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Researchers have discovered that involvement in structured programs and activities during out-of-school time plays a critical role in helping young people achieve success. *The 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development* found the likelihood of success is greatest when youth regularly experience positive adult interaction and mentorship and are involved in youth development programs.

Study Finds Youth Development Programs Build Stronger Communities

Findings from a national longitudinal study released last fall by National 4-H Council reveal that involvement in structured programs and activities during out-of-school time plays a critical role in helping young people achieve success. The more time youth spend participating in youth development programs, the more likely they are to experience positive youth development and contribute to their communities.

Led by Richard M. Lerner, Ph.D., professor at Tufts University, *The 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development* (PYD) was sponsored by National 4-H Council. It involved more than 4,000 youth and 2,000 parents from 25 states and measured the impact personal and social factors have on a young person's development. Findings indicate that all youth, regardless of where they live, their family situations, their socioeconomic status, and their race or gender, have the capacity to thrive.

"This study has allowed us to track the behaviors of youth over several years and to learn how family, school, and community experiences are shaping their development," said Lerner, director of the study and author of *The Good Teen* (Crown Publishers, October 2007). "We know that all youth have the potential to succeed, but we've found that the likelihood of success is greatest when youth regularly experience positive adult interaction and mentorship and are involved in youth development programs."

Positive youth development is a strength-based perspective of adolescence that emphasizes the potential for youth to successfully grow into mature adults. The characteristics of PYD have long guided state and federal policies and programs offered by youth organizations and educators. The 4-H Study of PYD measures the widely known characteristics of PYD, otherwise known as the "Five Cs"—competence, confidence, character, caring, and connection—to determine individual and social factors that influence the youth development process.

Key Findings

The following findings are drawn from information either discovered or confirmed by *The 4-H Study of PYD*:

■ Youth development programs are proven to affect youth success.

❖ *The 4-H Study of PYD* is the first research to prove that the characteristics of PYD can be measured. These characteristics are competence, confidence, connection, character and caring, which lead to contribution.

❖ Successful youth development programs:

- ✦ Provide educational opportunities in an environment that supports long-term, productive interactions between adults and youth
- ✦ Emphasize skill-building
- ✦ Reflect the diversity of interests of the youth involved
- ✦ Emphasize both promotion of positive behaviors and prevention of risk behaviors
- ✦ Encourage youth participation and leadership.

■ All youth can succeed.

❖ The study shows success in young people can be measured by whether or not they select positive, healthy goals for themselves; identify and use available opportunities to reach their goals; and how they adjust when goals are not met.

❖ The study confirms that three resources must be available in young people's homes, schools, and communities for youth to experience success in terms of positive youth development and prevention of risk behaviors: 1) mentoring, 2) long-term adult interaction and 3) access to structured programs outside of school.

❖ Involvement in youth development programs

Involvement in youth development programs helps develop young people who contribute to themselves, their families, and their communities in various ways.

increases a young person's potential of doing well.

■ **All youth need PYD. No young person is immune to the risks and challenges present in today's society.**

❖ Regardless of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender or geographic location, all youth need youth development programs to succeed.

❖ To prevent risk behaviors and promote successful youth, communities, families, and schools need to provide: 1) access to youth development programs, 2) sustained adult interaction, and 3) avenues for youth participation and leadership.

■ **Youth development programs reduce youth risk behaviors.**

❖ Youth development programs promote positive behavior, such as leadership and citizenship. They help youth develop decision-making skills that can reduce their likelihood to engage in risk behaviors, such as underage drinking, smoking, bullying, and vandalism, etc.

❖ Prevention is simply **not** enough. Youth need both positive youth development **and** prevention of risk behaviors to be successful.

■ **Youth development programs create youth who contribute to their communities.**

❖ PYD leads to contribution in early adolescence and results in youth who are competent, caring, confident individuals who have character and are connected to their communities. Involvement in youth development programs helps develop young people who contribute to themselves, their families, and their communities in various ways, including taking proactive steps to healthy living like exercising and eating right, supporting family activities, volunteering in their communities, and helping friends or neighbors.

■ **The more often young people are involved in high-quality youth development programs, the more they and their communities benefit.**

❖ High-quality youth development programs ensure an environment that encourages sustained positive relationships with adult mentors, skill-building activities, and leadership. Youth who spend more time involved in these high-quality youth development programs are more likely than other youth to experience positive youth development and contribute, and less likely to participate in risk behaviors.

❖ Research shows that the combination of environment (context) in which a youth learns, the subject matter (content) they learn, and the dosage (amount of time spent learning in that environment) are all necessary factors in determining youth success and lack of involvement in risk behaviors.

❖ Youth involved in structured programs outside of school are more likely to experience PYD than those who are not. The longer youth are involved in structured, out-of-school-time programs over a period of time, and the more frequently they participate in these activities, the more likely they will experience PYD.

❖ Youth who are involved in one or more structured programs outside of school experience higher PYD. The quality of activities youth were involved in had more of an impact than the quantity of activities. However, youth who participated in many out-of-school-time activities, regardless of type, experienced more PYD than peers who participated in no activities at all.

To learn more about PYD, 4-H, and *The 4-H Study of PYD*, visit www.fourhcouncil.edu/newsroom.aspx

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