

A Guide To Effective Investments In Positive Youth Development:

Implications of Research for Financing and Sustaining Programs and Services for Youth



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Introduction and Overview

Adolescence is a time of significant developmental changes for all youth, when important beliefs and practices are tested and some become lifelong habits. The decisions youth make during this period have long-term effects throughout adulthood, and the supports and opportunities that teens experience in adolescence play a critical role in whether these choices are positive or negative. Yet many adolescents are not provided with or do not take advantage of the supports and opportunities they need to become healthy and productive adults.¹

Some indicators of adolescent health, including teen pregnancy rates and rates of violent behavior, have improved in recent years. Others, including childhood obesity rates, have gotten worse. Still other indicators, such as the rate of infection for sexually transmitted diseases, have remained stubbornly unchanged. Moreover, disparities among certain ethnic, racial, and gender subpopulations have widened considerably for many negative health outcomes, including youth mortality, teen pregnancy, and contraction of sexually transmitted diseases.² Minority groups that are most disadvantaged by these health disparities are expected to increase significantly as a percentage of the total youth population, with the Hispanic youth population doubling between the years 2000 and 2020, when it will comprise 23 percent of the youth population.³

The long-term public costs associated with poor adolescent health outcomes are already estimated at \$335 billion annually in federal, state, and local expenditures, and these costs are likely to increase, if adolescent health challenges are not addressed comprehensively.⁴ The federal government and state and local governments have responded with significant investments in programs and services aimed at preventing negative adolescent health behaviors. Yet lessons from successful efforts to address specific negative behaviors, such as early and unintended pregnancy, suggest a broad approach is often more effective than programs aimed at a single problem or behavior. Public health research also supports the idea that improving outcomes for youth requires more than an array of discrete programs. A more comprehensive approach to supporting youth is needed to address the multiple aspects of their development. To build support for a more comprehensive system, it is important to develop partnerships across government agencies, with schools, families and other key societal institutions.

Positive youth development refers to an intentional approach for providing the array of supports and opportunities that promote healthy outcomes for youth. According to the federal Family and Youth Services Bureau, positive youth development is built on the premise that providing supports and opportunities to youth is “the best way to prevent them from engaging in risky behaviors” that

¹ Grantmakers in Health, *Positive Youth Development: A Pathway to Healthy Teens*, Issue Brief No. 15 (Washington, D.C.: Grantmakers in Health, 2002).

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention et al., *Improving the Health of Adolescents & Young Adults: A Guide for States and Communities* (Atlanta, Ga.: Centers for Disease Control, 2004).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.



threaten health and future well-being.⁵ Positive youth development focuses on meeting young people's needs for positive, ongoing relationships with adults and family; affording youth opportunities to build pro-social skills and competencies; and promoting healthy behaviors that will help them transition successfully to adulthood.

Communities and organizations that promote positive youth development enhance the positive factors in young people's lives and give them the opportunity to “build skills, exercise leadership and get involved” in their community.⁶ At the same time, these programs aim to reduce risky behaviors, such as dropping out of school, delinquency and criminal activity, violence, tobacco and other substance use and abuse, and early unprotected sexual activity. Importantly, positive youth development also focuses on key environmental factors, including family, peers, and the larger community, all of which greatly influence young people's attitudes, decisions and actions.

The most effective youth development strategies provide key supports and opportunities in the various environments in which youth spend much of their time, such as in school, at home with family, and in other community-based settings. Programs that help support positive youth development are broad and include after-school programs, mentoring programs, youth engagement programs, sports leagues and other recreational activities, as well as prevention and after-care programs focused on reducing the likelihood of negative health outcomes, including those in juvenile justice and residential care settings.

No single setting or program can provide all the different supports, services, and opportunities that all youth need. So, in many states and communities, public- and private-sector leaders have come together to develop comprehensive systems of support for positive youth development through coordinating policies, programs and funding. However, state and local leaders frequently lack research-based information on what works and which programs are effective for specific youth populations. Consequently, these leaders are often not equipped to make decisions on how to allocate scarce resources (and limited funding) strategically to the youth development services that will achieve the best outcomes.

Program leaders are also challenged to piece together fragmented federal, state and local funding streams that can support youth programs and services and facilitate the creation of comprehensive service delivery systems for youth and their families. Developing a comprehensive, coordinated approach to serving youth is difficult work and requires action across programs, policies, disciplines, and systems.

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Family and Youth Services Bureau, “Positive Youth Development: State and Local Collaboration Projects,” <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/youthdivision/initiatives/statecollabfactsheet.htm> (accessed April 5, 2009).

⁶ Ibid.

These challenges are exacerbated by the current climate of increased competition for scarce public resources and heightened demand for transparency and accountability. Consequently, leaders must think strategically about the services youth need and the best approach for financing programs and organizations that can provide them. To sustain comprehensive initiatives over time, leaders must consider how to maximize existing funds, leverage available supports, and build strong partnerships.

This strategy brief reviews the research on “what works” to promote positive youth development and it provides decision makers with background information for making good investment decisions.⁷ The brief discusses the effects of various program- and system-level strategies on key outcomes for youth in an effort to shed light on how to invest limited resources to achieve desired outcomes. Examples of effective youth programs are highlighted, as are efforts to build strong systems that support youth development.

This brief also addresses the importance of using a strategic financing approach to ensure programs and services supporting youth development can be sustained over time. It identifies three promising strategies for financing and sustaining a comprehensive and seamless system that supports positive youth development:

- using data to target and track investment decisions;
- accessing flexible funding to maximize coordination; and
- building and strengthening partnerships.



⁷ Note that this strategy brief is not an exhaustive review of the literature on positive youth development. The programs highlighted throughout the brief are examples of programs or systems that are considered promising practices or effective programs, based on the literature reviewed, but do not cover all promising or effective programs in this area. For additional information, see reports referenced throughout this document. Also see *Child Trends Databank: What Works: Programs and Interventions that May Influence Outcomes for Youth and Young Children* at: www.childtrendsdatabank.org/whatworks.cfm.



What Works to Promote Positive Youth Development

Decision-makers interested in identifying what works in promoting positive youth development and where to invest limited resources should consider findings from both program-level research and system-level research.

Findings from Program-Level Research

Three decades of research—across multiple disciplines—has resulted in a growing body of evidence about “what works” to promote the healthy development of youth and prevent risky behaviors. The benefits for youth are greatest when efforts to reduce risky behaviors are implemented using a positive youth development approach. This approach emphasizes affording young people opportunities to participate in challenging and engaging activities that build their skills and competencies. Programs that enhance positive factors in the lives of youth, such as connectedness to family, school, and community, can reduce the likelihood youth will engage in health-jeopardizing behaviors.

A positive youth development approach focuses on enhancing the “protective factors” in young people’s lives and minimizing “risk factors” in order to optimize their chances to thrive. Protective factors, sometimes called “assets,” are experiences, skills, or traits that reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes and increase the likelihood of positive outcomes.⁸ Alternatively, “risk factors” are experiences in the life of a child or an adolescent that increase the likelihood of negative outcomes. Some key protective factors include positive temperament, connectedness to family and school, good social skills, and positive peer influences. Possessing or experiencing certain protective factors can significantly increase the likelihood that youth will develop healthy, positive behaviors and limit the incidence of many negative outcomes. For example, academic achievement and participation in a religious community are factors associated with decreased violence, substance abuse, and high-risk sexual behavior.⁹

Research suggests that protective factors have a synergistic effect, so developing more or enhancing existing assets promotes resiliency in the face of challenges.¹⁰ Continued exposure to positive experiences, settings, and people, as well as opportunities to gain skills, are critical for young people to make healthy choices and promote emotional well-being. Community-based programs, volunteering opportunities, adult mentoring, and out-of-school time programs all play important roles in affording young people opportunities to develop and thrive.

⁸ Debra Hilken Bernat and Michael D. Resnick, “Healthy Youth Development: Science and Strategies,” *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice* 12, no. 6 (November 2006): S10–S16.

⁹ M. D. Resnick and P. M. Rinehart, *Influencing Behavior: The Power of Protective Factors in Reducing Youth Violence* (Minneapolis, MN.: Center for Adolescent Health and Development, University of Minnesota, 2004).

¹⁰ E.E. Warner and R.S. Smith, *Overcoming The Odds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

What Every Young Person Needs

Evaluations of youth programs provide lessons about the settings and opportunities that are necessary for a successful transition to young adulthood (See “Selected List of Evaluated Youth Development and Prevention Programs” on page 11).

