

Research Support for Healthy Youth Development Programs

Problem free is not fully prepared, and fully prepared is not fully engaged.”

These words represent one of the guiding philosophies of our work at the Healthy Youth Development Prevention Research Center. The idea comes from Karen Pittman, a foremost leader in the promotion of youth development. This philosophy speaks to the basic need that all adolescents have, regardless of social, environmental, or personal characteristics, to make meaningful contributions in their families, schools and communities.

In the course of the work we all do with and on behalf of youth, we are often asked to define healthy youth development and give justification for using youth development as a guiding principle of our Center. The following is a list of five rationales based on research for using healthy youth development that can be incorporated into all the advocacy you do on behalf of Minnesota’s young people.



Youth Development Programs...

provide young people with increased opportunities for connections to caring, concerned adults.

- Research consistently shows that a strong sense of connectedness to adults outside the family is a protective factor that has great potential for reducing adolescents' participation in a number of risk-taking behaviors. Young people need to have ample exposure to adults within their communities that have high expectations for their behavior and convey those expectations to young people.

provide youth with significant opportunities to make meaningful contributions to their communities.

- A key element of effective youth development programs is providing young people with opportunities to participate in their communities. An opportunity for meaningful engagement in community is as essential to an adolescent's developmental needs as a safe place to live and a healthy diet. These opportunities provide youth the arenas for testing out their emerging self-identity, a major developmental task of adolescence.

address multiple risk factors to adolescent health and are effective among diverse populations of youth.

- Threats to adolescent health do not occur in a vacuum, yet for years, programming for young people has been designed to target one “problem” at a time. Research shows that those at risk for one negative health outcome are at greater risk for a host of negative health outcomes. A youth development approach is one that views young people more holistically, as multi-dimensional people that live as members of families, schools and communities, and addresses strengths and weaknesses within these contexts.

are longer in duration and take a more holistic approach to working with adolescents.

- Short-term programs that focus on a single risk factor in an adolescent's life tend to have limited success. Consistent interaction with caring adults and long-term involvement with community service show much greater promise for sustainable changes in adolescents' lives.

help ensure that adolescents develop and mature into productive, contributing adult members of the community and the economy.

- Adolescents that engage in risky behaviors are less likely to attain academic and economic success as adults, therefore increasing the likelihood that they will cost the public more in public assistance dollars and forgone contributions to the economy.

References

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