

WHAT DO YOUTH NEED FOR POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT? (AND WHAT CAN 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT DO TO HELP THEM GET IT!)

Part II of a Series:

Involving Community Members, Policy-makers, and Organizations In the Mission of Youth Development

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Preface:

This is the second report in our ongoing series entitled: *What do youth need for positive development? (And what can 4-H Youth Development do to help them get it!)*. This is a long title for a project, and we apologize for our wordiness. The title does, however, firmly reflect some of our core beliefs, indeed some of the core beliefs of University of Wisconsin-Extension.

The first is the belief that we collectively have the knowledge and experience to identify the day-to-day experiences which young people need to move successfully through adolescence and into productive and healthy adulthood. In fact, this was the focus of our first report that was distributed in May of 1999 titled: *The Essential Experiences of Youth Development: Thoughts from the Research Literature and the Experiential Knowledge of 4-H Youth Development Professionals*. In that report, we detailed the opportunities and supports that research and our own practice demonstrate as being critical to the positive development of youth.

Most concisely, young people need five types of opportunities and supports, or “essential experiences.” These are as follows:

- Opportunities for self-directed and active learning (e.g., exploration and reflection, expression, and creativity).
- Opportunities to take on new roles and responsibilities (e.g., group membership, contribution and service, and part-time employment).
- Emotional support (e.g., nurturance and friendship, emotional safety).
- Motivational support (e.g., high expectations, standards and boundaries).
- Strategic support (e.g., guidance and decision-making; access to resources).

The second belief underlying this project is that positive youth development is the goal of 4-H Youth Development as an organization. Indeed, this emphasis is reflected in the mission statement that Greg Hutchins and a committee have recently completed. Whether we are supporting a community club, providing technical assistance to an after-school program, or mobilizing a community coalition, our aim is to promote youth development. Youth development is everybody’s business!

As noted in the first report, the fundamental challenge is for all of us to orient our work towards positive youth development, particularly with the aim of providing the “essential experiences” to all of the youth with whom we work. But we can’t do the work alone. The second challenge, therefore, is to figure out how to gain the support and active involvement of community members, policy-makers, and organizations.

It is on this second challenge that we focus this report. Specifically, we go back to our February 1999 conference where we brainstormed answers to the question, “What actions should we be taking in counties to encourage, assist, and/or convince others (volunteers, public officials, other service providers) to provide essential experiences to young people?” This report provides an analysis of the data collected. It provides a clear guidepost for strategies that we can begin (or continue) to do to ensure that the message of “youth development” becomes understood and endorsed in our localities.

In the remainder of the report, we highlight our progress and the short- and long-term actions that we will be taking to help 4-H Youth Development staff meet these challenges. Specifically, we will present an overview of the Best Practices Directory (BPD) and Program and Activity Assessment Tool (PAAT) that we are developing and beginning to pilot in association with county agents. Additionally, we are developing tools that will help you as you train volunteer leaders, work with community collaborations, and communicate with public officials. We hope you find this information useful, and as always, we look forward to your feedback on this project.

Promoting Positive Youth Development: Lessons from the Experiential Knowledge of Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development Professionals – Additional Results from the February 1999 Conference

In our first report we shared the “essential needs of youth” that were identified by nine small groups that took part in the Technology of Participation (TOP) process on February 2, 1999. In reviewing these essential needs we came to the conclusion that all nine groups were more similar than different (although in some cases the wording describing specific needs differed). Additionally, the majority of these needs could conveniently be summarized under two main headings: “opportunities” and “affirmation” (or supports).

During the afternoon of the first day of our conference each of the nine groups merged into one of three “environmental groups”: 4-H Clubs, Community Groups, or Institutions. Initially, participants were asked to individually finish a brainstormed list from the question: “What action should we be taking in counties to encourage, assist and/or convince others (volunteers, public officials, other service providers) to provide essential day-to-day experiences to youth?” Next, similar to the process utilized on the first day, smaller clusters identified those specific things that could be recommended in order to encourage others to provide such experiences to young people. This information was listed on the wall and organized into categories. The appendix of this report contain the charts for each of the three environmental groups.

Findings

In continuing the trend from the first day there are many similarities in those “action steps,” which were listed by all three environmental groups. Here are some of the specific findings:

- Each of the three groups listed *educating stakeholders*. (In addition to listing stakeholders the Community group also had a category entitled “educate the community.” This step included the

importance of sharing outcomes and impacts with key decision makers, articulating needs, demonstrating the financial benefit of youth development, and providing testimonials.

