can improve the lives of the young people we serve. Whether you're part of a well-oiled machine, or a tiny new program that's just finding your footing, each section is meant to build upon the other in a continuous cycle of reflection and improvement.

Now we have a clearly articulated vision of quality programming, a shared language to clearly define each program element, and a guide to facilitate an ongoing improvement process — let's roll up our sleeves and get to work! The youth we serve are counting on us.



BRING IT TO LIFE

Throughout BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT., you'll find ways to act on the concepts in this book, such as:

- questions to guide reflection
- online resources for more information
- the key steps in a Continuous Program Improvement cycle.

ONLINE TOOLKIT:

Looking for more ways to strengthen each Building Block or integrate the CPI process into your work? New tips, tools and resources are added often!



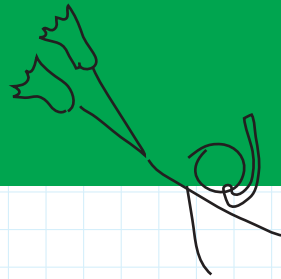
www.
igniteafterschool.org/bibi

BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT.

Minnesota's Guide to
Effective Afterschool Practices

EXPANDED EDITION

THIS PAGE IS
INTENTIONALLY LEFT
BLANK

DIVE DEEPER INTO PROGRAM DESIGN!

What is your role in intentional program design? How much time do you set aside for intentional program planning?

How well do your program activities meet the goals of your program? What could be improved?

Reflect

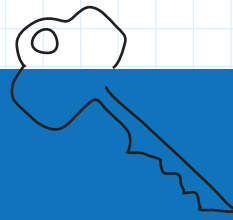
BUILDING
BLOCK
ONE



INTENTIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN

What learning styles are prioritized in your program? How can you design activities for other learning styles?

How and where are you creating space for youth to reflect? Is it often enough?



YOUTH WORKERS ARE KEY TO POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS.

How do you get to know each individual youth?

How comfortable are you with modeling? Do you model some behaviors more than others? Why?

Reflect

BUILDING
BLOCK
TWO

2

SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS & ENVIRONMENT

When it comes to reinforcing program expectations, how consistent are you across youth?

How do you handle conflict with and among youth? How well does your response promote belonging?



How do you solicit and incorporate youth ideas and requests? How could you do that even more?

How do you encourage and enable youth to develop their leadership skills?

Reflect

BUILDING
BLOCK
THREE

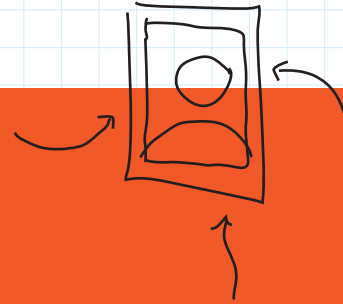


YOUTH VOICE & LEADERSHIP

What would youth say about your leadership style?

What is the biggest challenge you face in promoting youth voice? What could help you address this challenge?

WELCOME

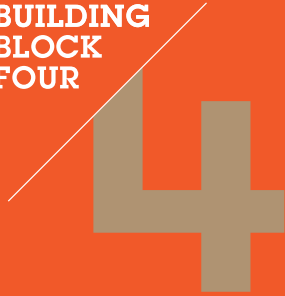
**MEET YOUTH "WHERE THEY'RE AT."**

When and how are you able to reflect on your own culture and identity? How can you further develop your intercultural skills?

How do you provide youth regular opportunities to explore and discuss their own cultures and identities?

Reflect

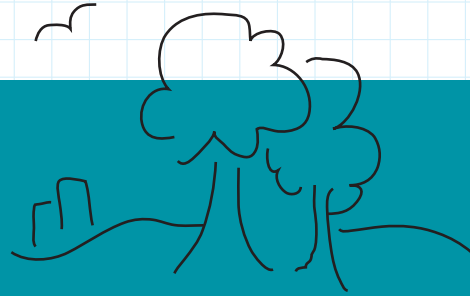
BUILDING
BLOCK
FOUR



RESPONSIVENESS TO CULTURE & IDENTITY

How do you know if you are being responsive to young people's culture and identity?

How have you made your program more inclusive and responsive? What else can you do?

**WE'RE PART OF THE VILLAGE!**

What do you know and believe about the families and communities of the young people you serve? What is the source of that information?

How do you go about engaging families? How successful are you? Who can give you feedback on this?

