Positive Youth Development

Introduction

Positive Youth Development (PYD) can be described as a set of practices used by agencies, programs, schools and communities to enable youth to reach their full developmental potential. These practices engage young people in a manner that promotes positive and healthy transitions from adolescence to adulthood.

The core components of PYD include:
- creating opportunities for individuals, based on their strengths
- providing meaningful learning experiences, particularly, experiences that enable youth to feel connected to others
- preparing for life events through developing a wide range of capabilities.

The Foundations of Positive Youth Development

Positive Youth Development recognises that, while practitioners might think they know what is best, youth have to determine in their own way and in their own time what is and is not meaningful to them. Young people have to be motivated from within to take part in learning activities and to interact with others to develop themselves as persons. Youth voice and respect for youth voice are critical in assisting youth make transitions between different developmental stages. It is critical that youth rather than adults have the major say in identifying short and long-term goals for their development. The role of adults is to support, encourage, and offer guidance in areas in which youth might request assistance. Positive Youth Development does not focus on the problems youth experience, but instead focuses on what youth need in order to thrive.

Programs implementing Positive Youth Development nurture positive outcomes by providing protective factors (such as making sure that a young person has a significant other person to talk with). These serve to enable youth to direct themselves through their own competencies, belief systems, and desires.

Positive Youth Development also views youth as resources and partners who can make important contributions in planning and implementing activities in their communities. When all is said and done, PYD goals challenge communities to interact with youth in ways that traditional services fail to address. Youth wellness is not simply a job for professionals, but an obligation which all community members carry.

Key Components

Engagement

Young people need opportunities to engage in meaningful activities, have a voice in decisions, take responsibility for their actions, and actively participate in the life of the community.

When youth are not engaged in meaningful activities or when their voice is not honoured, they are at risk of not feeling valued and becoming disconnected from others. This is likely to lead to problems for both the young person and the community.

Connectedness

Young people need to belong, to be connected to family and community to thrive.

A growing body of brain research indicates that we are hardwired to connect. The developmental consequences of social alienation hinder our abilities to learn, develop and interact with the world. Additionally, social connectedness enables us to develop a greater sense of self identity and increased understanding of others in the world around us.

Preparedness

Young people need to develop competencies and skills to ready themselves for overall wellness, work and adult life.

Cognitive, social, emotional, vocational and cultural competencies are all needed. With these competencies, youth are in a better position to successfully overcome adversity, as well as to accomplish personal goals.

In summary, positive youth development and reflects a major shift in thinking. Instead of asking what we can do to prevent and fix problems, we are asking what opportunities, learning experiences, supports do we need to give young people so that they feel connected, prepared and engaged.
Positive Youth Development – Six Focus Areas

**Emphasis on positive outcomes**

The approach highlights positive, healthy outcomes (in contrast to reducing negative outcomes or ‘fixing’ problems). Examples of desired youth development outcomes are competence (academic, social, vocational skills), self-confidence, connectedness (healthy relationship to community, friends, family), character (integrity, moral commitment), caring and compassion.

**Youth Voice**

It is essential to include youth as active participants in any youth development initiative. They have to be equal partners in the process. Youth involvement presents a great challenge to adults and challenges them to rethink how they engage in planning, developing and implementing programs.

**Strategies aim to involve all youth**

Youth development strategies are generally aimed at all youth. The assumption is that creating supportive and enriching environments for all youth will lead to the desired positive outcomes as well as reduced negative outcomes. However, experts in the field recognise the need to blend universal approaches with approaches that are targeting particular youth facing extra challenges.

**Long-term involvement**

Youth development assumes long-term commitment. Activities and supportive relationships have to endure for a long period of time to be effective. While short-term positive results may be seen and should be built on, sustainability is important. Positive community-based, youth outcomes may not be measurable for 15–20 years. Youth development strategies have to be long-term.

**Community involvement**

Youth development stresses the importance of engaging the larger social environment that influences how young people grow up and develop. This environment includes family and friends, but also the community they live in. Community is more than social services, youth organisations, schools and law enforcement agencies; it involves businesses, faith and civic groups, and private citizens who are not attached to any organization.

**Emphasis on collaboration**

Youth development requires people from various agencies and community groups to work together. Collaboration can express itself in different forms e.g., agencies coming together to write a grant proposal or community groups forming a coalition to achieve one common goal by sharing resources and expertise.

**Useful Links**

Foundation for Young Australians
http://www.fya.org.au/

Youth Development Research Project
http://www.impactyouthprojects.net.au/content/qydrp_08_standard.asp?name=YDRP_Home

Youth Research Centre

Communities that Care

My Peer Toolkit

Forum for Youth Investment
http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org

Search Institute
http://www.search-institute.org/content/what-redevelopmental-assets

ACT for Youth
http://www.actforyouth.net/

ACT for Youth Upstate Center of Excellence Positive Youth Development Resource Manual