

# **Community Youth Development: A Partnership for Action**

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## **Abstract**

The concept of Community Youth Development is introduced and explained to raise the level of accountability, significance, and urgency for developing comprehensive responses to the epidemic of risk facing America's youth. The two theoretical models of adolescence (i.e., Positive Youth Development and Risk and Resiliency) that are employed as the pillars of this approach are also presented. The key components that comprise the community youth development framework are discussed, along with implications for practitioners, researchers, and policy.

## **Community Youth Development: A Partnership for Action**

Parents, teachers, faith communities, professionals in youth development, family consumer sciences, and human services fields are all asking similar questions pertaining to young people:

- “What does it take to create a community that will offer the positive opportunities that can promote the optimal development of all young people?”
- “What can a community do to prevent youth violence?”
- “Can communities or youth professionals identify youth who are likely to commit violent acts toward others or themselves or take part in other criminal acts before they actually engage in such behaviors?”

- And finally, “Can professionals and communities successfully intervene with high-risk youth to minimize their engagement in further risk behaviors?”

America’s towns and cities have been startled into the realization that their communities are all vulnerable for violence regardless of whether they are rural, suburban, or urban communities. The violent acts of young people toward their peers have repeatedly shocked the nation (e.g., Jonesboro, AR; Littleton, CO; Mount Morris, MI; Eugene, OR), reflecting an epidemic that impacts not some youth, in some communities, but youth from virtually any community throughout our nation. While countless other “tragedies” such as these have been prevented, or perhaps even gone unreported, our nation remains attentive to programs that might prevent the recurrence of violent incidents such as these.

In fact, the focus of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) program, authorized under Title X, Part I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, is to address this issue of safety. This program is designed to provide expanded learning opportunities for participating children and youth in a safe, drug-free, and supervised environment. The 21st CCLC program enables schools to stay open longer, thus providing a safe place for homework centers, intensive mentoring in basic skills, drug and violence prevention counseling, readying middle school students for college prep courses in high school, enrichment in the core academic subjects, services for children and youth with disabilities, technology education programs, as well as opportunities to participate in recreational activities, chorus, band and the arts. In addition, collaboration with community-based organizations (e.g., 4-H, YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, the local library) is an essential part of the grant requirements and the overall operation of this program.

This article introduces the concept of Community Youth Development. This is a new concept that seeks to raise the level of accountability, significance, and urgency for developing comprehensive responses to the “epidemic of risk” facing America’s youth. This concept provides a framework for community mobilization efforts including the school-based 21st CCLC program. Moreover, this perspective is based on the pillars of two theoretical models of adolescence: Positive Youth Development and Risk and Resiliency. We assert that positive youth development is the precursor to community youth development. Second, we assert that research about resiliency is critical when attempting to develop a perspective of community youth development. Simply stated, it becomes an approach to helping youth “overcome the odds” and become active partners in their own development, as well as their community’s development. After reviewing these two perspectives, we introduce the key components that comprise the community youth development framework. We end this manuscript by discussing the implications and potential that this approach holds for practitioners, researchers, and policy.

## Positive Youth Development

Given the violence in schools and what appears to be many youth's disconnection with society (Nightingale & Wolverton, 1993), communities are trying desperately to understand what it takes to create environments that promote the positive and healthy development of all their youth. Communities are attempting to redesign themselves, or to introduce programs that potentially can facilitate the development of youth character, to be places that promote the general well-being of all young people and promote positive and healthy behavior while simultaneously preventing negative behavior and addressing problems (Blyth, 2000; Blyth & Leffert, 1995; Blyth & Roehlkepartain, 1993; Hawkins & Catalano, 1992). Many communities have begun to see the importance of addressing "Positive Youth Development." Unfortunately, many communities have a limited understanding of what it means to mobilize a community to create an environment that promotes the positive development of all young people.

Many of our nation's communities have participated in the Search Institute's Attitude and Behavior Survey. According to Benson and his colleagues (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998), Search Institute has surveyed 99,462 youth from 213 U.S. cities and towns with their new survey (after 1995) and over 250,000 youth with their old survey. Search Institute's main objective in conducting these surveys is to provide communities with a portrait of their children and youth that they can employ to mobilize their community around promoting the development of youth. However, our own work with communities in various parts of our nation reveals that communities and youth-serving institutions do not fully understand how a community's actual actions and institutional programs must be transformed to successfully develop a community landscape that provides optimal opportunities for healthy youth development (Borden & Perkins, 1998; Borden, Yohalem, Blyth, & Morales, 2000; Keith & Perkins 1998; Keith, Perkins, Greer, McKnight Casey, & Ferrari, 1998; Perkins, Borden, & Hogue, 1998; Perkins, Borden, & Knox, 1999; Perkins & Butterfield, 1999).