In 2002, the National Research Council’s Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth conducted a seminal study of programs targeting youth ages 10 to 18 to help identify what works in promoting positive youth development.¹¹ The study found that whether interventions are focused on teen pregnancy, mental health, or positive youth development more broadly, the programs with the greatest impact share common characteristics that facilitate positive outcomes for youth. The review of experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of community programs indicated that effective programs are characterized by settings that provide:

- physical and psychological structure and safety;
- appropriate structure;
- supportive relationships;
- opportunities to belong;
- positive social norms;
- support for efficacy and mattering;
- opportunities for skills building; and
- integration of family, school, and community efforts.

How young people spend their out-of-school time also influences their health and well-being. Children left alone and unsupervised, regardless of sex, race, or economic status, are more likely to drink alcohol or take drugs than their peers who are supervised by an adult.¹² Not surprisingly, out-of-school time programs can help youth develop and nurture their talents, improve their academic behaviors, and help them form bonds with adults and youth who are positive role models.¹³

In the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, researchers found that students who reported high levels of participation in school-sponsored activities were less likely than non-participants to engage in risky behaviors, such as dropping out of school, delinquency and criminal behavior, taking drugs, smoking, drinking, and engaging in high risk sexual activity.¹⁴ In response to a growing body of research, many states and communities have increased public and private investment in out-of-school time (OST)

¹¹ Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer Appleton Gootman, eds., *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2002).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹³ Jean Baldwin Grossman et al., *The Cost of Quality Out-Of-School Time Programs* (Washington, D.C.: Public/Private Ventures and The Finance Project, 2009).

¹⁴ Eccles and Gootman.



activities in schools, parks, community centers, and other settings. Nationwide, approximately 6.5 million youth participate in OST programs.¹⁵ Many more families—especially low-income and minority group families—report unmet demand for high-quality and accessible programming.¹⁶

To increase the likelihood that young people experience a healthy adolescence that leads to successful adulthood, youth need:

- opportunities and experiences that help promote positive behaviors and build important skills and behavioral traits;
- opportunities that are provided in settings youth are most likely to access, particularly out-of-school time activities in or near their schools; and
- programs that offer a balanced approach to reducing incidences of negative behaviors and incorporate helping youth develop positive skills.



¹⁵ Afterschool Alliance, *America After 3 PM: A Household Survey on Afterschool in America* (Washington, D.C.: Afterschool Alliance, 2004), http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/press_archives/america_3pm/Executive_Summary.pdf (accessed September 8, 2008).

¹⁶ A. Duffett, J. Johnson, S. Farkas, S. Kung, and A. Ott, *All Work and No Play? Listening to What Kids and Parents Really Want from Out-of-School Time* (New York, N.Y.: Public Agenda, 2004).

Selected List of Evaluated Youth Development and Prevention Programs

The following chart lists some of the evidenced based youth development and prevention programs (for a more complete list of programs, see the individual sources at the bottom of the table). Programs differ significantly in terms of the population targeted, settings for service delivery, and program goals.

Program Name	Program Type	Age	Location	Outcomes	Source
Big Brothers Big Sisters	Youth development, mentoring	10 to 16	Community	- Increased grade point average - Decreased initiation of drug and alcohol use	A
Functional Family Therapy	Substance abuse prevention, juvenile delinquency prevention	11 to 18	Home	- Decreased rate of re-arrest (for juvenile offenders) - Decreased initiation of alcohol use	D
				Cost effective (based on net gain to tax payers)	B
Life Skills Training	Health promotion; drug, alcohol and tobacco prevention	8 to 14	School	- Decrease in smoking, drug, and alcohol use - Cost effective (based on net gain to tax payers)	B & C
Boys and Girls Club	Promotes health, education, social skills development, and youth leadership	7 to 18	Community	- Improved school performance	C
Wraparound Milwaukee	System of care for children with serious emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs, and for their families	13 to 17	Community, Home	- Reduced placement in out of home residential care facilities	C
Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways	Violence prevention	10 to 14	School	- Reduced levels of violence among youth - Cost effective (based on net gain to tax payers)	B & C
Guiding Good Choices	Effective parenting education; Building peer resistance skills	9 to 14	Community	- Lower rates of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use - Cost effective (based on net gain to tax payers)	B, C & D

Sources:

- A. Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer Appleton Gootman, eds., *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2002).
- B. Washington State Institute for Public Policy, *Benefits and Costs of Prevention and Early Intervention Programs for Youth* (Olympia, WA.: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, September 2004). <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/04-07-3901.pdf>.
- C. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Model Programs Guide 2007*. <http://www2.dsgonline.com/mpg/>
- D. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, *Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). <http://download.ncadi.samhsa.gov/ken/pdf/surgeon/SG.pdf>



Influence of the School Environment and Peers

The environment in which youth learn, work, and play influences the choices they make. Studies indicate the particular importance of the school environment and peers on youth and identify effective approaches for positively affecting youth's educational achievement, health and other outcomes.

Academic success is one of the most powerful predictors of both present and future well-being. It is linked to good mental health, school completion, pro-social values and behaviors, good relations with parents, and low levels of involvement in risky sexual behavior, drug and alcohol abuse, and criminal activities.¹⁷ Consequently, efforts that promote academic achievement can improve the likelihood of success for youth with regard to various health and development outcomes. However, other factors in a school environment, including peers, connectedness to teachers, and school safety, can also strongly affect a youth's ability to succeed academically.

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) is a nationally representative survey designed to examine how various aspects of a community, such as family, friends, peer, school, neighborhood, and the larger community, influence teen's health and risk behaviors.¹⁸ The survey data have been used extensively to examine the role of protective factors in the general adolescent population.¹⁹ Many of the studies analyzing Add Health data have concluded that peers of adolescents can be important contributing factors, both positive and negative, for several key behaviors, including violence, drug and alcohol use, gang membership, early and unintended pregnancy, and school absenteeism.

In one study, smoking and drinking among young males was directly correlated with the incidence of these behaviors among age-related friends. Researchers concluded there are "smoking" schools and "drinking" schools and students attending these schools are sensitive to their peers' behavior. They also concluded that several factors can mitigate negative peer influence, including strong parental relationships and the choice of schools.²⁰ The research also shows that peers can influence youth in many positive ways. It is not surprising then that the selection of one's peer group can play a determining role in a young person's health and educational outcomes.

¹⁷ Eccles and Gootman.

¹⁸ Data collection for the Add Health Survey began in 1994 with a sample of 90,000 students in grades 7 through 12; researchers continue to follow approximately 20,000 students from the initial cohort. These students now range in age from 24 to 32.

¹⁹ University of North Carolina, Carolina Population Center, "Add Health," <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/addhealth> (accessed March 12, 2009).

²⁰ Andrew E. Clark and Youenn Lohéac, "It Wasn't Me, It Was Them! Social Influence in Risky Behavior by Adolescents," *Journal of Health Economics* 26, no. 4 (2007): 763–84.

A safe school environment is critical to supporting student learning. When youth feel unsafe in their school, they are more likely to be absent, to experience emotional stress, or to ultimately to drop out.²¹ Programs that reach youth in school settings are one way to mitigate the potentially negative influence of a dangerous school environment. For example, Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways is a school-based violence prevention program for middle school students. Following a classroom-based curriculum, students practice identifying and choosing nonviolent strategies for dealing with conflict.²² Initiatives that promote smooth transitions from middle school to high school—and transitions from school to work or postsecondary education—and that create alternative routes for struggling youth have also demonstrated positive results, particularly for youth living in low-income communities.

Efforts to address alcohol and tobacco usage among teens in school based settings have also proven effective. One evidenced-based program, LifeSkills Training (LST), works with middle and high school students to help youth develop personal and social skills that will allow them to resist negative influences that promote tobacco, drug or alcohol use. LST works with youth to build protective factors, including greater self esteem and self-confidence, that serves to protect them against a range of negative health behaviors. The program, which can be provided in school-based or community-based after-school settings, has been shown to decrease current and long-term use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs.²³

Efforts to reach youth across a wide range of outcomes frequently incorporate many needed supports and services within the school. Approximately 1,500 schools now have school-based or school-linked health centers that offer preventive health services for children and youth. Other schools have broadened their focus on youth development to include not only health but also other social services. During the past two decades, community schools, sometimes called full-service schools, have emerged as a promising mechanism for providing not only education services but also health and social services for students and their families. The most comprehensive schools provide social service supports for families besides physical and mental health supports (see Promoting Positive Youth Development Through Community Schools in Oregon on page 14).



²¹ Pilar Marin and Brett Brown, *The School Environment and Adolescent Well Being: Beyond Academics* (Washington, D.C.: Child Trends, Inc., November 2008).

²² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices", http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/programfulldetails.asp?PROGRAM_ID=95 (accessed March 12, 2009).

²³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: National Registry of Evidenced-based Programs and Practices, "Life Skills Training", http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/programfulldetails.asp?PROGRAM_ID=230 (accessed May 15, 2009).



