Best Practices: Positive Youth Development

Positive Youth Development is a policy perspective that emphasizes providing services and opportunities to support all young people in developing a sense of a competence, usefulness, belonging and empowerment. While individual programs can provide youth development activities, the youth development approach works best when entire communities including young people are involved in creating a continuum of services and opportunities that youth need to grow into happy and healthy adults. [1]

Youth Development is not a highly sophisticated prescription for "fixing troubled kids." Rather, it is about people, programs, institutions and systems who provide all youth, "troubled" or not, with the supports and opportunities they need to empower themselves. Youth Development strategies focus on giving young people the chance to form relationships with caring adults, build skills, exercise leadership, and help their communities. [2]

Youth Development is both a philosophy and an approach to policies and programs that serve young people. The underlying philosophy of youth development is holistic, preventative and positive, focusing on the development of assets and competencies in **all** young people.

Key elements to the Youth Development *approach* are the following: [3]
- Youth are viewed as a valued and respected asset to society;
- Policies and programs focus on the evolving developmental needs and tasks of adolescents, and involve youth as partners rather than clients;
- Families, schools and communities are engaged in developing environments that support youth;
- Adolescents are involved in activities that enhance their competence, connections, character, confidence and contribution to society;
- Adolescents are provided an opportunity to experiment in a safe environment and to develop positive social values and norms; and
- Adolescents are engaged in activities that promote self-understanding, self-worth, and a sense of belonging and resiliency.

Essential Components:

Young people need safe, structured places to learn and links to basic services that, if absent, can prevent them from learning and functioning within our society. A report by

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[1] Positive Youth Development, National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY), Silver Spring, Maryland, 2001, available at www.ncfy.com

[2] Center for Youth Development and Policy, "What is Youth Development?" Academy for Educational Development, available at http://cyd.aed.org/whatishtml.

[3] This list of key elements draws on materials from: Teipel, K., *Minnesota Adolescent Health Action Plan*, forthcoming; findings from key informant interviews conducted by Stephen Conley for the Partnership; *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*, National Academy Press, Washington, DC (January, 2002); and the National Youth Development Web site: http://www.nydic.org/nydic/devdef.html

the National Research Council on Community Programs to Promote Youth Development summarizes what research tells us about adolescent development, the necessary ingredients or "personal and social assets" that support young people's well being, and outcomes of community program participation. This report includes the expertise of youth advocates, policy researchers and program planners. [4]

The following are essential features of effective learning environments and settings that facilitate positive youth development for young people inside and outside of school. [5] These features of positive developmental settings and characteristics of successful positive youth development staff can be used for training staff, designing programs, and developing standards and assessment tools:

Physical and Psychological Safety – Safe and health-promoting facilities; practice that increases safe peer group interaction and decreases unsafe or confrontational peer interactions.

Appropriate Structure – Limit setting, clear and consistent rules and expectations, firm enough control, continuity and predictability, clear boundaries, and age-appropriate monitoring.

Supportive Relationships – Warmth, closeness, connectedness, good communication, caring, support, guidance, secure attachment, responsiveness.

Opportunities to Belong – Opportunities for meaningful inclusion, regardless of one's gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disabilities; social inclusion, social engagement and integration; opportunities for socio-cultural identity formation; support for cultural and bicultural competence.

Positive Social Norms – Rules of behavior, expectations, injunctions, ways of doing things, values and morals, obligations for service.

Support for Efficacy and Mattering – Youth-based, empowerment practices that support autonomy, making a real difference in one's community, and being taken seriously. Practice that includes enabling, responsibility granting, meaningful challenge. Practices that focus on improvement rather than on relative current.

Opportunities for Skill Building – Opportunities to learn physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional, social skills; exposure to intentional learning experiences; opportunities to learn cultural literacy, media literacy, communication skills, and good habits of mind; preparation for adult employment; opportunities to develop social and cultural capital.

Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts – Concordance, coordination, and synergy among family, school and community.

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[4] Community Programs to Promote Youth Development, National Research Council, Institute of Medicine, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., (January 2002)

[5] Nancy Leffert, Ph.D. et al*., Making the Case: Measuring the impact of Youth Development Programs*, Minneapolis: Search Institute, (1996), 9.