For example, in a recent community-wide evaluation of a youth violence collaborative assessment, it was determined that the entire county had adopted a philosophy of "Positive Youth Development" for working with youth and that an "asset-based approach in all future programs" would be used. However, when specifically asked, these community leaders estimated that only approximately five percent of all programs actually were asset-based or focused on promoting the positive. Moreover, a close examination of their definition of "asset-based approach" revealed a lack of consistency and clarity. Similarly, one of the authors of this paper participated in a community "scan" of violence prevention programs. During public testimony, one of the participants stated that their agency had adopted a

“positive youth development” philosophy in their efforts. However, when asked specifically what this meant, especially for program purposes, the respondent (the agency head) was hard pressed to explain how this new philosophy had “transformed” their practices. Perhaps more alarming was the fact that the agency director stated that the goal of their efforts was directed at building “Search Institute Assets,” but they were really uncertain how they would engage in this, let alone evaluate the impact of the agency’s efforts.

The disparity between the desire to create a community that promotes positive and healthy youth development and the ability to actually implement this goal suggests a lack of understanding of critical components needed for a comprehensive community approach to fostering positive and healthy youth development. There are several possible explanations for a community’s inability to apply a positive youth development framework to its efforts. Historically, communities have used research and program efforts that have focused on deficit models rather than on opportunities for positive youth development (Lerner, 1995). These programs and policies have typically focused on the elimination of problems associated with various risk conditions and behaviors. Generally, such efforts have focused on one particular behavior such as drinking, using drugs, or academic success. Moreover, these efforts have typically targeted young people who were already experiencing some form of difficulty in their daily lives (e.g., juvenile diversion and substance abuse problems). If successful, these programs and policies may prevent young people from further engagement in the same behaviors. However, they fall short of decreasing the likelihood of youth engaging in other risk behaviors (e.g., sexual experimentation and school failure). As researchers have noted (e.g., Dryfoos, 1990; Lerner, 1995), the co-engagement of risk behaviors is a regular phenomenon among youth. Hence, programs that focus on preventing only a few risk behaviors, and do not minimize the risk of youth engaging in other negative behaviors, unfortunately fall short of their objective of promoting the optimal development of youth.

Outcomes such as these have led the research community to recognize that intervention and prevention programs do not necessarily prepare young people to meet the challenges and demands that they face now or will face in the future. Pittman and Irby (1996), for example, assert, “We [society] have reduced the challenges of youth development to a series of problems to be solved, leaving the core inputs for development – supports and opportunities – to be addressed in a catch-as-catch-can fashion” (p. 13). Preparing young people to meet challenges requires providing them with a foundation that enables them to make decisions that will promote their own positive development. Thus, programs and policies need to provide a foundation that promotes an individual’s growth and development by engaging young people in skill-enhancing opportunities. Scholars (e.g., Benson,

1997; Bogenschneider, 1998; Lerner, 1995, 2002; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Lerner & Perkins, 1999; Pittman & Irby, 1996) assert that models of positive youth development (e.g., asset models, life skills models) must be one of the major foci of community efforts if we, as a nation, are to overcome the conditions that place youth at risk for unhealthy and negative developmental outcomes. The other major foci include addressing and decreasing those risk factors that place youth in jeopardy of engaging in negative behaviors, as well as strengthening the economic infrastructure of communities. Nevertheless, communities must develop community-wide efforts that promote positive youth development for all young people, providing them with the opportunities to develop positive relationships, skills, competencies, and attitudes that will assist them in making positive choices for their lives. In addition, youth who are most vulnerable must also receive special attention and the risk factors they face must be addressed.

A phrase that captured the movement toward positive youth development in the 1990s was “Problem free is not fully prepared” (Pittman & Irby, 1996, p. 2). The next logical question is, “Fully prepared for what?” Of course, we want our youth to enjoy life and develop their skills and competencies so that they become well-rounded, productive citizens as adults. We also want our youth to have limited risks and challenges, so that they learn how to deal with adversity and develop into productive adults; a kite does not rise with the wind, rather, against it. However, what about the present, that is, when young people are youth? Clearly, positive youth development is not enough. Positive youth development efforts must engage youth in the short term if there is a desire to have positive long-term outcomes. Thus, besides being “fully prepared,” youth need to be fully engaged as partners with adults in their own development and in the development of their communities. Pittman (2000a, p. 34) underscores the importance of this by emphasizing that “Fully prepared isn’t fully participating.”

Coined by the National Network for Youth (Hughes & Curnan, 2000), “community youth development” integrates the positive youth development framework and provides a context of engagement while concurrently reinforcing the idea that context is a critical factor that must be developed to promote positive youth outcomes. Community youth development shifts the emphasis from a dual focus of youth being problem-free and fully prepared, to a triadic focus for youth being problem-free, fully prepared, and engaged partners. More importantly, this focus recognizes that there is an interdependent relationship between positive and healthy youth outcomes and positive and healthy communities. Specifically, healthy communities have a higher probability of contributing to positive youth development, and healthy youth who are valued and part of a community contribute to sustain a community’s strength and health.