Promoting Positive Youth Development through Community Schools in Oregon

Oregon's Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) initiative focuses on bringing together parents, schools, businesses, government, and nonprofit community organizations to ensure student success and close the achievement gap. SUN community schools offer services and supports to students and their families, including in-school support teams, after-school programming, and connections to health and social services. Although SUN programs were introduced in elementary and middle schools, the network has expanded to include several high schools. The schools leverage significant in-kind resources and county, city, and private funding to support services for youth and their families. The initiative has accessed the support of more than 350 business and community partners along with that of nearly 3,200 volunteers through the 54 community schools that comprise SUN.

SUN aligns resources and services to provide a single integrated system of care based on county priorities that include basic living needs, education, safety, accountability, a thriving economy, and vibrant communities. Services are provided in schools and in other community institutions where youth and their families are most likely to take advantage of them. Educational outcomes have improved significantly for youth who participate in SUN schools, in part, as a result of the ancillary social and health services provided to them. The program tracks results, including performance on state benchmark tests in reading and math, daily attendance, youth's connectedness to adults, and youth's ability to find positive solutions to conflicts they face.

For more information, please contact: Diana Hall, School and Community Partnerships, Multnomah County Department of County Human Services, at Diana.c.hall@co.multnomah.or.us

Influence of Family and Other Adults

Peers, the school environment, and other factors in the community are important to healthy youth development, but the influence of family and other adults is equally critical. Formal and informal relationships with adults, including parents, caregivers, neighbors, and employers, play a crucial role in providing the ongoing support and experience youth need to realize their full potential or, in some cases, to counteract negative influences.

According to one recent analysis, parent-family connectedness is a protective factor that can help youth avoid an array of risky behaviors, including alcohol and tobacco use.²⁴ Other analyses suggest that connectedness to family, other adults, school, and community protects youth of different genders, races, and ethnicities from high-risk behaviors.²⁵ Many initiatives aim to strengthen connections between youth and family, as well as between youth and other adults, through community engagement and education. Still other programs offer positive adult role models for youth who may not have such role models in their own home (See Big Brothers Big Sisters: Promoting Youth Development through Mentoring on page 15).

²⁴ Bernat and Resnick.

²⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, et al.

Big Brother Big Sisters: Promoting Youth Development Through Mentoring

Big Brothers Big Sisters is one organization that seeks to capitalize on the positive influence that a relationship with a non-familial adult can have on a youth's development. The organization provides professionally supported, one-to-one mentoring for children, ages 6 through 18, in communities nation-wide. Mentors are volunteers who participate in an initial screening process, orientation, and training. Children participating in the program and their families are also screened and are matched with mentors based on location, personality, and preferences. A case manager from Big Brothers Big Sisters supervises the process, maintains communication with all parties involved, and provides support to the mentors throughout the relationship.

Mentors typically meet with children at least once a week for a minimum of one year in either a community-based setting or within the child's school. These meetings are an opportunity for mentors and children to engage in a variety of activities such as playing sports, reading, doing homework, sharing a meal, or simply having a conversation. Goals for the relationships are identified in the initial interview held with the parent or guardian of the child and are formalized in an individualized case plan, which is maintained by the case manager. Ultimately, the focus is on developing a mutually satisfying relationship that provides regular contact between the child and volunteer.

Evaluations have shown that positive relationships between youth and their Big Brothers or Big Sisters mentors have a measurable, positive impact on the children's lives. One study found that youth participating in the program were more confident in their schoolwork performance; able to get along better with their families; less likely to begin using illegal drugs or alcohol; and less likely to skip school (Tierney, J.P., Grossman, J.B., and Resch, N.L., *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1995).

For more information, please see: <http://www.bbbs.org>





Several community-based initiatives have focused on providing needed supports for parents and families as a way to improve youth development outcomes. One initiative aimed at improving adolescent reproductive health outcomes, Plain Talk, was first implemented in Atlanta, Hartford, New Orleans, and San Diego in 1993 and is now being replicated in several cities nationwide. This neighborhood-based initiative combines adult-focused community outreach and education with youth-focused services. One key element of the Plain Talk strategy is to train and equip neighborhood adults to provide young people with accurate and straightforward facts about contraception, early and unintended pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Plain Talk also focuses on increasing adolescents' access to reproductive health services. In 1997, an independent evaluation found that the incidence of early and unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease was significantly reduced among Plain Talk youth.²⁶ For example, participating females were 70 percent less likely to get pregnant than those who had not been exposed to the Plain Talk strategies, and males were significantly less likely to have caused a pregnancy. Youth were 80 percent more likely to get routine reproductive health care and half as likely to have a sexually transmitted disease.²⁷

Another community-based initiative, Guiding Good Choices (GGC), targets high-risk families with children ages nine to 14 and offers parents the opportunity to learn new skills to prevent drug and alcohol abuse among their children. The program aims to increase communication between youth and their parents, help adults develop consistent discipline practices, and increase parents' knowledge of the risk factors associated with drug abuse. The program also provides parents with strategies for communicating expectations for behavior, managing family conflict, and encouraging the expression of positive feelings and love for their children. Sessions enable parents and children to discuss and practice various ways to resist peer and social pressures to engage in inappropriate behavior.

In a four-year follow-up study, GGC reduced alcohol use by 41 percent and significantly reduced the rates of initiation for marijuana and alcohol abuse among the study population. In a randomized clinical trial, the program was also found to significantly reduce the rate at which adolescents develop depression.²⁸

Other adults can also profoundly affect child and adolescent development. In fact, one key aspect of a successful community-based program is the role and influence adult staff or volunteers have on the youth who participate. Youth respond positively to adults who provide emotional support as well as clear guidance and expectations. No single type of adult will be successful with all youth. Youth are

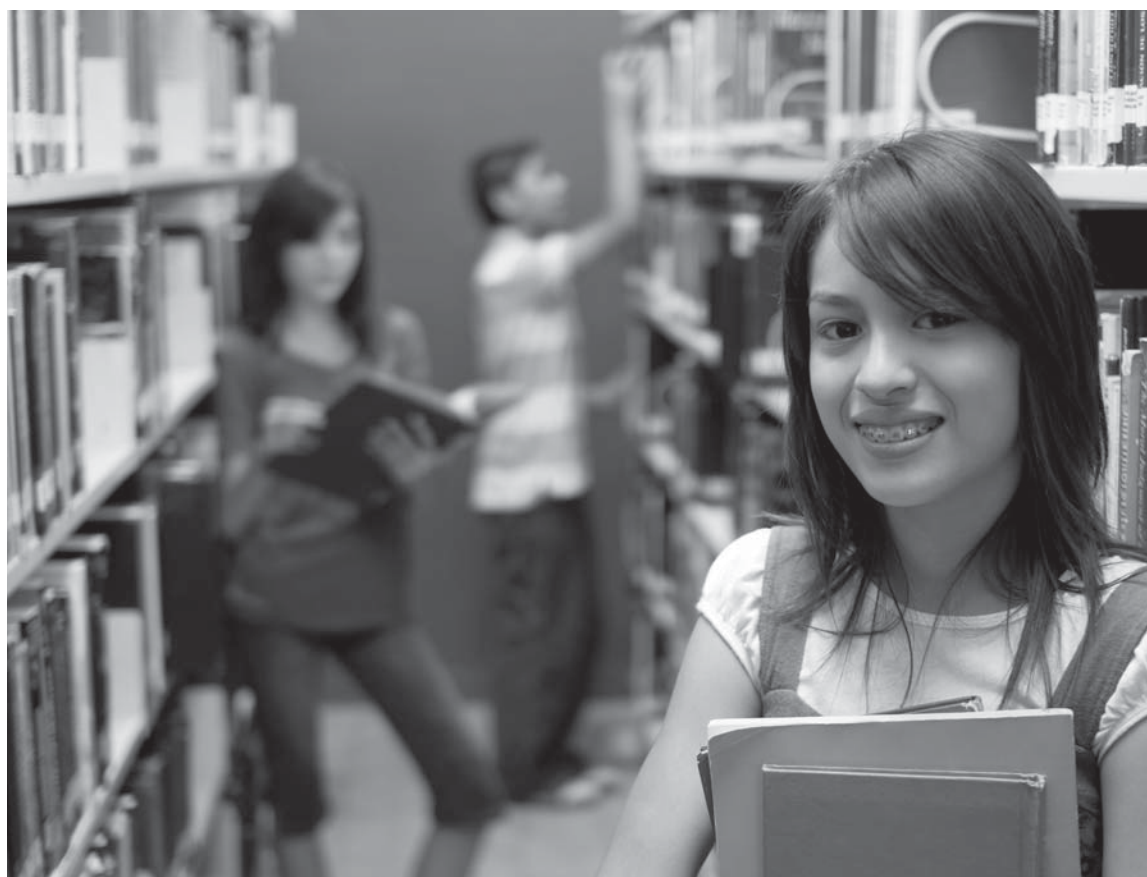
²⁶ Annie E Casey Foundation, *Kids Count 2004* (Baltimore, Md.: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004).

