

## Survey of District/Regional level Jr High/Middle School Programming and Representation

The purpose of this survey was to discover what levels of programming and representation are currently in existence across the US and Canada, and to provide some basic information to the Continental Junior High Transitional Age Range Representative (Jr High TARR) who is a member of the Continental Youth Council, which works with the Youth Office in Boston, Massachusetts.

While being a brief survey, it was the hope that the information gathered would provide enough information to begin to understand the level of ministry that is currently being done in this area while also providing encouragement to sustain or increase that level of ministry. Jr High/Middle School programming and representation is the other side of the bridge to young adulthood of which we so often speak. Or it could also be seen as another of the many bridges we come across in our lives, each of which is very important.

It should also be noted that there were a limited number of responses to the survey and only myself compiling the results. This definitely allows for some bias to be present in the results. It was my intention to keep the questions on the survey at a fairly general level in an attempt to avoid some of that bias and I have done my best to remain impartial with my reporting of the findings as well.

The first survey question asked for the name of the district or region about which the information was being given. Responses to this survey were received from every district and region in the US and Canada. At the time of this survey, that number is 23 as there are two regions in Canada that currently have one regional level structure for youth programming. This level of participation was essential to gain a more accurate understanding of the ministry that is being provided.

The next question involved the age range that is used to describe Young Religious Unitarian Universalist (YRUU) programming in the district/region. The percentages do not add up to one hundred as there is some overlap in the final two categories. Each single survey response accounts for just over four percent of the respondents.

Age range of 14-18 30%  
Age range of 14-19 17%  
Age range of 14-20 26%  
Beginning at age 12 22%  
Include up to age 22 9%

The question about Jr High/Middle School representation on the district/regional level youth committee shows that 35% do have elected representation at that level. Most districts/regions that have an age range starting at 12 do have a Jr High/Middle School representative, some have more than one. They are typically elected at district/regional conferences that include both Jr High/Middle School age youth as well as Sr High age

youth. One district/region holds cluster level elections, with one Jr High/Middle School age representative from each cluster, another has a Jr High/Middle School age specific conference where they elect their own representation and one elects a Sr High age person to serve as a liaison to the Jr High/Middle School age group. There are clearly a number of ways to have representation for this age group. There are also a variety of reasons for those differences. Because there are those who might be interested in exploring this issue to a greater extent and who might be interested in contacting people in those districts/regions that currently have Jr High/Middle School age representation for more information, the districts/regions who answered this question affirmatively are listed alphabetically below.

Central Region (CUC)  
Florida District (UUA)  
Heartland District (UUA)  
Massachusetts Bay District (UUA)  
Northeast District (UUA)  
Ohio Meadville District (UUA)  
Prairie Star District (UUA)  
Western Region (CUC)

As far as programming for Jr High/Middle School age youth, the responses were very much on the positive side with 78% of respondents indicating that there is district/regional level programming for this age group. One additional district/region indicated that there is occasional programming based on availability of support and another indicated that there is congregational/cluster level planning that may be the beginning of something on a larger scale. While this was just a yes/no question, it was clear from the responses to other questions that there is a variety of programming that currently exists. They vary in length from an afternoon to a full weekend, and they may or may not be exclusively for youth in this age group.

There were excellent responses to the last two questions. Some responses, and excerpts of others will be included in this report in an effort to summarize what was written by those who took the survey. Not everyone responded to these questions and language that was specifically related to a district/region has been removed to help broaden the scope and potential help the comments might be to others.

#### Question:

How might Jr High/Middle School age youth be better served by your district/region?

#### Responses:

Middle School listserv, Middle School resources linked on the district/regional website, workshop for Middle School group leaders at annual meeting.

Similar trainings for Middle School that are offered at the High School level. Curriculum that is up to date and reflective of children in this day and age.

More programs specific to Middle School aged kids rather than "junior" high school programming.

Providing more resources and planning for congregation's middle school groups.

Middle School cluster groups that plan 2-3 events in a year. Overnights, one-day or half-day events. These cluster groups are initiated by district/regional staff with local leaders doing the planning.

Communicate better with our congregations.

By integrating/linking a smooth transition to YRUU programming.

A chance to have Jr High conferences, because we only have "youth" cons/rallys, and the last one Jr. youth attended, they weren't allowed to stay overnight at.

Stronger enthusiasm and support from parents for getting Jr High youth to events.

Youth ministry in the district/region with more focus, building a stronger committee of youth representatives, and having Jr. youth as a part of that.

Individual congregations asking for consultation in regard to youth programming, including Jr. High youth.

Having congregations with active Jr. High/Middle School youth groups to be asked their feedback of what they would like to see more of.

Having a Jr High age representative on the district/regional Youth Steering Committee.

