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Introduction

If youth is the season of hope, it's often so only in the sense that our elders are hopeful about us; for no age is so apt as youth to think its emotions, partings, and resolves are the last of their kind. Each crisis seems final, simply because it is new.

— George Eliot [Marian Evans Cross] in *Middlemarch*

Tens of thousands of community-serving organizations center at least part of their programs on youth. Services range from child-care programs for infants and tots to social and fraternal organizations for teens. Included in this wide-ranging selection of educational and recreational activities are youth sports, youth development, scouting, mentoring, religious instruction, and search and rescue. This wealth of experiences equips the youth of today with the social and vocational experiences to become the adults of tomorrow. Ideally, those of you who are leading these programs see childhood or youth as the season of hope. It's a period when children under your care need nurturing, while they explore, test, grow and stretch into becoming themselves. The season seems long to the children who hungrily grab at life, wanting to do more and more without your help. But as adults you know that childhood disappears much too fast, and that freedom guided within limits during the season of youth in the end can produce a hardier and more resilient season of adulthood.

Much as the children under your care need to be protected from harm, the organization serving them needs to be protected to survive and continue to operate in the future. Each youth-serving program has unique risks, as well as risks shared by other nonprofits, that should be addressed. These risks encompass youth as service recipients, as unpaid volunteers and as paid staff. The risks extend from early childhood to participants who may be as old as 21 years of age—older than the age of majority in most states.

Several years ago, the Nonprofit Risk Management Center published the *Child Abuse Prevention Primer for Your Organization.* The single-focus book was extremely well received, but it didn't address many of the issues about which

the Center continues to field questions. In response to the array of questions from youth-serving nonprofits, we offer *The Season of Hope: A Risk Management Guide for Youth-Serving Nonprofits,* which takes a broader focus.

Unfortunately, protecting participants in youth-serving programs is a larger task than it was when the first book was published. In *Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them,* James Garbarino postulates that the unspoken social contract that existed between adults and children in earlier generations has been broken. He says that as a consequence of the killings on school campuses, children realize that they can't always count on adults to protect them. Conversely, adults can no longer enter into a contract to ensure the safety of young people as they grow and develop. But you can mitigate the risks inherent in your youth-serving programs.

The Season of Hope focuses on using risk management as a tool to protect children, as much as we can, from harm irrespective of its source. Our intent is twofold: 1) to improve the safety of youth who participate in nonprofit and volunteer programs and 2) to ensure that the ability of organizations to accomplish their youth-development missions isn't impaired due to inadequate risk management planning and implementation. Several specific risk exposures common to youth-serving organizations, including child maltreatment, are discussed.

The book is written to offer assistance to youth development professionals, program managers, agency and organizational executives, board members, and paid and volunteer staff members of youth-serving organizations as they consider their risk management needs.

The first chapter introduces the concept of risk management in community-serving nonprofit organizations. Those of you familiar with the process might wish to skim the chapter as a refresher before delving into the specifics of how it applies to youth-serving organizations. For those new to risk management per se or how it's applied in the nonprofit world, you may wish to give it a more careful read.

The second chapter identifies how the normal child-development process creates risks for organizations. It also discusses the differences between children and adults pointing out the need for organizations to clearly establish boundaries for acceptable behavior in sponsored activities.

The third chapter examines parental roles as they interact with organizations serving their children. Changes in family demographics affect the ability of some organizations to deliver traditional services and, therefore, have a bearing on the risks related to serving children and youth.

The fourth chapter looks at the varieties of child maltreatment and the implications for a youth-serving organization's risk management program.

Chapter 5 approaches violence among youth from bullies, gangs and weapons. It addresses how you can recognize these threats and reduce their impact on your nonprofit's mission.

Chapter 6 examines injuries based on their source, such as poisons and falls, and from their site, such as playgrounds and camps and some measures you can take to lessen the number and severity of these injuries at your nonprofit.

Chapter 7 identifies three types of threats inherent in the newest risk management challenge to nonprofits: Internet use by children and youth. You can balance the benefits of this tool, which is becoming integral to learning, and the risks of someone turning the tool on the learners and using it to harass or abuse them.

Chapter 8 investigates physical and mental health problems that are brought into your nonprofit by young participants. Drugs and alcohol, which involve and affect both physical and mental health, are handled separately.