²⁷ For a list of programs focused on adolescent reproductive health that have undergone rigorous evaluation, see Victoria Ball and Kirsten Moore, *What Works for Adolescent Reproductive Health*, (Washington, DC: Child Trends, May 2008). Plain Talk is not among the evidenced based programs reviewed in this publication.

²⁸ Channing-Bete Inc., "Guiding Good Choices: Program Results 2009," <http://www.channing-bete.com/prevention-programs/guideing-good-choices/results-recognition.php> (accessed February 9, 2009).

most influenced by adults with whom they feel a connection, including a shared upbringing, community bonds, or cultural identity.

The skills and knowledge of staff are also important. Studies have shown that afterschool providers with more training and education are more effective in delivering high quality programs²⁹, and are more likely to retain staff.³⁰ State and local efforts to develop systems that support, coordinate and monitor afterschool programs reflect this importance.³¹ These efforts include developing and implementing credentialing programs and professional development for afterschool staff, and program standards that reflect baseline requirements for program quality, health and safety.³² A number of states have also implemented a variety of quality rating systems to measure program quality and help encourage quality improvements of afterschool programs.



²⁹ Beth M Miller, *Pathways to Success for Youth: What Counts in After School: Massachusetts After-School Research Study Report* (Boston, Mass: United Way of Massachusetts Bay, 2005).

³⁰ Julie Dennehy, et al., *Setting the Stage for a youth Development Associate Credential: A National Review of Professional Development Credentials for the Out-of-School Time Workforce* (Wellesley, Mass.: Wellesley Centers for Women, National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2006).

³¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Bureau, *Building Professional Development Systems for the After-school Field* (Washington, D.C., Child Care Bureau, September 2007).

³² Ibid.



Summary of Program-Level Research

Programs that promote positive youth development are more likely to engage youth and help them build assets needed to be successful as defined by key health and education outcome measures. Those focused solely on eliminating a particular negative behavior, such as preventing early and unintended pregnancy, often fall short of their goal, unless coupled with other opportunities and supports to develop healthy behaviors. Young people need not only the motivation to avoid risk-taking, they need opportunities to positively express themselves and develop sound values and a vision for a successful future.³³

Community-based programs are most effective when they reinforce aspects of positive youth development and provide opportunities and experiences that address the following:

- physical and psychological structure and safety;
- supportive relationships;
- opportunities to belong; and
- opportunities for skills building.

In addition, no single program or strategy can provide all of the youth development opportunities and supports that most young people need to be successful. A continuum of services and supports is most effective when it is linked to and reinforced in the environments where youth spend their time, including settings with family members and other adults, school settings, and community settings.



³³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, et al.

Findings from System-Level Research

Decision makers can pursue deliberate strategies to improve adolescent health outcomes through positive youth development programs and services, including strategies to connect youth to community, family, and school. Yet, to scale up and sustain effective programs for youth, decision makers need to take a systemic view that includes a focus on infrastructure at the community or state level. A systemic approach, and the extent to which it is effective, is influenced by many factors. These include:

- how services are financed;
- the data systems used to track key outcomes using sound indicators;
- the services and program offerings for youth and their access to them; and
- the policies and practices that support the organization of and level of engagement of community partners.

Individual programs that work directly with youth and families are more likely to have a sustained impact when they are supported by and are part of a larger system or strategic approach to positive youth development. System-level initiatives create the structure to promote positive outcomes for youth in a community or state by:

- implementing a youth development strategy that cuts across and breaks down silos among agencies;
- aligning financing and policies to support key youth development goals;
- engaging key partners, including schools, faith-based institutions, families, community groups, and government agencies; and
- creating an environment where effective community-based programs are supported and sustained.

Research on the effectiveness of systems that support youth development is still relatively limited. In part, this is because there are few states or cities that have what can be called a “system” that coordinates resources and services to support youth. However, there are many promising examples of systems building emerging from states and communities nationwide, particularly in the area of afterschool or out-of-school time (OST). Additionally, lessons can be learned from system building efforts in related fields such as public health and mental health. These promising practices help illustrate *what works and where to invest limited resources* at the system level to achieve positive outcomes for youth.



State and Community Efforts to Support Positive Youth Development

State and community-level efforts to develop comprehensive systems that support youth development have focused on improving the coordination and delivery of categorical services. One common strategy at the state level is to develop a Children’s Cabinet. Children’s cabinets can look across key youth serving agencies to find ways to improve service delivery, coordinate financing of services, and develop shared performance goals. The youth development field can also learn from recent state and local efforts to develop out-of-school-time (OST) systems or networks. Finally, communities can serve as a vehicle for testing the effectiveness of systems coordination efforts because of their relatively small size and similar population. Private foundations have spearheaded or financed many community-level strategies to coordinate youth development efforts.

State and City-Level Strategies. One of the most comprehensive efforts to focus on system building for youth development at the state and community levels was undertaken by the federal Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) through its State Youth Development Collaboration Demonstration Projects. Between 1998 and 2003, FYSB awarded \$7.8 million in grants to 13 states to develop and implement youth engagement strategies to serve youth more effectively and efficiently across agencies. Subsequently, the Bureau has awarded additional grants to encourage more state-local partnerships for positive youth development and facilitate the transfer of knowledge about youth development strategies from the state level to the local level. To help promote collaboration, the state grantees are expected to build partnerships with schools, local government agencies, local nonprofit organizations, and other community institutions. Notably, the key learning from the initial demonstration projects with states, according to FYSB, is the importance of a well-developed, strategic plan that incorporates ongoing assessment to identify service strengths and gaps.

Many states and communities have established collaborative bodies to better understand and coordinate the services and resources that support youth development. Coordinating bodies—sometimes called Children’s Cabinets—may involve state or county agencies, nongovernmental organizations, public institutions, funders, community leaders, parents, and youth. These bodies offer a central location for analyzing and tracking data on a common set of outcome measures for youth, discussing shared issues and challenges, developing coordinated strategies to improve youth outcomes, and pooling resources for addressing identified challenges (see New Mexico’s Children’s Cabinet: Coordinating Funding and Policies to Support Youth Development on pages 21 & 22).

A 2005 report from the National Conference of State Legislatures identified several keys to success for a Children's Cabinet, including a common vision, the capacity to assume shared accountability for outcomes, the capacity to engage many different stakeholders, and the authority and resources needed to align policies and funding and address service coordination issues.³⁴ A 2007 report summarizing several years of work with Children's Cabinets nationwide concluded that few of these coordinating bodies have reached their potential in terms of effecting lasting change to improve outcomes for youth. Nonetheless, Children's Cabinets are "ideal structures for generating big impact results because of their capacity to create or mandate partnerships and define big picture goals for children and youth."³⁵

New Mexico's Children's Cabinet: Coordinating Funding and Policies to Support Youth Development

Created in 2003 by Governor Bill Richardson and chaired by the Lieutenant Governor, New Mexico's Children's Cabinet (NMCC) plays a critical role in providing leadership around the coordination and effective use of resources to support children and families in the state. The NMCC is a working group of the Cabinet Secretaries of thirteen departments such as education, children and family services, and health. The Cabinet focuses on improving opportunities for children and youth to ensure they are "involved, educated, safe, supported and healthy." The Cabinet does this through a number of mechanisms including tracking key outcome data on positive youth development measures through an annual joint Report Card and Budget Report, and through regular meetings to address cross-cutting strategy and policy issues concerning children and youth.

In order to assure child outcomes improve, the NMCC annually publishes the *Children's Report Card*. First published in 2005, the report card tracks indicators that measure the progress towards achieving the Cabinet's key outcomes. Some outcomes are closely linked to developing key assets, or protective factors, both important indicators of positive youth development. For example, the Report Card measures youth involvement in meaningful activities by tracking the number of youth who volunteer in their community; 68 percent report doing so. The Report Card also measures the percentage of youths who have supportive relationships in their home, school, or community- a critical factor in predicting many adolescent health outcomes. Finally, the report card looks at the number of days per week children eat meals with their parents- another important indicator of family involvement; 50 percent of youth reported eating meals with family all seven days per week.

Complementing the Report Card is the *Children's Budget Report*. One of the first of its kind at the state level, the Budget Report presents a comprehensive analysis of the state and federal funding across and within each of the five key outcome areas. The report ties outcome data from the Report Card to the budget information provided to show which state and federal funding

³⁴ Thaddeus Ferber, Elizabeth Gaines, and Christi Goodman, *Positive Youth Development: State Strategies* (Washington, D.C.: National Conference of State Legislatures, October 2005).

