



POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT 2006 Community Commitment Issue

ALL CHILDREN AND YOUTH SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO PREVENTION, INTERVENTION AND FAMILY SERVICE PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT POSITIVE ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

There is a growing body of evidence about the positive relationship between the number of supports and opportunities children experience while growing up and the increased successes and decreased problems they have during adolescence.¹

Positive youth development (PYD):

- Provides young people with a range of opportunities and supports to help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent.
- Actively engages young people in the process of their development, provides a variety of learning experiences, offers new roles and responsibilities, as well as key supports and relationships.
- Helps communities shift from a problem-focused approach to serving youth, to a community-youth involvement model designed to capture the talents, abilities, and worth of every young American.²

Key philosophical elements of a positive youth development framework

- Youth development does not occur in isolation from family, community, and country.
- Young people's maturation process is influenced by their surroundings and affected by relationships with key people such as parents, teachers, youth workers and peers.
- The positive youth development approach includes services (to meet basic needs), opportunities (to learn, practice and contribute) and supports (emotional, motivational, strategic).
- Not all young people start at the same place developmentally because of economic circumstances, family problems or personal differences.
- Developmental activities must be tailored to meet the needs of young people who are in disadvantaged circumstances necessary to address the limitations in their life circumstances.³

All young people benefit from PYD, but there are populations who are shortchanged because of life circumstances. Youth who often miss PYD opportunities are: School dropouts, homeless and runaway youth, foster youth, delinquent youth, youth alienated from healthy adult relationships, economically deprived youth, and youth with individual differences that segregate them from mainstream society.

Research findings indicate that

1. Positive developmental pathways are fostered when children and adolescents have developed a sense of industry and competency; a feeling of connectedness to others and to society; a belief in their control over their fate in life; and, a stable identity. Young people who have developed these characteristics appear to be more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors, exhibit positive school performances, and be productive members of their community.²
2. In 2003, the average young person surveyed by the Search Institute experienced only 18.6 of the 40 developmental assets. Search Institute's research of 40 developmental assets has found that these assets are powerful influences on adolescent behavior - both protecting young people from different problem behaviors and promoting positive attitudes and behaviors.⁴
3. Positive youth development requires creating a shared vision for youth and community.
4. Positive youth development requires collaboration.
5. Shifting to a positive youth development approach requires educating service providers, policymakers, families and communities.
6. Desired outcomes should be identified as well as evaluation indicators must be designed.⁴

¹ Public/Private Ventures, Fall 2000

² Understanding Youth Development – US Dept. of HHS (1997)

³ Reconnecting Youth & Community – U.S. Department of HHS (1996)

⁴ Search Institute – *Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors: The 2003 Dataset*