Reflect

BUILDING
BLOCK
FIVE

5

COMMUNITY & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Which organizations and individuals are your community partners? Who is not on that list that could be? What is holding you back from pursuing new relationships?

What opportunities are you creating for youth to lead in their own community?



A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT.

How comfortable are you sharing your organization's mission and values with others?

How well do you understand your organization's policies and your role in promoting them?

Reflect

BUILDING
BLOCK
SIX

6

ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT,
STAFF SUPPORT & YOUTH SAFETY

Does your organization have any policies that you don't agree with or have a hard time following? Why are they challenging for you and what could you do about it?

What professional development opportunities are you pursuing? How do you take what you learn and apply it to your organization?

BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT.



**BE IT.
GUIDE**

*An Addendum to Believe It. Build It. –
Minnesota's Guide to Effective Afterschool Practices*

**Youth Worker Tools
for Navigating the
Complexities of Working
with Young People**

THIS PAGE IS
INTENTIONALLY LEFT
BLANK

GET READY TO BE IT.



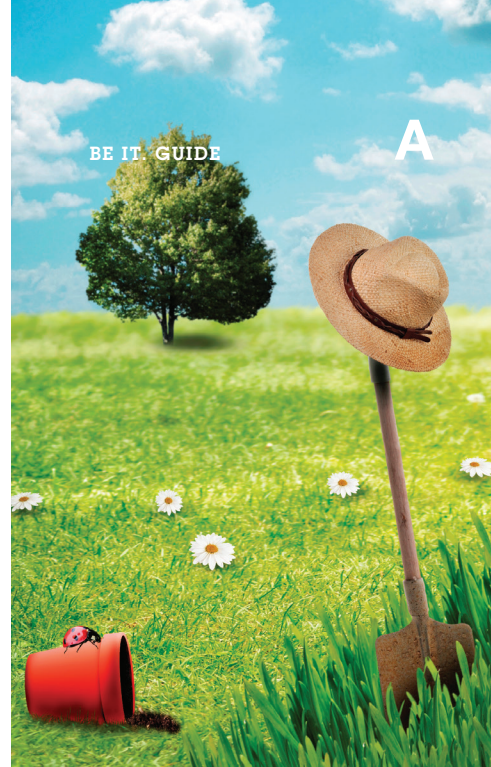
We all want to be at our best when we show up for youth every day.

Simple, right? But in reality, our daily interactions with young people, families, schools, managers, etc. aren't simple at all. BE IT was created to help make complicated situations more clear so we can really be at our best for young people.

Here's what you'll find in these pages:

- 1. Cornerstones of Youth Work:** Shared principles that build off the WE BELIEVE statements on p. 5. They're the values that guide our day-to-day interactions with young people.
- 2. Thriving Strategies:** Each Thriving Strategy is one interconnected piece of what we need to thrive as youth workers. They're most effective when youth workers and employers commit to them. Work through these in any order, and circle back as needed. (Don't worry if some are more solid than others — that's perfectly normal and will change as your career progresses and your organization evolves!)
- 3. Manager Action Items:** Youth workers can't fully BE IT without ongoing support from higher ups. If you supervise youth workers and help set their work culture and conditions, you (*yes, you!*) play a critical role in youth workers' success. The Manager Action Items offer specific strategies you can use right away to better support youth workers.
- 4. Building Block Reflection Questions:** We heard you — you wanted more opportunities to reflect on how your role as a youth worker supports high-quality effective practices. We've added more youth worker-centered reflection questions to each Building Block.

We know these tools won't solve every dilemma, but they can help us navigate the unexpected challenges that come with youth work. We hope they make your work more rewarding and deepen the positive impact you make on young people.



ARE YOU READY TO BE IT?

BE IT speaks most directly to youth workers in summer and afterschool programs, but we hope anyone working with young people finds helpful insights here.

Manager Action Item:
Give yourself a hand for supporting youth workers! Your first challenge is to reflect on what YOU currently do to help youth workers BE IT.

Let's go!
Turn the page to
get started



ONLINE TOOLKIT:

www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi-beit

BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT.

Minnesota's Guide to
Effective Afterschool Practices

EXPANDED EDITION



CORNERSTONES

OF YOUTH WORK

Youth come first. We put the needs and interests of young people at the heart of everything we do. That's not always easy as we often grapple with competing interests. We continuously adjust to find a balance that is receptive and responsive to the needs, concerns, and hopes of young people.