³⁵ Karen Pittman, Elizabeth Gaines, and Ian Faigley, *State Children's Cabinets and Councils: Getting Results for Children and Youth* (Washington, D.C.: The Forum for Youth Investment, December 2007).



New Mexico's Children's Cabinet: Coordinating Funding and Policies to Support Youth Development *(continued)*

sources help support key goals and outcomes. Budget and performance data within each goal area is presented across five years to allow for comparisons.

The Children's Cabinet also formed the New Mexico Youth Alliance to advise the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and the Legislature on policy issues that matter to young people. The Youth Alliance consists of 112 youth (ages 14-21) from across the state that meet at least four times a year at the State Youth Advisory Council to discuss youth issues and present solutions to the Governor, Lt. Governor and Children's Cabinet. In addition, each member of the Youth Alliance must partner with an adult mentor to act as advocates of change in their community.

For more information regarding New Mexico's Children Cabinet, please contact: Claire E. Dudley, Child and Youth Policy Advisor, Office of the Lt. Governor; Claire.dudley@state.nm.us, or visit <http://www.nmchildrenscabinet.com/>

Leaders seeking to develop coordinated strategies for serving youth can learn from states and cities that are developing OST systems or networks. Out-of-school time (OST) programs are a key component of any effort to build a system that supports the positive development of youth. Across the country, there are currently 38 statewide afterschool networks, which bring together key stakeholders and partners to work collaboratively to coordinate resources and influence policies to support afterschool programs or services.³⁶ Through this mechanism, public and private sector leaders have made significant progress in building partnerships and developing systems that improve the quality, quantity and sustainability of afterschool programs in their state or city.³⁷

Although significant progress has been achieved in improving the quality and quantity of afterschool services in many parts of the country, there is no clear blueprint for how to build or organize an afterschool system. A new study looking at systems building efforts for out-of-school time programs in six cities notes that there is no accepted model for what an effective afterschool system looks like, including what are the major components of a system.³⁸ In an effort to begin to address this research gap, the study provides a framework for understanding the major areas for investments in OST systems building, which include:

³⁶ More information on the National Network of Statewide Afterschool Systems can be found on their website, <http://www.statewideafterschoolnetworks.net/>.

³⁷ For additional information on systems building efforts in afterschool, see the following publications: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Child Care Bureau, *A Guide for Effective Governance: Considerations and Lessons Learned for Afterschool Networks* (Washington, DC: Child Care Bureau, June 2006). See also: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Child Care Bureau, *Using a State Child Care Quality Rating System to Promote Quality in Afterschool Programs* (Washington, DC: Child Care Bureau, 2007).

³⁸ Cheryl D. Hayes, et.al, *Investments in Building Citywide Out-of-School-Time Systems: A Six City Study*, (Washington, D.C., The Finance Project and Public Private Ventures, Study forthcoming).

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- providing community leadership and vision;
 - improving program quality;
 - expanding access to and participation in quality programs; and
 - ensuring adequate funding and sustaining quality programs

The report also notes that each of the cities studied differed significantly in terms of the goals they had for their OST system, the scale of their efforts, how their system was organized, and the activities they invested in to reach their goals. For example, efforts to improve program quality ranged from providing technical assistance and training to OST staff, aligning OST programming with school curriculum, building data management systems to organize information about programs, and implementing program evaluation tools. Strategies to expand access and participation in OST programs ranged from investing in resource and referral systems, doing market research to understand community needs, conducting outreach to increase awareness of program options, developing more innovative programs to better serve youth, and building new facilities and securing rent-free space for programs to operate.

Community-Level Strategies. Communities include neighborhoods or other geographically determined areas. They also include faith-based institutions, community based organizations, families, neighbors, and other adults. Communities differ significantly in the services and opportunities available to youth. Where communities offer diverse supports, youth generally fare better. At-risk youth also do better in these well-resourced communities, compared with similar youth in communities with fewer opportunities and supports.





Some successful community based initiatives are the result of a key local organization or group of dedicated community leaders. The Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) provides comprehensive neighborhood-based services to prepare children for economic and education success by the time they reach adulthood. Services are provided not only to children and youth, but also to their families, to help improve a young person's chance for success (See The Harlem Children's Zone: Reaching the Tipping Point for Youth in one Community below).

The Harlem Children's Zone: Reaching the Tipping Point for Youth in one Community

Based in a 97 block area of Central Harlem in New York City, the Harlem Children's Zone® (HCZ®) provides comprehensive neighborhood-based services for youth from birth to age 23, in an effort to transform the health and educational outcomes for a generation of youth. Rather than focusing on a single issue or service area, HCZ aims to meet the full range of educational, health and social services needs of the youth in their community. Grounded in the philosophy that the community as a whole must be strengthened in order improve the chances of success for children, HCZ's youth programs are complemented by parent education, community building, social work services and other supports for families and community. The organization's goal is to create a "tipping point in the neighbourhood so that children are surrounded by an enriching environment of college-oriented peers and supportive adults." (from the Harlem Children's Zone website).

HCZ offers a continuum of services that spans the full range of a child's development. Examples of services include parent education through their "Baby College" program, early childhood education services, charter schools with comprehensive in- and out-of-school time supports for school-age youth, wraparound services in seven neighborhood public schools for youth who were not able to attend their charter schools, and academic support and guidance for high school graduates attending or seeking to attend college.

HCZ's model has received national attention as being worthy of replication. The US Department of Education's 2010 budget proposal includes \$10 million for the "Promise Neighborhoods initiative" that would seek to replicate HCZ's model in target neighborhoods with high poverty rates and low student achievement. This initiative would provide planning grants to non-profit, community-based organizations seeking to develop comprehensive, neighborhood programs for children and youth, from birth through college.

The initial results of HCZ's work are promising, with 93 percent of children completing their early childhood programs in school year 2007-2008 being deemed as "school-ready" for entering kindergarten. An evaluation of HCZ's TRUCE program in 2004 assessed participants' preparedness for academic progress and college, health care and nutrition patterns, and unhealthy behaviors. The evaluation found that the majority of program participants were actively planning to attend college, were receiving regular healthcare, and were not engaging in unhealthy behaviors such as using illegal substances.

For more information contact: Kate Shoemaker at kshoemaker@hcz.org or visit: <http://www.hcz.org/programs/the-hcz-project>

Private philanthropic organizations have also been integral to many community-based systemic efforts that have focused on integrating the different supports youth need to be successful. Some of the most comprehensive and long-term initiatives funded by private philanthropies have focused their efforts on leveraging the support of key community partners, including schools, families, government, faith-based institutions, local employers, and community-based organizations, to work with children and their families.

In 1987, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation began a 20-year effort to fund three diverse Michigan communities to promote positive youth development. The initiative seeks to shift the focus from isolated social programs that emphasize fixing young people's problems to community collaborations that aim to help young people develop to their fullest potential. It also seeks to transform grantmaker-grantee relationships and foundation-based programming to local, intimate partnerships and community-based programming.

To synthesize lessons learned from the first decade of the initiative, the foundation concluded that investing in the infrastructure governed by a local coordinating body must be the first priority.³⁹ Community-based governance and partnerships have required ongoing attention and resources throughout the initiative. Professionals have needed to develop new skills to listen to local leaders and afford youth leadership roles in project design and implementation.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has also launched a long-term systemic community-based initiative, Making Connections, to help improve outcomes for low-income children and their families. While the focus of the initiative is much broader than youth development, there may be lessons learned that can help support other youth-focused initiatives, particularly in their approach to building community partnerships. The initiative, located in 10 urban sites nationwide, focuses on strengthening families and their ties to important resources and opportunities within their community. The initiative aims to achieve a core set of results including increasing access to job opportunities and to financial products that help build assets for economic success, ensuring young children are healthy and prepared to succeed in school, and ensuring youth and adults have strong social connections to one another and opportunities to participate actively in the life of their community.

Two of the strategies used by Making Connections sites may be particularly relevant for systems building for youth development programs. One strategy is the focus on enhancing opportunities for parents to access employment, increase earning and build assets (important goals in and of themselves), in part because of the expected positive impact this will have on the educational and health outcomes of their children. The idea is that when families are economically stable, their children are more likely to achieve in school, and the parents are better positioned to access community supports for their children. A second

³⁹ W.K. Kellogg Foundation, *Kellogg Youth Initiative Partnerships: Lessons Learned from the Crucial First Decade of Positive Youth Development Through Community-Based Programming* (Battle Creek, MI: W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2001). http://www.wkcf.org/DesktopModules/WKF00_DmaSupport/ViewDoc.aspx?LanguageID=0&CID=163&ListID=28&ItemID=1633174&fld=PDFfile



strategy is to leverage public-private partnerships with key neighborhood partners, including businesses, schools, government agencies, and community based organizations, to expand the scope and reach of supports for children and their families. Making Connections sites have formed partnerships to increase access to key local employers and job training for parents, as well as build support for enhancing and increasing access to early childhood services.