- All three groups mentioned **marketing** (although the Institutions group referred to this as “storytelling”). Steps mentioned included promoting, educating the media, sharing outcomes, and celebrating positive youth development.
- Two of the environmental groups (4-H Clubs, Institutions) specifically mentioned **resources and training**. Additionally, “The Pitch,” a category from the Institutions group, mentioned using a mission statement to secure funds.
- The importance of **research** was mentioned by both the Community group (i.e., conduction of youth development research and data collect) and the Institutions group (i.e., research in action).
- Both the Community and Institutions groups specifically mentioned **youth advocacy**. Additionally, the content of the heading “Youth as Partners,” mentioned by the 4-H Clubs group, is very similar.
- The importance of having **partnerships** was mentioned by the Community group (i.e., establish and participate in coalitions for and with youth) and Institutions group (i.e., collaborating). The “Broadening the base” category from the 4-H Clubs group is a similar category (i.e., the importance of partnering with other organizations).
- Both the 4-H Clubs and Institutions environmental groups stressed the importance of **role modeling positive youth development**. The Community group’s category, “Practice what you preach,” echoes this important action step by its emphasis on modeling positive behaviors.
- Ensuring **meaningful youth roles** (Community) and “Youth opportunities” (Institutions) are similar in their emphasis on providing opportunities for youth and building environments for positive experiences. Additionally the “connect with kids” category (Community) stresses the importance of finding ways to work at the level of youth and directly with them.

Interestingly, after all of the above categories were compared and contrasted only one isolated category, unique to each respective group, remained:

- Institutions – Volunteer development
- 4-H Clubs – Fun
- Community Groups – Recognition and encouragement

When viewed broadly, all of the “action steps” identified above (with the exception of the three listed most immediately above) can be viewed as either essential opportunities or supports to assist youth in their journey toward positive youth development. Educating stakeholders, providing research, resources, training, being a youth advocate and modeling positive youth development are important ways to support youth. In addition, all three environmental groups mentioned important opportunities including encouraging partnerships, ensuring meaningful youth roles, and marketing.

In summary, these findings confirm and substantiate the findings in our first report. In other words, these results reinforce the importance of providing key opportunities and supports to youth. In addition, these results suggest that the opportunities and supports are the same, irrespective of environmental group. This is very helpful information as we strive to provide these crucial opportunities and supports in a wide variety of settings and environments.

The “Youth Development Tool Kit” (A Work In Progress)

As highlighted above, there are a variety of audiences with whom we wish to “teach” youth development. To reach these audiences, we will need to be creative in how we put the message out there. The data from the conference provides some good directions.

Most importantly, we have powerful content matter and effective messages to provide. The joint message of positive youth development, and of 4-H Youth Development as the organization best suited to produce positive outcomes among youth, should be convincing to local stakeholders. We recognize, however, that staff — both at the state and local levels — need tools to help make the case.

Producing useful tools is a major emphasis of this project. In constructing tools, we are taking steps to ensure that they are (a) practical, (b) easily understood, and (c) flexible enough to be used in a variety of ways — while, of course, making sure that they reflect the best of research and the best of practice. In essence, we are seeking to create a “youth development tool kit.”

As we see it right now, the table of contents for the *Youth Development Tool Kit* will be the following:

SECTION 1: YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND SELF-ASSESSMENT: FUNDAMENTAL FRAMEWORKS AND PROCEDURES

Tool 1.1: *Opportunities and Supports for Youth Development, A Summary of the Research Literature*. These materials identify the day-to-day “essential experiences” for positive youth development. This framework was based not only on published research, but also by data collected from Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development staff at a February 1999 annual retreat.

Tool 1.2: *Best Practices Directory*. This tool provides examples that illustrate how the essential experiences of youth development can be integrated into, and used as a planning guide, for implementation of programs and activities.

Tool 1.3: *Program and Activity Assessment Tool (PAAT)*. This is the self-assessment instrument that you can use to assess programs and activities. Its purpose is to provide a relevant and efficient way for staff to assess the degree to which their programming offers essential elements of youth development to young people.

Tool 1.4: *Using and Scoring PAAT*. This tool provides guidelines for using and scoring PAAT as a strategy for strengthening programs and activities.

SECTION 2: USING PAAT AS A STRATEGY FOR COMMUNICATING AND TEACHING “YOUTH DEVELOPMENT” TO KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Tool 2.1 *Program Planning and Priority Setting*. Using PAAT as a reference point, this piece will help youth educators balance the needs and expectations of various clientele groups and program stakeholders with the desire to design and implement programs that impact youth development. It can be used to review ongoing programs, as well as to help ensure that new ones be considered in view of essential youth development opportunities and supports.