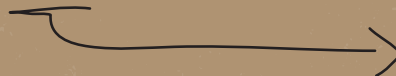
We stand up for equity for all young people. Our work is grounded in social justice. We live that truth by ending inequities in systems and opportunities. We recognize that young people experience different barriers based on class, race, gender, ability, sexual identity and more. We have a responsibility to spearhead change.

We support young people's positive identity development. We know that identity is grounded in community, family and culture, and encourage young people as they explore their place in the world. We provide opportunities for them to formulate their own positive sense of self, to build healthy relationships with others, to find a place where they are valued and give value to others, and to envision positive futures for themselves.

We safeguard young people's physical and emotional well-being. Ensuring young people are physically safe and emotionally secure is a big responsibility — and also a big sign of trust. We acknowledge that feeling safe differs for each young person, especially for those who've experienced adversity and trauma. We provide safe spaces for all young people, and always put their well-being first.

We act with integrity toward ourselves, others and our profession. We are aware of our influence on young people. We conduct ourselves knowing that we are role models. We are professionals who ensure that what we say and do increases public respect for young people and elevates the field of youth work. We know that acting with integrity requires honesty, authenticity, and courage.

Youth Worker THRIVING STRATEGIES start on the next page!





THRIVING STRATEGY ONE

SELF AWARENESS

What it means:

As a youth worker, you understand who you are — your character, values, biases and lived experiences that shape the way you view yourself and others. You know that your own self-awareness impacts how you see and support young people.

Why It Matters:

How you show up for youth affects your interactions with young people, and they pick up on that. Many things impact your sense of self — cultural background, sexual identity, class, family, education, religion, big city or small-town upbringing — the list goes on. Being self-aware means continuously re-examining your own identity to better understand your existing beliefs about how the world works and how young people navigate it. That helps you uncover any assumptions (which you might not have even realized you had!) about young people that are based on *your* experience, but don't necessarily align with *their* identity and experience. When you're self-aware, you're better positioned to support young people on their own journey to knowing themselves.

Manager Action Item:

- ✿ Have you created intentional opportunities for youth workers to unpack their own identities? Do this: Create time and space to regularly reflect upon identity and how it shapes the way we view ourselves and others. Lead by example by sharing how your identity influences how you work with staff.

OVER



WHAT DO YOUTH WORKERS SAY?



When I'm authentic, it allows the basketball players who are secretly anime fans to hang out with the anime fans who are secretly basketball players. Authenticity creates an environment of 'we are safe and we are allowed to be whoever we want to be in this space.'



NEED RESOURCES?

Find them at www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi-beit

BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT.

Minnesota's Guide to Effective Afterschool Practices

EXPANDED EDITION



Reflect

THRIVING
STRATEGY
ONE



SELF AWARENESS

How do people see me? How do I know this?

How do my identities shape my approach to youth work? How do I show up for young people? Am I authentic with young people?

What power, privileges and assumptions do I bring to youth work?

What experiences shaped the way I see myself? How have those evolved over time and how do they impact my approach to youth work?

Where are my "blind spots" — biases or misperceptions that shape the way I see the world? Who can help me think about this?

THRIVING STRATEGY TWO

BOUNDARIES

What it means:

Your relationship with young people is both authentic and professional, with appropriate limits on your role in a young person's life. You stay within healthy and respectful boundaries, and recognize there is a power imbalance because of your role as a youth worker.

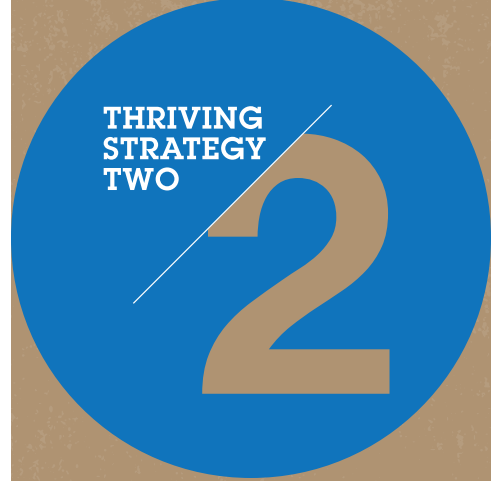
Why It Matters:

Youth workers tend to have a great deal of passion for helping young people and compassion for the challenges they face. This emotional connection can serve as a powerful spark for fostering relationships. (In fact, building positive, trusting relationships with young people is an afterschool effective practice!) But we're still professionals, so we must maintain professional boundaries that protect youths' physical and psychological safety. Where exactly that line is drawn often varies from one situation to the next, so it's important to have regular reflections and discussions with your supervisor and coworkers. Then, turn those conversations into opportunities to continuously clarify policies that identify appropriate boundaries.