Research on systemic efforts to promote positive youth development is nascent, but important lessons on systems building can be learned from other fields, including mental health. These lessons can increase understanding of what works at the system level for promoting positive youth development.

Lessons from the Mental Health Field in System-Building

The mental health field's system of care approach to the coordination of services for children with serious mental health challenges and their families sheds light, from a systemic perspective, on how to coordinate services and funding to achieve desired goals for youth. A system of care considers how financing, service delivery, and infrastructure-related supports can be coordinated to minimize the burden on families trying to access mental health services, while providing comprehensive supports and services to children and youth in the least-restrictive setting possible.

A system of care is a network of community-based services and supports that works to address the challenges of children with serious mental health needs.⁴⁰ Formally called Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and their Families, the Systems of Care initiative is sponsored by the Center for Mental Health Services of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The initiative has provided more than \$1 billion to local communities to implement a system of care.

The principles of a system of care also reflect many of the key values of positive youth development.

- Services need to be driven by decisionmaking that includes youth and their family.
- Services are community-based and are accessible to youth and their family.
- Services are comprehensive in order to address the personalities and needs of all youth.
- Services are coordinated so all youth and their families can be served more effectively and efficiently.

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Children's Mental Health Facts: Helping Children and Youth with Serious Mental Health Needs: System of Care," <http://www.systemsofcare.samhsa.gov/> (accessed April 29, 2009).



States and communities that have implemented systems of care delivery models have experienced significant, positive results for the children, youth, and families they serve. Results include reductions in emotional and behavioral problems, reductions in suicidal attempts or ideation by children with suicidal histories, and increased involvement of children and families in their own service planning.

In 2008, the National Center for Children in Poverty analyzed how systems of care principles were being implemented in the mental health system in states across the nation.⁴¹ The study identified several key strategies that states should pursue to drive system-level improvements in child mental health outcomes, including:

- ensuring flexible funding that enables rapid response to emerging knowledge about the development of child mental health issues;
- using financing strategies, such as investing in communities, coordinating funding, maximizing revenues, and aligning budget allocations with performance outcomes;
- making available dedicated funding for prevention and early intervention;
- incentivizing systems to improve quality, including rewarding systems that use Medicaid and state funding creatively to improve service delivery and tying rewards to improved outcomes;
- using data to drive clinical and administrative decision making; and
- implementing integrated delivery systems.

The study also highlights some of the key system-level barriers that states faced when implementing a system of care that addressed the mental health needs of children and youth.

- A lack of collaboration was evident across systems. For example, only a few child mental health agencies reported they worked with their adult mental health agency counterparts, even when the parents of the children being served were mentally ill.
- Funding restrictions seriously hindered efforts to support evidence-based practices that have proven effective in improving child mental health outcomes.
- Many states reported they had only “rudimentary” data systems, which restricted their efforts to improve service quality, manage information, and integrate with other systems.
- Only a few states had knowledge of or could provide full information on the budget for children’s mental health. Of these, most relied heavily on funding specific to mental health; very few sought to access funding from other child-serving agencies despite the various agencies “sharing” many of the same children.

⁴¹ Janice L. Cooper et al., *Unclaimed Children Revisited: The Status of Children’s Mental Health Policy in the United States* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University, National Center for Children in Poverty, 2008).



- Many states restricted the use of funding for services in non office-based settings, including child care facilities and school settings. This constraint flies in the face of developing services in the community and in the home.

Summary of System-Level Research

Research on systemic approaches offers clear lessons and promising strategies for investments in a coordinated and comprehensive set of services at the state or community level to support positive youth development. Strongly aligned systems increase access to flexible resources. They also provide the leadership and collaboration among key partners that can reduce the need for youth and their families to navigate an otherwise fragmented system of supports and services. Effective systems that support positive youth development frequently share common traits, including:

- financing strategies that seek to coordinate funding from multiple child-serving agencies and programs;
- programs and opportunities that are comprehensive but coordinated to ensure services are effective and provided efficiently;
- ways to leverage the resourcefulness of parents, other adults, and community members to participate alongside government agencies and community-based organizations in supporting youth development; and
- data to track system-level outcomes for youth and drive decisionmaking on where and how best to invest funding that supports youth.







Implications of Research to Guide Effective Investments in Positive Youth Development

Despite the considerable advancement in understanding what works to promote healthy youth development, state and local leaders still face significant challenges in implementing an effective system that reaches all or most youth. One key challenge is how to finance and sustain support for the diverse services and infrastructure necessary to foster positive outcomes for youth. Over time, many promising youth programs face challenges in sustaining the financial support needed to continue to be effective. Large-scale initiatives to support a comprehensive approach to youth development can suffer setbacks when state and local budgets get tight and new funding does not materialize. To avoid losing effective programs or reducing services to youth who need them, program leaders and decision makers must think strategically about long-term approaches to finance effective programs or system-level initiatives.

The sustainability of a single program or system requires a clear plan that aligns the goals to be achieved with financing strategies for supporting those goals over time. Developing such a strategic financing plan involves clarifying what should be financed, estimating fiscal needs, identifying the current resources available to fill service gaps, and identifying the funding sources and finance strategies for meeting determined needs (See Key Steps to Developing a Strategic Financing Plan below). Financing strategies can include accessing new funding, using existing funding better, leveraging the support of other child-serving agencies and community partners, and maximizing current investments by focusing on effective programs and services.

Key Steps to Developing a Strategic Financing Plan

1. **Clarify Financing for What** — including defining your target population and activities and services that you want to provide.
2. **Estimate Fiscal Needs** — consider your start-up costs versus on-going costs.
3. **Identify Current Resources** — including all federal, state, local, and private funding available to support the initiative.
4. **Assess Funding Gaps** — compare fiscal needs identified with current resources available.
5. **Identify Funding Sources and Financing Strategies** — including reviewing current funding sources available and identifying other financing strategies to support the initiative.



The research reveals important elements of what works for positive youth development and, therefore, what should be financed. As programs, communities, and states use the research to determine the focus of their positive youth development efforts, significant work to determine costs should be undertaken. As costs are balanced against available resources, gaps will emerge, suggesting priorities and needs for identifying further funding, or other financing strategies, both in the short and long term. A critical step in a strategic financing approach is to consider mechanisms to generate needed revenue or other financing strategies to support identified goals for youth.

Three strategies to help support and sustain positive youth development programs and systems are:

- using data to target and track investment decisions;
- accessing flexible funding to maximize coordination; and
- building and strengthening partnerships.

Using Data to Target and Track Investment Decisions

Program performance information is key for targeting and analyzing the impact of current investments. Collecting robust information is costly and time consuming, but using such data effectively is critical for making wise investments for youth development.

Develop a Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement System

States and communities must be able to measure the effects of programs and services on an ongoing basis, especially given the scarcity of resources and heightened scrutiny of public expenditures. To develop this capacity, leaders must set clear goals and outcome measures; develop a system for tracking, analyzing and reporting key data; and use the data to inform and help guide decision-making—or develop what is sometimes called a quality assurance or quality improvement system. Although many states and communities already have some components of a quality assurance system—and some of these systems even track youth outcomes and share data across agencies—most do not use the information to make program changes or budget decisions. Whether decision-makers use this data to re-allocate funding, to monitor youth programs, or as a tool for program self-assessment and improvement, data is critical to building a system that supports high quality youth services.



A 2007 study by the Forum for Youth Investment examined three initiatives, including two state initiatives and one national youth organization that are in the process of developing quality improvement systems for youth development and after-school programs.⁴² The study noted that although it was too early to determine the impact of any initiative, there were some key lessons to be shared with other states and communities interested in developing quality improvement systems for youth programs. Because each system was different, the study was able to compare them across some key areas including, whether the effort was voluntary or mandatory for youth programs, the level of accountability for the youth programs involved, the type of data collected, and how the data was used to inform decision making.

The study highlights the importance for leaders of any state, locality, or initiative to consider what it wants to achieve through a quality improvement system, and align its system with those goals in mind. For example, one of the state programs, Michigan's Department of Education After School Quality System Demonstration, chose a self assessment to be completed by youth programs, rather than use a formal accountability system. Thus, while participation in using the system is required, programs may feel more comfortable sharing data and even discussing potential weaknesses, knowing that there are not consequences, at least initially, based on performance. In contrast, the national organization, Girls, Inc., requires all of its affiliate organizations to achieve an adequate assessment score or risk losing their affiliation with the group. The benefits of using such an approach are that programs will clearly pay attention to improving those areas being measured. Potential challenges of using such an approach are the risk that programs may be less forthcoming about internal problems or challenges they are facing due to the potential consequences they could face, although the study did not find any evidence of this occurring.