Tool 2.2 *Volunteer Leader Training*. This resource will contain tips and strategies for using PAAT to help volunteers understand the importance of making sure the programs, experiences and events in which they are involved are addressing youth development needs. In addition to training tips and strategies, the resource will also include teaching activities, handouts and worksheets for volunteer leaders to use on their own.

Tool 2.3 *Community Coalitions*. The PAAT can be used by 4-H Youth Development staff members to help them teach, guide, and build and gain focus among diverse members of community coalitions. When community coalitions can gain consensus on how to translate “youth development” into practice, then their productivity and efficiency increases. We are currently working with three counties to pilot ways of using the PAAT to work with community coalitions. This tool will present lessons learned and guidelines based on these pilot experiences.

Tool 2.4 *Communicating with Public Officials and Demonstrating Impact*. This part of the toolkit will include a series of outlines, teaching suggestions, templates and other resources for using PAAT as the basis for communicating with public officials and other important stakeholders about the value of 4-H Programs in terms of our special “niche.”

SECTION 3: RESOURCES FOR SHARED LEARNING AND PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

Tool 3.1. *Research and Reports*. Included will be material that describes research and practice related to opportunities and supports for youth development. Those people who use PAAT will be put on a mailing list to receive the most recent studies and practitioner guides.

Tool 3.2. *Web Resources*. A list of relevant websites for information on youth development, as it relates to self-assessment and program improvement.

Tool 3.3. *List Serve*. The list serve will contain the names and addresses of all persons who have used PAAT. Interested persons will be able to contact the past and current users of PAAT so to brainstorm ideas as to how to make PAAT most applicable to their own priorities.

Current Status and Next Steps

We have nearly completed a strong draft of Section 1 of the Toolkit. Our work has been fully informed by the field: We have taken earlier versions of PAAT to district meetings, have gone over it item by item with a number of 4-H Agents, and are using it in discussions with community coalitions.

Nonetheless we want to stress that PAAT is still in a draft form. We continue to welcome feedback. At the February 2000 annual 4-H Youth Development Conference, we will be offering a workshop on PAAT. Section 1 of the Toolkit as well as working drafts of some portions of Section 2 so that staff will have a chance to explore how to use them. We are looking forward to getting more feedback during the conference. Subsequently, we will prepare a final version of PAAT, and begin to disseminate and offer training on it. Our plans are to stick with this version for a year and offer workshops again at the February 2001 staff conference in order to share experiences and review ways of improving PAAT and its uses.

Section 2 of the Toolkit is in development. As noted above, during the February conference we will be involving agents in exploring how these fundamental youth development tools can best be used to help train volunteers and communicate with public officials.

As we continue to work on Section 3 of the Toolkit, our intent is to create a list serve of people who are using or expect to be using PAAT. In this way, we can begin to share lessons and tips. It will be from this early group of users that we will be able to determine how best to identify and disseminate “resources” to those who are users of PAAT and innovators in the field of positive youth development.

4-H Club - Day 2

Resources and Training	Broadening the Base	Marketing and Public Relations	Educating Stakeholders	Modeling PYD	Youth as Partners	Fun!
Provide resources and support for leaders and public	Meet with youth and other groups to assess needs and wants of today's youth	Educate through the media	Coffee and communication with the courthouse/county board (more informal interaction)	Modeling use of time, resources, and personal involvement with youth	Advocacy for youth as partners in community issues	Schedule fun into the program
Take a group of youth and/or adults through process	Work within county youth coalitions	Invite others to our programs to visit	Share outcomes/impacts with decision makers	Ask people to get involved re their talents	Youth to advocate for themselves in public	
Educate volunteers regarding role model awareness	Go to where the kids are -- schools	Share outcomes (stories)/impacts with the public	Affirmation of public support by stakeholders (say thanks)	Be a role model for our community people	Allow youth and adults to make decisions about their program	
Utilize new leader orientation to make philosophy of YD real	Encourage a focus on diversity in programming	Publicize youth testimonials	Actively invite public officials to participate directly in 4-H community club activities	Provide positive role models utilizing ideas from yesterday	Encourage/support youth to speak up for their needs	
Train volunteers adult and youth to communicate with public officials	Encourage family involvement in clubs by giving them more opportunities	Increase media awareness	Cost/benefit analysis to share incarceration vs prevention (\$ terms)	Model our beliefs about PYD in our interactions with youth	Encourage kids to recruit other kids	
Incorporate asset building in ongoing training/programming	Offer experiences outside of 4-H box for at-risk kids	Use of aggressive new marketing tools and strategies	Tell stakeholders that we provide positive alternatives to at-risk kids	Encourage people to become youth leaders and support such leaders through rewarding experiences	Incorporate experiences such as decision-making and being respectful into projects	
Emphasize an adult advisory role	Partner with other organizations	Gear publicity to educational and preventative aspects of programs				
Manageable programs with clear focus and practical progression	Provide guidance and research to coordinators of other organizations					
Provide support for and benefits of subject matter projects						