Manager Action Item:

- 🌱 Do your organization's policies and training address appropriate boundaries? Do this: Review your policies with staff. Discuss various scenarios and identify any questions about appropriate boundaries that are not addressed in your current policies. See Building Block 6 on page 27 for inspiration.

OVER



WHAT DO YOUTH WORKERS SAY?



One of the biggest challenges I faced was with a youth who was going through abusive situations at home. They trusted me enough to tell me what was going on, but I had to report it. It's the conflicting emotion of I really don't want to break that trust. But I know that this is what I have to do.



NEED RESOURCES?

Find them at www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi-beit

BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT.

Minnesota's Guide to Effective Afterschool Practices

EXPANDED EDITION



Reflect

THRIVING
STRATEGY
TWO

2

BOUNDARIES

What are the potential risks and consequences of not having healthy boundaries in your relationships with young people?

Think of a time when you were unsure of the appropriate role for you in a young person's life. What was the situation? How did you find clarity?

What resources are available to help you maintain healthy boundaries with youth?

What are some warning signs that a relationship boundary might be in danger of being crossed?

What can you do if you feel like a coworker's relationship is crossing boundaries with a young person?

THRIVING STRATEGY THREE

SELF CARE

What it means:

You prioritize *you*. It's not always easy to “turn off” your youth worker switch at the end of the day, so you intentionally do what you need to do to unplug from the emotional and physical challenges of youth work. You recognize that you can't (and shouldn't) solve every problem in a young person's life.

Why It Matters:

Youth workers often see young people in stressful situations. We can't always control the challenges in a young person's life, but we can control how prepared we are to offer support and help them navigate difficulties. There's no one way to care for yourself amid the daily challenges of youth work — some days you may need a quiet space to think and other times a peer group for support. Regardless of the activity, it's all about prioritizing your physical and mental health so you can sustain yourself in this line of work. It's also about you not carrying too big a burden. Sometimes self-care is connecting young people to other resources for additional support.

Manager Action Item:

- ⚙️ You set the tone by managing workloads, building a supportive team and encouraging work/life balance. Do this: Challenge your staff to report back on one activity they did to promote self-care. Consider a team self-care challenge, activity or experience.

OVER

THRIVING STRATEGY THREE

3

WHAT DO YOUTH WORKERS SAY?



One of my values is self-care. You can't pour from an empty cup. If you don't have it in you and you didn't fill yourself back up, you can't come in and think you're ready to give it all to these kids.



NEED RESOURCES?

Find them at www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi-beit

BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT.

Minnesota's Guide to Effective Afterschool Practices

EXPANDED EDITION

Reflect

THRIVING
STRATEGY
THREE

3

SELF CARE

What does good self-care look like for me?

What are my symptoms of poor self-care? How do these come through in my work with youth?

In what ways does my workplace support self-care? How could that be improved?

What is one small thing I can do for myself right now to promote self-care?
What can I do longer-term?

How can I model and encourage self-care for the youth I serve?

THRIVING STRATEGY FOUR**LIFE-LONG LEARNING****What it means:**

You embrace continuous learning and adopt a growth mindset. You take time to invest in your career as a youth worker, reflect on the work and sharpen or expand skills — both for yourself *and* to better understand the everyday lives of young people.

Why It Matters:

The world young people are navigating is constantly changing, and that means the field of youth work is too. We're always adapting, so life-long learning means our skills and knowledge need to evolve along with us. Professional development includes many different things and can take place in many different formats. You might attend a training, find a mentor (or mentor someone else!), go on a retreat, or meet regularly with colleagues to share techniques. All of those experiences help expand and deepen your knowledge. Adopting that growth mindset means you believe that with effort and persistence, you *can* learn and *can* improve. That's the first step toward amazing accomplishments!

Manager Action Item:

- ✿ Learning requires an investment of time *and* resources. Does your organizational culture value life-long learning? Is professional development included in your budget? Do This: Update (or create!) your staff professional development budget. Consider allocating a certain percentage for each staff member to use annually, and invite staff to propose a plan for how to use their annual funds.

OVER

THRIVING STRATEGY FOUR

4

WHAT DO YOUTH WORKERS SAY?

“I’m getting better at tapping into the resources around me. I have co-workers that I can go to who have gone through the same things; I’m utilizing them to help me understand.”