Several assessment tools have been developed in recent years to measure the quality of youth programs.⁴³ These tools can be an important component of a quality assurance or quality improvement system. There are similarities and differences across the assessment tools in terms of the types of programs or services they evaluate, the types of data measured and data collection methods used, and the purpose of the tool. For example, while some tools aim to highlight areas for program improvement, others allow state or community leaders to compare across programs, in terms of the quality of services or compliance with program standards. Still, other tools are focused on monitoring performance, and some are used as a method for accrediting or approving certain programs. Tools also vary in terms of the types of data they collect and the methods of data collection. For example, some tools are focused on program staff observation, while other tools include data gathered through interviews of program staff or youth clients. State and community leaders should carefully consider the purpose of any tool, and be clear with youth program leaders about how the information collected will be used.

⁴² Wilson-Ahlstrom, A. and Yohalem, N. with Pittman, K, *Building Quality Improvement Systems: Lessons from Three Emerging Efforts in the Youth Serving Sector* (Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, March 2007).

⁴³ For more information on assessment tools for youth programs, see Yohalem, N. and Wilson-Ahlstrom, A. with Fischer, S. and Shinn, M, *Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment tools, Second Edition* (Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, January 2009).



Ensure Data Integrity

Data integrity is critical for making informed decisions on how to use scarce public resources. States and communities vary significantly in terms of how much responsibility community-based youth programs have for inputting, analyzing, and reporting key administrative and performance data. Some state or local systems require all programs to input data directly into a common system that enables the public agency to monitor results in real time. In contrast, some systems allow each youth program to collect and report its own data, which can result in uneven and inaccurate data reporting to the public agency. Still other systems have a “trust but verify” system where youth programs report their results to the public agency, which then verifies the results through a data audit. Each method has benefits and costs that should be considered.

Whichever method is used, front-line personnel who input the data must understand why inputting data correctly and thoroughly is important. Moreover, the interpretation of the data must be shared with them and then used to make program improvements or adjustments. When data is not seen as useful to line staff and supervisors, data integrity often suffers because it takes a back seat to direct service work.

Data should be gathered from multiple sources, including qualitative data through client surveys or interviews and quantitative data from administrative and other records. Gathering anecdotal information from participating youth can also provide valuable program insights that may not always be apparent from looking at data.



Implement Performance-Based Budgeting and Contracting

Tracking program performance data is most useful when actions are taken based on the information collected. Whether it is to offer technical or financial assistance to help improve performance, hold programs that are not achieving results accountable, provide financial incentives, or impose sanctions, decision makers can use performance data to allocate resources in a way that helps achieve desired outcomes.

In addition, agency budget directors can build in performance measures and goals when developing contracts with private and nonprofit youth-serving programs. When determining whether to implement or pilot an evidence-based program, decisionmakers may also want to consider conducting a cost-benefit study (see Washington State Using Cost-Benefit Analysis to Guide Investments in Youth below).

It is important to make the process as transparent as possible to youth program leaders. Youth program leaders should provide input on the development of performance measures, which should tie back to a shared set of goals for youth.

Washington State: Using Cost-Benefit Analysis to Guide Investments in Youth

The Washington State legislature uses the research capacity of the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to provide information and analysis on programs that support children, youth, and families. Of particular interest, the institute has performed cost-benefit studies on prevention programs in education, child welfare, youth development, and juvenile justice to identify what works and whether the benefits of these programs outweigh their costs. The state legislature uses the information provided in the studies to make decisions on which prevention programs should be funded and which ones are too costly to implement based on anticipated benefits.

The Institute has created a methodology related to the costs and benefits of spending public funds on prevention efforts that includes analyzing evaluation studies of research-based prevention programs from across the nation. Its 2004 analysis of prevention programs focused on seven outcomes the legislature identified for this study: crime, substance abuse, education, teen pregnancy, teen suicide attempts, child abuse or neglect, and domestic violence. Although limited by the absence of rigorous evaluation of many prevention strategies, the institute found many prevention programs produce a positive return on investments and acknowledged that its approach is likely to underestimate the economic benefits.

For more information, see <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov>.

Also see: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, *Benefits and Costs of Prevention and Early Intervention Programs for Youth* (Olympia, WA., September 2004), <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/04-07-3901.pdf>



Accessing Flexible Funding to Maximize Coordination

Well-functioning systems that support youth development, as well as the community programs that operate within these systems, rely on federal, state, local, and private revenues to remain sustainable and provide effective services (See Key Federal Funding Sources for Youth Development Programs on page 36). Yet coordinating funding streams to create a system that is comprehensive in its service offerings and efficient for the youth and their families who access those offerings is often a challenge. Funding at the federal level is fragmented across the many federal programs that serve youth, and each funding stream has its own eligibility restrictions, application processes, and reporting requirements. The same can be said of funding at the state and local levels. Often, what program leaders appreciate the most is flexible funding, so they can tailor programs to clients' needs.





Key Federal Funding Sources for Youth Development Programs

The following chart lists some of the key federal funding sources that support youth programs.⁴⁴ Funding amounts are also provided, as is the amount of funding each program has received from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA).

Funding Source (Federal Agency)	Funding Amount	Type of Youth Program				
		Academic Success	Career and Workforce Development	Youth Leadership and Engagement	Health and Well Being	Systems Support
21st Century Community Learning Centers Dept. of Education	FY 08: \$1.1 billion ARRA: \$200 million	✓Academic Support ✓Arts / Culture Education ✓Drop out Prevention ✓Family Literacy	✓Career Exploration	✓Leadership Development ✓Mentoring ✓Volunteer/Community Service	✓Delinquency prevention ✓Mental Health/Behavioral Health ✓Recreation/Fitness ✓Substance Abuse Services	✓Evaluation ✓Technical Assistance and Training
AmeriCorps Corp. for National and Community Service	FY 09: \$271 million ARRA: \$201 million	✓Academic Support ✓Drop out Prevention ✓Family Literacy		✓Leadership Development ✓Mentoring ✓Volunteer/Community Service	✓Delinquency Prevention	
Community Services Block Grant Dept. of Health and Human Services	FY 08: \$643 million ARRA: \$1 billion	✓Academic Support ✓Arts / Culture Education ✓Drop out Prevention	✓Career Exploration ✓Job Placement ✓Vocational Education	✓Mentoring	✓Delinquency Prevention ✓Mental Health/Behavioral Health ✓Substance Abuse Services	✓Facilities ✓Planning and Collaboration
4-H Youth Development Program Dept. of Agriculture	FY 08: \$410 million	✓Academic Support	✓Career Exploration ✓Vocational Education	✓Leadership Development ✓Mentoring ✓Volunteer/Community Service	✓Delinquency prevention ✓Recreation/Fitness	
WIA Youth Activities Dept. of Labor	FY 09: \$828 million ARRA: \$1.2 billion	✓Academic Support ✓GED Classes	✓Job Placement ✓Vocational Education ✓Work Experience	✓Leadership Development ✓Mentoring		✓Evaluation ✓Systems Building Services ✓Training and Technical Assistance
YouthBuild Dept. of Labor	FY 09: \$50 million	✓Academic Support ✓Drop out Prevention ✓GED Classes	✓Career Exploration ✓Vocational Education ✓Work Experience	✓Mentoring ✓Volunteer/Community Service ✓Work Experience	✓Mental Health/Behavioral Health ✓Substance Abuse Services	✓Systems Building Services ✓Training and Technical Assistance

⁴⁴ Information used for this chart was taken from Dionne Dobbins-Harper and Soumya Baht, *Finding Funding: A Guide to Federal Sources for Youth Programs* (Washington, DC: The Finance Project, 2007). For a complete list of programs that support youth development programs, see the full document at: http://www.financeproject.org/publications/findingfunding_PM.pdf

Flexible funds play a critical role in filling the gaps that frequently result when trying to work across systems and provide supports that do not fit into conventional program guidelines or funding regulations. Providing opportunities and supports for youth in multiple settings (e.g., their homes, schools, and communities) is important. Yet program leaders are often challenged to provide more opportunities and supports in the community due, in part, to restrictions tied to key federal funding streams. For example, Medicaid requires services be provided in specific types of facilities, which may preclude the participation of smaller, community-based programs.

Accessing Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) Funds

One particularly flexible and significant funding source that can be used to support youth development programming and system building is tobacco Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) funding. The tobacco Master Settlement Agreement between attorneys general of 46 states and tobacco manufacturers has provided those states with roughly \$71 billion in unrestricted revenue since payments first began in 2000. The funding is unrestricted, so states can and have used the funding for a wide range of purposes, including preventing youth smoking, promoting youth development, providing long-term health care services, addressing budget deficits, and paying debt service on bonds issued.