In addition, successful positive youth development staff have the following characteristics:

- A grounding in youth development principles;
- Genuine respect for youth and adult-youth relationships;
- The skills to empower young people to be involved in the decision-making process;
- Self-awareness and understanding of program goals, strategies and outcomes; and
- Conviction and belief that youth are capable and can contribute.

People, programs and institutions who work with youth are engaged in youth development if there is a strong evidence of the following practices: [6]

Supports: Motivational, emotional and strategic supports to succeed in life. The supports can take many different forms, but they must be affirming, respectful, and ongoing. Supports are powerful when offered by a variety of people, such as parents and close relatives, community social networks, teachers, youth workers, employers, health providers, and peers who are involved in the lives of young people.

Opportunities: Chances for young people to learn how to act in the world around them, to explore, express, earn, belong, and influence. Opportunities give young people the chance to test ideas and behaviors, and to experiment with different roles. It is important to stress that young people, just like adults, learn best through active participation and that learning occurs in all types of settings and situations.

Quality services: Services in such areas as education, health, employment, and juvenile justice which exhibit: 1) relevant instruction and information; 2) challenging opportunities to express oneself, to contribute, to take on new roles, and be a part of the group; and 3) supportive adults and peers who provide respect, high standards and expectations, guidance and affirmation to young people.

Research done by Karen Pittman (Forum for Youth Investment), Michelle Cahill (Carnegie Corporation) as well as other researchers has shown that young people who have the following competencies are more resilient and less likely to engage in risky behaviors:

Physical competence: Attitudes, behaviors and knowledge that will assure future health and well being.

Social competence: Responsiveness, flexibility, empathy and caring; communication skills, a sense of humor, self-discipline, assertiveness and the ability to ask for support.

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[6] Center for Youth Development and Policy, "What is Youth Development?" Academy for Educational Development, available at http://cyd.aed.org/whatis.html

Cognitive competence: Good reasoning, problem-solving and planning skills; the ability to think abstractly, reflectively and flexibly.

Vocational competence: A sense of purpose and belief in the future; educational aspirations; adequate preparation for work and family life.

Moral competence: The development of character, values, and personal responsibility; a desire to be ethical and to be involved in efforts that contribute to the common good.

Additional Research Models:

Other research that supports a positive youth development approach includes the Social Development Framework by J. David Hawkins and Joseph G. Weiss. The social development model is a process in which children and youth are influenced sequentially by their families, schools, peers and community. In each of these spheres of influence, three specific things must happen in order for positive development to occur. According to this model, youth must be given an opportunity to be involved in a meaningful way; they must develop skills for successful participation and interaction; and there must be a consistent system of positive reinforcement for desired behavior. [7]

The Search Institute, a national youth research organization, has identified 40 developmental assets that enable young people to succeed in life. These findings provide a useful set of measurable building blocks that unify the social development model and the concept of key competencies. These 40 developmental assets are grouped into two major types. External assets include positive experiences that young people receive from people and institutions in their lives. Internal assets focus on nurturing the internal qualities of young people to guide choices and create a sense of self, purpose, and focus (e.g. commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, positive identity). This research indicates that the more assets youth have, the less likely they are to engage in risk-taking behaviors and the more likely they are to engage in pro-social behaviors. [8]

Demonstrated and Model Programs:

The following programs are based in research and have been evaluated for effectiveness. The list, however, is by no means exhaustive. Please note that these are *examples* of programs using the Positive Youth Development philosophy. [9] The

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[7] Positive Youth Development in the U.S. Research Findings on Evaluations of Positive Youth Development: Empirical Evidence from Positive Youth Development Programs and Evaluations, 1999, available at http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/HSP/PositiveYouthDEV99/chapter3.htm

[8] http://www.search-institute.org/assets. For a list of the 40 Developmental Assets, see http://www.search-institute.org/assets/forty.htm

[9] For additional information on demonstrated and model programs, two volumes, entitled *Some Things Do Make a Difference for Youth* and *More things That Do Make a Difference for Youth* –are available from the American Youth Policy Forum. These compendiums of evaluations of youth programs and practices can be purchased by writing AYPF, 1001 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 719, Washington, DC 20036-5541. The International Youth Foundation web site also has excellent model program information at http://www.iyfnet.org/document.cfm/24/factsheet/6/0/2/131.

National School-Age Care Alliance has developed a set of standards for quality school-age care that are consistent with this Positive Youth Development philosophy.