Time for Sr High and Jr High youth to connect at other events like annual district/regional meetings.

Including Jr High/Middle School in YRUU social action projects.

Stronger support from a staff person to help institutionalize the events.

Having a group of consultants who can work with congregations and be available to lead workshops with youth and adults.

Jr High/Middle School visits/exchanges with neighboring UU youth groups.

### Question:

Please let us know any other information you feel is important for us to know about Jr. High/Middle School programming and representation in your district/region.

### Responses:

We have two smaller area Middle School cons/rallys that are beloved, healthy, and well-attended. We also have seed money and encourage a trend of Coming of Agers from small congregations to link up with larger congregations with existing and strong programs. This is proving successful.

We have one church that does cons/rallys that is paving the way.

Too much emphasis on youth empowerment rather than sound middle school philosophy abounds in our district/region.

Activities are available for Jr High/Middle School at all district/regional events including cons/rallys. This is really an area our individual congregations need to concentrate on with our help.

In talking with a few DREs, there is a growing consensus that we need to "reach" youth by the fifth or sixth grade because after that they have way too many options to occupy their Sunday morning youth group times.

We use an annual con/rally to bridge our seniors out and our incoming 9th grade youth in.

I'm just starting to feel like I know what I'm doing with Sr. High youth and am sadly lacking in Sr. High/Middle School knowledge to even know what we need to know. There must be DREs in the district/region who are more knowledgeable than I am.

We currently have difficulty generating the trust and commitment of many DREs to support either Jr. or Sr. youth to attend cons/rallies or trainings.

We have had Jr.High/Middle School advisor trainings and some congregations "fun" events for this age group.

It seems we not only have one gap into young adulthood, but also have created another one from RE into the youth phase. I often hear that there is a wide range of issues that those age 12-22 (NOTE: I substituted the extreme upper and lower age ranges here) are going through. We have an extremely comprehensive OWL program that we teach to our younger youth. We seem to think that they are ready to hear and discuss things of that sensitive nature, then we expect them to do nothing more than advanced arts and crafts at a con/rally.

We've had Jr. High/Middle School representation at the district/regional level for nine years. They have elected their own representation for the past seven. They were appointed for the two years before that.

The district/region sponsors cluster based Jr. High/Middle School day long conferences and helps with some congregational sponsored activities. There is not a specific Jr. High/Middle School organizational structure. Most of their programs are worked out between DREs and District/Regional YRUU staff.

There is a summer camp nearby that is highly successful for this age group. Maybe we could find out their philosophy and curriculum.

We narrowed our age range from 12-22 a number of years ago but have continued to make a strong effort to have quality, appropriate programming for 7th and 8th grade youth.

We have some adult Jr. High/Middle School educators who have created a day-long training program for adults who might want to work with this age group. We have taught it twice and plan on continuing to do so on an annual basis.

Many of our congregations feel that Jr. High/Middle School is really the place to start focusing on high school youth ministry, and they put a lot of resources into building up the Jr. High/Middle School programs. I think we need a training on Jr. High/Middle School ministry available to people, because while many of the tenants in the YRUU youth ministry trainings apply to this age group, it is a totally different age group with different programmatic, emotional, and physical needs.

We are currently trying to negotiate an age range reduction which will help us focus on the Jr. High/Middle School separately.

We have two events per year for this age group, staffed by Sr. High youth and adult advisors. We really feel that Sr. High leaders learn so much from this experience.

Our district/regional Youth Adult Committee is just beginning to work on reaching out past the youth who attend cons/rallies to all the youth in the district, assessing and initiating a variety of program and ministry opportunities.

OWL and local Coming of Age programs have been very effective in getting and keeping youth involved in the church. Leadership Development Conferences and

Spirituality Development Conferences should be emphasized more for 8th and 9th graders so that the upcoming leaders get the valuable training provided by those sessions.

In Conclusion:

The responses to this survey provide a glimpse into the world of Jr. High/Middle School programming and representation that is currently in place. They point out both strengths and areas that could use more support.

As was mentioned at the beginning, the purposes of this survey were to discover what levels of programming and representation are currently in existence across the US and Canada, and to provide some basic information to the Continental Jr High TARR. That task is now complete. I also noted that it was my hope that this survey would also provide encouragement to sustain or increase the level of ministry that is currently provided to Jr. High/Middle School youth. While it will be up to each of us to find ways to increase the level of ministry being provided, I do hope that this survey and it's findings help in that effort by raising awareness and beginning some conversations.

Copies of this report will be provided to the Youth Office in Boston, the Director of Lifespan Learning in Canada, to district/regional staff who work with youth and religious education, and to the advisor, religious education, and youth council listservs.

My thanks to those who completed the survey and shared their experiences, hopes and dreams for this work.

Respectfully submitted,  
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