While states use MSA funding for many different purposes, MSA funds can potentially be an important source of revenue for programs focused on positive youth development, including the prevention of smoking and the adoption of healthy behaviors.

- The amount of funding available to states who are party to the agreement is significant, with states receiving a total of \$7 billion in 2009.
- The funding is completely flexible, affording a unique opportunity to support positive youth development.
- The funding is long term, with funding allocations extending in perpetuity. Youth advocacy organizations and community leaders can work with their state leaders to access these funds as a source of long-term support.

Although several states have invested at least part of their MSA funding in programs that support youth development activities, only a few have looked strategically at how they can use some of these funds to support youth.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ For more information on how states are using their MSA funds to support youth programs see www.financeproject.org/tobacco.



- Healthy Maine Partnerships is a network of communities, schools, hospitals, businesses, and volunteers working together at the state and local levels to establish policies and environments that reduce tobacco use and tobacco-related chronic disease. By forming successful coalitions, leveraging funding, and adjusting program strategies and interventions based on independent evaluation results, Healthy Maine Partnerships has given rise to more than 250 state and local policy and environmental changes.
- Alabama allocates up to \$70 million annually in MSA funding to a children's trust fund. Funds support alternative schools, therapeutic foster care, child advocacy centers, juvenile detention and probation services, SCHIP, child abuse prevention, children's mental health services, and tobacco prevention, treatment and enforcement.
- Kansas created a Children's Cabinet to oversee MSA expenditures which are held in the Kansas Endowment for Youth (KEY) Fund. Ninety-five percent of the MSA funds are dedicated to improve the health and well-being of children and youth in the state. Fund support early care, child welfare, child mental health, juvenile prevention and intervention grants, immunization outreach, and smoking prevention.





Building and Strengthening Partnerships

Even with sufficient funding, the challenges of working with multiple government agencies and community-based providers can hinder efforts to provide comprehensive, integrated, and accessible services to youth and their families. Effective collaboration requires information and expertise to be shared across multiple government agencies and programs and with their service provider partners. Information and expertise must also be shared with other community institutions, including schools and religious institutions.

Too often, however, parents in search of opportunities that promote positive learning for their children are thwarted by a confusing bureaucracy of agencies and programs that do not talk to one another and do not share information. Building working partnerships across community providers, government agencies, families, schools, and other community leaders and groups also helps leverage additional financial resources and community support for youth development opportunities.

Collaboration offers opportunities to coordinate activities and focus on population-level impacts. It is achieved by sharing information across government agencies and other community partners, developing shared goals and objectives, streamlining administrative and service delivery processes, and forming public-private partnerships.⁴⁶

- **Developing shared goals and objectives.** Another challenge to collaboration is that each agency—and often each program—has its own outcome measures and objectives that it is focused on achieving. Agency and program leaders may not be aware of the overlapping youth populations that their programs serve. They also may not be able to step back to see the larger picture of how they can all contribute to the broader goal of ensuring the healthy development of youth. Developing shared goals and objectives for youth that cross agency and program lines offers hope for bridging this gap. A Children’s Cabinet or other collaborative body can formulate a coherent strategy that focuses broadly on youth development (See Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development, on page 40).
- **Sharing information across government agencies and other community partners.** Despite the benefits of sharing data, agencies are often reluctant to share client data due to restrictions, real or perceived, that are imposed by state or federal laws aimed at protecting client privacy. The fact that many states share data across various agencies and systems—and some even share data with private and nonprofit service providers—indicates they have found ways to address this important issue. Some states and communities have formed working groups to address data sharing issues with some success. In other cases, legislation or administrative actions may be needed that binds the various agencies to sharing data and creates a mechanism for doing so.

⁴⁶ Sharon Deich and Cheryl D. Hayes, *Thinking Broadly: Financing Strategies for Youth Programs* (Washington, DC: The Finance Project, January 2007).



- **Streamlining administrative and service delivery processes.** During the past decade, state- and community-level efforts have focused on providing one-stop service delivery to clients. The goals are to improve access among families by collocating benefits and services and to achieve program efficiencies by consolidating staff and integrating services and benefits. For example, community schools build partnerships with multiple providers of health and social services. They offer a convenient, centralized location to provide supports and opportunities for positive youth development. In the mental health field, efforts to locate certain services in schools or collocate services with other community providers have proven successful in improving access to services.
- **Forming public-private partnerships.** Successful initiatives to improve the lives of youth have rarely been the result of government agencies acting on their own. Community partners who regularly interact with youth in places where they work, study, and socialize are vital players in the process. These partners must be brought in early to any initiative focused on youth and should inform and guide any actions taken. Intermediary organizations, typically nonprofit organizations formed outside of city or state government, have been effective in coordinating key stakeholders and mobilizing resources to develop systems for out-of-school time learning.⁴⁷ At the individual program level, developing partnerships is equally critical. Programs that can engage in public-private partnerships with other community groups, families, citizen groups, or the philanthropic community can improve the quality and reach of their services for youth.⁴⁸ Programs that engage in public-private partnerships are also more successful in developing diverse funding strategies that help sustain quality services.⁴⁹

Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development

The Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development (ICYD) is a network of ten state agencies that are working together to build a youth development system that achieves better outcomes for youth. The initiative aims to achieve its goals through improved coordination of programs and policies at the state level. Some of its efforts include developing a set of common performance measures across youth serving agencies, and regular reporting, by county, on each of the key outcome measures. Child development indicators include measures of safe and supportive families, safe and supportive schools, indicators on whether youth are prepared to transition to adulthood, and a range of physical and mental health indicators. The 2009 Iowa Legislature passed a measure placing the ICYD in the Iowa Code, which includes a requirement for an annual report to the Governor and the Legislature. The ICYD, working with The Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality⁵⁰, has also conducted a pilot of a program assessment tool to help measure the quality of youth programs across a wide variety of settings and state agencies ranging from juvenile justice settings to after school programs.

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⁴⁷ Cheryl D. Hayes, et al, 2009

⁴⁸ Mary Burkharuser, M.A., and Allison J.R. Metz, *Building Systems-Level Partnerships, Part 5 in a Series on Implementing Evidence-Based Practices in Out-of-School Time Programs: The Role of Organizational-Level Activities* (Washington, D.C.: Child Trends, Inc, June, 2009).

⁴⁹ Kate Sandel, *Snapshots of Sustainability: Profiles of Successful Strategies for Financing Out-of-School Time Programs* (Washington, D.C.: The Finance Project, 2007).

⁵⁰ The Weikart Center is a joint venture between the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation and the Forum for Youth Investment.





Conclusion

To develop into healthy and successful adults, youth need support that enables them to avoid problems and also affords them opportunities to build skills, develop positive bonds with peers and other adults, and adopt healthy habits early in life. Positive youth development provides a framework for helping youth build these skills and nurture positive behaviors. Programs and services that support positive youth development can significantly improve the likelihood youth will successfully navigate adolescence and become contributing members of their community. Effective programs and services often share key characteristics. These include providing a safe and nurturing environment; affording youth opportunities to develop self-confidence and self-worth, and providing opportunities for youth to build critical-thinking skills and engage with and form connections to family and other adults.

System-level initiatives provide the infrastructure, policy direction, and resources needed to link the diverse programs and services available to youth and their families. Efforts that support youth development are most effective when government, community, and private sector leaders work in concert to provide the services and opportunities youth need to be successful, when funding streams are aligned to support key goals for youth, and when data are leveraged to make good decisions. System-level initiatives also require flexible funding that can be coordinated and combined with other federal, state, and local funding to support services for youth.

To maximize young people's chances for success, decision makers should use an approach that aligns desired outcomes for youth with research-based programs and services needed to achieve those outcomes. At the same time, they must consider financing strategies that can support and sustain those services over time. Strategic financing requires identifying the key goals to be achieved, comparing current funding available with needs, costing out any gaps in services, and developing financing strategies to achieve the key goals. Financing strategies should include ways to access new funding, but they should also include ways to maximize existing resources and leverage the support of other child-serving agencies and community partners.

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Helping leaders finance and sustain initiatives that lead to better futures for children, families, and communities.

The Finance Project is an independent nonprofit research, training, consulting, and technical assistance firm for public- and private-sector leaders nationwide. It specializes in helping leaders plan and implement financing and sustainability strategies for initiatives that benefit children, families, and communities. Through a broad array of tools, products, and services, The Finance Project helps leaders make smart investment decisions, develop sound financing strategies, and build solid partnerships. To learn more, see <http://www.financeproject.org>.



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