Beacons (School-Community partnership)
The Beacons are school-based centers for disadvantaged young people, ages 4-19, which stresses youth development rather than youth deficit. Young people are viewed as central players in their own lives. Managed by community, nonprofit organizations in 41 New York City neighborhoods, the Beacons draw more than 30,000 New Yorkers (including parents, teachers, and other adult community members) each year. Activities vary across sites but include recreational, educational, health and community services. By engaging youth in various activities and a continuity of supports, the Beacons allow them to develop caring relationships. The centers set high expectations and clear standards and provide opportunities to engage in high quality activities and make a contribution. Youth also sit on Community Advisory Councils, which plan and assist in the implementation of Beacon activities. The NYC Department of Youth Services founded the Beacons in 1991. Plans are underway for replication in 6-8 other cities.

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Big Brothers, Big Sisters
Big Brothers, Big Sisters of America (BBBS) is a 93-year-old program using autonomously funded local affiliates to support one-on-one mentoring matches between volunteer adults and young people. Outside evaluation by the Public/Private Ventures demonstrated that participants in this program were 46% less likely to initiate alcohol use and minority Little Brothers and Sisters were 70% less likely to initiate drug use. Little Brothers and Sisters were also 27% less likely to hit someone. The following are key components that assist with the development and maintenance of BBBS quality matches:

1) Stringent guidelines for screening volunteers by professional program staff to eliminate applicants who pose a safety risk, are unlikely to keep a commitment, or are unlikely to form positive relationships with a young person;
2) An orientation for volunteers to learn program requirements and rules, with some sites providing more extensive training on sexual abuse, developmental stages of youth, communication and limit-setting skills, tips on relationship-building and other issues;
3) A matching process which takes into account adult volunteers, youth and parental preferences, geographical proximity of adult volunteer and youth, gender, race, and religion (most matches are made within gender, and staff try to make same-race matches); and

4) Supervision to support effective matches, including required monthly telephone contact by agency case managers with the adult volunteer and the youth and/or parent.

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Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
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Web site: http://www.bbbsa.org

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

In the United States, the school dropout rate among Hispanic youth is exceedingly high, and at 33%, it continues to be one of the nation's highest. In response to this phenomenon, the Intercultural Development Research Association in 1989 developed the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. The program strives to prevent Hispanic students with limited English proficiency, ages 12 to 21, from dropping out of school by training them as tutors for elementary school students. Central to the program is the belief that students can be prevented from failing and dropping out. With the proper role models and support to improve their sense of worth, they can excel. Since the program began, over 4,300 young people have been trained as tutors, and more than 12,900 students have been tutored. The dropout rate of tutors has dropped significantly, and they have posted higher English and math scores. The U.S. Department of Education has cited the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program for its effectiveness.

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Web site: http://idra.org/ccvyp

Mobility International, USA (MIUSA)

About one in ten people in the world have some form of disability. To foster the leadership abilities of disabled youth and assist them in becoming active members of society, MIUSA was created in 1981. An affiliate founded in England, MIUSA works to eliminate barriers, which have traditionally prevented people with disabilities from participating in exchange programs and other cross-cultural learning experiences. Since its creation, it has helped young people from the United States and 15 other countries gain a cross-cultural perspective in foreign settings. Each year, MIUSA organizes as many as four leadership exchanges with young people, ages 15 to 25. MIUSA's programs mix disabled and able-bodied youth to foster greater understanding among youth who do not regularly interact. Youth visiting the United States take part in a month-long leadership program in Oregon, and engage in recreation, community

service projects, and seminars on topics such as disability rights and discrimination. Youth participating in the program report that MIUSA has helped them overcome feelings of isolation and highlighted what they can achieve.

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Web site: www.miusa.org

Self Enhancement, Inc. (SEI)

Self Enhancement, Inc. (SEI) has designed a comprehensive program that bolsters every environment in which inner-city children learn, live and grow into adults. Self Enhancement, Inc.'s Youth Program provides structured, goal oriented personal development and violence prevention services to over 1,500 2nd through 12th grade inner-city Portland children and youth each year. Program services: ***School Day Program*** – case management and advocacy for SEI participants within their schools and within the community, tracking scholastic achievement and behavior. ***After School and Weekend*** – supervised, task focused education, recreation and performing arts activities that provide safety and options typically unavailable to inner-city children and youth. ***Summer Program*** -- all day expansion of school year program. Self Enhancement, Inc. was recognized in 1993 by the United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention as a national model of youth violence prevention.