NEED RESOURCES?

Find them at www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi-beit

BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT.

Minnesota's Guide to Effective Afterschool Practices

EXPANDED EDITION

Reflect

THRIVING
STRATEGY
FOUR



LIFE-LONG LEARNING

What am I curious about? What do I want to know about the world? About young people?
About youth work?

What does my current professional development plan look like and how is it working
for me? How could I branch out? How do I share my professional development goals
with my supervisor?

What are my strengths and where do I need to improve?

How can I share what I learn through professional development with others in my
organization? What can others teach me?



THRIVING STRATEGY FIVE

COLLABORATION & COMMUNITY

What it means:

Youth work links to the outside world. It's part of something bigger that's making a positive impact on young people and entire communities. As a youth worker, you are part of the community that is connected to all the pieces that touch a young person's life — family, school, neighborhoods, and more.

Why It Matters:

There's strength in numbers. Young people get the support they need to thrive when you as a youth worker collaborate with others. Being deeply connected to a young person's community puts you closer to "where they're at" so you can better meet them there. It also helps you better understand the unique opportunities, resources and strengths in their community. When you're connected to a network of community allies, young people are part of the "bigger picture," and we're all better able to support them as a whole person. Together, struggles are divided, solutions are multiplied, and youth have more opportunities to connect, learn and lead.

Manager Action Item:

- ⚙️ Managers play a critical role in nurturing connection and collaboration. Do staff have permission to use work time to form relationships with coworkers? How can you teach community-building skills and give staff spaces to practice? Do this: Each month, pick one staff member to focus on. Make a professional introduction for them. Bring them along to one community-building meeting on your calendar and debrief afterward.

OVER



WHAT DO YOUTH WORKERS SAY?



I think it's really important to make connections with other youth workers, kids and families. When you start by building relationships, you're able to make more effective changes as you move forward.



NEED RESOURCES?

Find them at www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi-beit

BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT.

Minnesota's Guide to Effective Afterschool Practices

EXPANDED EDITION



Reflect

THRIVING
STRATEGY
FIVE

5

COLLABORATION & COMMUNITY

Who makes up the community where I work? Where are the resources and allies?
Who's missing and how can I engage those individuals?

How can I strengthen my community network? What can I contribute?

What resources and contacts does my community have? How can I tap into them more often?

How often do I meet new people and explore collaboration? Where else can I make connections?

What opportunities do I have to be a "link" in my community? Who can I connect to one another?

Which collaborations have been most successful? Why? What can we duplicate or build upon from those successes?

THRIVING STRATEGY SIX

ADVOCACY

What it means:

Advocacy is messy. Sometimes it's personal — it can be specific to you, your program and/or the young people you support. Sometimes it's fixing policies and practices at your organization so that they better support youth and youth workers. Sometimes it's coaching young people to advocate for their own needs. And sometimes it's advocating for bigger policy change at a city, county, state or national level.

Why It Matters:

While advocacy is undoubtedly challenging, it also has the potential for great reward. Systemic change can happen, funding sources can increase, opportunities for youth can expand — but only if we come together to advocate for our needs and values personally, publicly, and alongside young people.

Manager Action Item:

- ✿ Understand the role your organization can play in formal advocacy efforts (especially if you are a nonprofit) and empower youth workers to engage in allowable advocacy work. Do this: Challenge your organization to take a stand for the opportunities and resources young people need. Ask youth workers to reflect on policies or practices that have the potential to improve youth outcomes and then take action to change them.

OVER

THRIVING STRATEGY SIX

6

WHAT DO YOUTH WORKERS SAY?

BB I've gotten phone calls from youth in a really tough place when they're looking for support. That's a big win. At the very least, we can advocate for them and talk to the right people to get them access to services.

BB

NEED RESOURCES?

Find them at www.igniteafterschool.org/bibi-beit

BELIEVE IT. BUILD IT.

Minnesota's Guide to Effective Afterschool Practices

EXPANDED EDITION

Reflect

THRIVING
STRATEGY
SIX

6

ADVOCACY

Think of a time when you struggled with advocating for a young person.
What was the source of that struggle?

When have you had to be an advocate for young people, yourself or your program?
What worked or didn't work about that experience?

How can you familiarize yourself with public policies that impact youth programs?
How can you get involved in supporting those policy decisions?

How comfortable are you helping youth advocate for their needs? How can you build
confidence and skills in this area?