Community Groups

Youth Development Advocacy	Promote and Market PYD	Educate the Community	Recognition and Encouragement	Collect Data	Connect with Kids	Conduction YD Research	Educate Stakeholders	Establish and Participate in Coalitions for and with Youth	Ensuring Meaningful Youth Roles	Practice What You Preach
Develop coalitions to advocate for YD \$	Marketing ❖promotion ❖education ❖selling youth education ❖examples of research	Give adults the necessary tools for working with youth - skills - resources	Encourage our community to celebrate our youth accomplishments ❖recognize ❖treat them fairly ❖talk & listen to them	Assess your community for needs and impacts	Find ways to work at kid level - direct work with youth	Conductor of research (YD Research)	Stress importance of providing support/ opportunities as a means of prevention	Develop relationships with other youth-serving agencies	Round table discussions ❖Awareness of youth and adult views on current issues	Role model community-wide approach to YD
Support the development of youth centers run for and by youth	News releases/ pictures capturing youth making positive contributions	TEACH positive youth development	Affirm efforts already in place - recognition	Gather information ❖financial benefits ❖anecdotes ❖alumni status ❖testimonials			Articulating benefits to corporate sponsors	Headhunter for youth - connecting link	Youth forum ❖opportunity for youth to speak publicly	Role models - teaching by setting an example
Adults advocate key role for youth in community (boards, decision making roles)	Refine promotion of YD programs and opportunities	Train youth and adult volunteers to be better able to meet youth needs					Educating key decision makers ❖ongoing... ❖invite to functions ❖presentations/ talk about ❖youth reporting	County youth development coalition	Set youth up for success (public policy)	Model the behaviors (positive YD behaviors)
Advocating for funding of YD efforts	Develop a plan to effectively educate the community/ media						Educate key decision makers using YD research	Partner with youth	Building environments where youth are the communicators	Use a community development approach to YD
Advocate for youth workers							Comparison of costs - for prevention vs intervention treatment	Identify specific group/ organization and present specific plan	Motivating youth to be spokesperson to represent their needs	Role modeling youth development techniques
							Testimonials with and for youth (success stories)	Be an active participant in collaborations		
							Articulate need for resources with elected officials			

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Institutions - Day 2

Educate Stakeholders	Collaborating	Storytelling	Youth Advocacy	Research In Action	The Pitch	Volunteer Development	Modeling PYD	Youth Opportunities	Funding and Resources
Match public official with youth (like interests)	Partnerships with other agencies, organizations - training, resources, information	Providing media with weekly positive story ideas	Call attention to the children	Keep current on research and share	Develop department mission statement	Include key elements in volunteer training	Model positive youth development	Support opportunities of others providing experiences	Find new and unique ways to fund youth activities
Communicate cost-effectiveness to key decision makers	Provide examples building coalitions (be a part of the example - role modeling)	Help people (youth and adults) tell their story	Advocating for youth in our personal and professional lives	Research impact of working together on youth	Develop a statement (short/clear) that we consistently share (repeatedly) what we are all about (advocates for youth)	Linking volunteers to opportunities (i.e. volunteer fairs)	Model youth development programs for others	Provide opportunities with youth to succeed	
Show financial benefit of youth development	Develop county-wide youth collaborations around key elements	Use media to promote positive youth development	Ensure advocate youth are represented on relevant committees	Incorporate/share research into our work more (more credibility with "others")	Develop and practice the \$Pitch\$				
Educate public officials (testimonials/ fiscal info)	Help "others" see their issues from PYD perspective	Conduct ongoing public relations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦showcase successes ✦create plan ✦develop relationship with institutions like press 	Advocate for youth in community leadership roles	Sharing research and programs with youth workers/ volunteers					
Involve stakeholders (public officials) in youth development experiences	Train adults and youth to effectively partner	Celebrate the existing/ongoing experiences	Be the voice for youth consistently						
Provide research and testimonials to stakeholders	Work more collaboratively								