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www.selfenhancement.org

YouthBuild USA

In the USA, approximately 5.4 million young people have dropped out of school. There are over two million homeless people and countless government owned properties in need of rehabilitation. These crises prompted the establishment of YouthBuild USA. Youth commit to a 12 to 18 month program that alternates training in construction with academic instruction. At least 89% of participating youth are high school dropouts who also want to obtain their high school equivalency diploma. As part of their training, participants rehabilitate abandoned buildings to provide affordable permanent housing for the homeless or those with low incomes. In addition to the supervised construction work –for which they are paid a weekly stipend – youth participate in counseling, leadership development, and academic and job skills training. Statistics collected

annually since 1993 show that 85% of YouthBuild graduates go on the college or obtain jobs in construction. YouthBuild has been replicated in 165 cities and counties.

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Web site: www.youthbuild.org

Youth as Resources

Youth as Resources (YAR) is an initiative of the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC), a private, nonprofit organization whose principal mission is to empower people to prevent crime and build safer and more caring communities. YAR was started in 1987 in three Indiana communities with initial funding from the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment. The success of this program led NCPC and the Indiana Department of Corrections to introduce YAR as a special initiative in five Indiana juvenile correction facilities. YAR encourages youth engagement in communities by providing small grants to youth-designed and youth-implemented projects that address social problems and contribute to positive community change. Young people work as partners with adults in all levels of the program, including governing boards responsible for awarding the grants and developing program policies. To support YAR's expansion, the Center for Youth as Resources (CYAR) was created in 1995 as a separately incorporated area of the NCPC. Youth participants ranged from 11 to 25 years of age.

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Web site: http://www.yar.org

Useful Web Sites:

Academy for Educational Development – *Solving critical social problems in the United States and throughout the world through education, social marketing, research, training, policy analysis and innovative program design and management.*
www.aed.org

AmeriCorps – *Link to AmeriCorps Network Northwest Oregon at the NW Regional Educational Laboratory web site.*
www.nwrel.org/ecc/americorps/states/oregon/
Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America – *The expert in youth mentoring.*
www.bbbsa.org

Building Partnerships for Youth – *(National 4-H Council, University of Arizona and University of California) – a web site that provides professionals with a database of programs to help youth 9-13 years of age make healthy choices.*
www.bpy.n4h.org/

Child Policy International – *The clearinghouse on international developments in child, youth and family policies at Columbia University.*
www.childpolicyintl.org

Child Trends – *Dedicated to improving the lives of children and families by providing research and data to inform decision-making that affects children.*
www.childtrends.org

Child Welfare League of America – *Positive development in out-of-home care.*
www.cwla.org/programs/positiveyouth/

Children Now – *Dedicated to assuring children grow up in economically secure families, where children are supported by quality health coverage, good early education, a positive media environment, and safe, productive after school activities.*
www.childrennow.org

Connect for Kids – *Helping adults make their communities better places for families and children.*
www.connectforkids.org

Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration: Youth Programs - *Information and assistance about various youth employment and training activities authorized under the Workforce Investment Act.*
www.doleta.gov/youth_services/

Forum for Youth Investment – *Dedicated to increasing the quality and quantity of youth involvement in the U.S. by promoting a "big picture" approach to planning and policy development.*
www.forumforyouthinvestment.org

Fund for the City of New York Youth Development Institute – *Working to affect youth policies, programs and practices at all levels of government and in all funding streams so that they reflect a positive model of youth development.*
www.fcny.org

Girls, Inc. – *A national research education and direct advocacy organization that inspires girls to be strong, smart and bold.*
www.girlsinc.org

International Student Activism Alliance/Know Your Rights – *Exists to promote student interest in politics and the political process.*
www.studentactivism.org

Innovation Center for Community & Youth Development – *A catalyst for positive change in the way youth development takes place. Youth/adult partnerships in decision-making.*
www.theinnovationcenter.org

International Youth Foundation – *Bringing worldwide support to the many exceptional local efforts that are changing young lives in every corner of the globe.*
www.iyfnet.org

Job Corps – *Nation's largest and most comprehensive residential education and job training program for at-risk youth.*
www.jobcorps.doleta.gov

Learning In Deed - *A tool for becoming informed and involved in service learning.*
www.learningindeed.org

National Association for the Education of Young Children – *Promoting excellence in early childhood education.*
www.naeyc.org

National Clearinghouse on Family and Youth – *Links to resources pertaining to youth development.*
http://www.ncfy.com/youthdevlp.htm

National 4-H Council -- *(U.S. Department of Agriculture-Cooperative Extension System) – Provides activities and opportunities for growth, learning, and community involvement for youth in every county in the nation.*
www.4-H.org

National Institute for Work and Learning – *An institute of the Academy for Educational Development. Seeks to promote active collaboration among the institutions of work, learning and community.*
http://niwl.org

National Institute on Out-of-School Time – *To ensure that all children, youth and families have access to high quality programs, activities, and opportunities during non-school hours.*
www.noist.org

National School-Age Care Alliance – *Administers an accreditation process for school-age care programs.*
http://www.nsaca.org

National Service Learning Partnership – *Establishing a strong, ongoing structure to foster collaboration on expanding service learning.*
www.service-learningpartnership.org

National Network for Youth – *Dedicated to ensuring that young people can be safe and lead healthy and productive lives.*
www.nn4youth.org

National Youth Employment Coalition – *A non-partisan national organization dedicated to promoting policies and initiatives that help youth succeed in becoming lifelong learners, productive workers and self-sufficient citizens.*
www.nyec.org

National Youth Rights Association – *Champions of youth rights; excellent links.*
http://nyra.ecg.net

Northwest Regional Education Laboratory Youth Development Program – *Providing a wide range of training, technical assistance, professional development, curriculum development and consultation on youth development, community-based learning and school-to-work initiatives.*
http://www.nwrel.org/ecc/youthdev/index.html

Oregon Mentors– *Committed to the dramatic expansion of quality programs that provide mentors for young people in Oregon.*
www.ormentor.org

Promising and Effective Practices Network – *Building quality programs for America's youth.*
http://www.nyec.org/pepnet

The Positive Youth Development Project - *Research findings on evaluations of Positive Youth Development.*
http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/HSP/PositiveYouthDev99/preface.htm

Public/Private Ventures – *National nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve the effectiveness of social policies, programs and initiatives, especially as they affect children and youth.*
www.ppv.org

RAND Organization's Labor and Population Program – *Report on evaluating after-school care.*
www.rand.org/publications/RB/RB2505

Sar Leviton Center for Social Policy Studies – *Dedicated to improving the educational and labor market prospects for disconnected youth.*
www.levitan.org

School-to-Work in Oregon – *Career-related learning.*
www.oregonjobs.org/stw

Sharing Success – *New York State Education Department's system for identifying and disseminating successful education programs and practices.*
www.sharingsuccess.org

Stone Soup – *The only magazine made up entirely of the creative work of children.*
www.stonesoup.com

take care – A guide to safe relationships
www.takecareonline.org

Urban Studies Institute – *Tuesday forum on teen risk taking.*
http://www.urban.org/news/Tuesdays/6-00/june00_transcript.html

Worksystems, Inc. – *A collaboration of public and private leaders committed to creating a workforce development system which continuously anticipates and meets the needs of employers and workers; an NYEC member.*
www.worksystems.org

Younger Americans Act – *Policy proposal to mobilize American communities to assure all youth access to the competencies and character development they need to be fully prepared as adults and effective citizens.*
http://www.nydic.org/youngam6700.html

Youth as Resources – *Provides small grants to youth and supports them as they design and implement issue-related projects. Past organizational and youth participants help provide training and technical assistance.*
www.yar.org

Youth in Action Network - *Meet new people, have fun and help make the world a better place- a chat room for involved youth.*
www.teaching.com/act

Youth Leadership Institute – *Community based institute that works with young people, youth practitioners and the systems that impact them in order to build communities that respect, honor and support youth.*
www.yli.org

Youth On Board – *Envisions a world where young people are fully respected, and treated as valued and active members of their families, communities and society.*
www.youthonboard.org

Youth Today, Youth Tomorrow – *An online workspace and resource center created and managed by the Forum for Youth Investment.*
www.ytyt.org

Youth Today – *A nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people help youth.*
www.youthtoday.org

Research Resources:

Brown, D. *et al. Barriers and Promising Approaches to Workforce and Youth Development for Young Offenders.* Available at: www.aecf.org.

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US Department of Health and Human Services. January 1997. *Understanding Youth Development: Promoting Positive Pathways of Growth.* Washington DC: CSR, Incorporated.