## History of Community Youth Development

Community youth development has evolved from the scientifically robust research that involves ongoing studies of adolescent development. The literature on adolescent growth and development and, more specifically, the research surrounding risk and resiliency was pioneered by scholars such as Rutter, Werner, Garmezy, and Garbarino (Garbarino, 1992, 1993, 1995; Garmezy, 1991, 1993; Rutter, 1985, 1987, 1993; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979; Werner 1990, 1992, Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992). These scholars, collectively, have provided the foundation from which community youth development has evolved.

Resiliency has been defined as the ability of individuals to withstand the stressors of life and the challenges to their healthy development (Rutter, 1985, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992). In other words, resiliency may be defined as the ability of individuals to do well despite facing overwhelming odds in their lives (Bogenschneider, 1998). This research on resiliency has provided strong evidence of protective factors, that is, specific variables and processes involved in safeguarding and promoting successful development. These protective factors have a dual effect of decreasing the likelihood of negative consequences from exposure to risk and increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes (Jessor, Turbin, & Costa, 1998). Thus this research has identified protective factors that are responsible for resiliency in spite of adverse contexts, while, in turn, finding other factors that promote failure (i.e., risk factors) (Bernard, 1991; Dryfoos, 1990; Garmezy, 1985; Jessor, 1993; Jessor et al., 1998; Lavery, Siegel, Cousins & Rubovits, 1993; Luster & McAdoo, 1994; Luster & Small, 1994; Luthar, 1991; Rutter, 1985, 1987, 1989; Werner, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992).

For example, in their longitudinal study of a cohort of children from the island of Kauai, Werner and Smith (1982, 1992) describe three types of protective factors that emerge from analyses of the developmental course of high-risk children from infancy to adulthood: (1) Dispositional attributes of the individual, such as activity level and sociability, at least average intelligence, competence in communication skills (language and reading), and internal locus of control; (2) affectional ties within the family that provide emotional support in times of stress, whether from a parent, sibling, spouse, or mate; and (3) external support systems, whether in school, at work, or in church, that reward the individual's competencies and determination and provide a belief system by which to live. Masten and Garmezy (1985) derived similar conclusions. In their review of research, they found three broad sets of variables that operated as protective factors: (1) personality features such as self-esteem; (2) family cohesion and an absence of discord; and (3) the availability of external support systems that encourage and reinforce an individual's coping efforts.

The results of these longitudinal studies and other resiliency studies have provided critical information to the field of human development. These studies have identified characteristics that act as buffers for young people against great adversity. This work has offered researchers and practitioners important information to use when designing and implementing programs for youth development. Utilizing this information, researchers and practitioners alike have moved from concentrating on resiliency to concentrating on positive youth development (Pittman, 1992; Pittman & Cahill, 1992; Pittman & Wright, 1991; Pittman & Zeldin, 1994). Moreover, other applied scholars such as Benson, Blyth, and Lerner (Benson, 1990, 1997; Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Blyth & Leffert, 1995; Blyth & Roehlkepartain, 1993; Lerner, 1995, 2002) have solidified the positive youth development framework by identifying critical elements. Finally, the work of practitioners at the National Network for Youth (Hughes & Curnan, 2000) and the International Youth Foundation (Pittman, 2000a) have advanced the field of youth development by integrating positive youth development and community development.

Understanding community youth development means promoting factors that provide all youth, regardless of their level of risk, with the critical elements needed for successful development, while concurrently engaging them as full community partners. Whereas resiliency centers on youth that are in “states” of high risk (e.g., experiencing abuse, encountering violence as part of their daily context) or in adverse situations, community youth development emphasizes the things that all youth need in order to thrive and become engaged partners in their own development as well as in their communities’ development.

### **Positive Youth Development Building Blocks**

Community youth development is comprised of building blocks of positive youth development, that is, individual and environmental characteristics that promote and enhance youths’ development toward becoming successful adults. These characteristics are referred to by researchers and practitioners as developmental assets (Benson 1990, 1997; Benson et al., 1998; Blyth & Roehlkepartain, 1993), life skills (Hendricks, 1996), and protective factors (Hawkins & Catalano, & Miller, 1992), and more recently, thriving indicators (Benson et al., 1999). In keeping with current terminology, we employ Search Institute’s term “developmental assets” to represent the building blocks of positive youth development.

Developmental assets can be external dimensions that comprise the young person’s environment, such as positive relationships in families, peer groups, schools, and the community. Alternatively, they may be internal dimensions that reflect the teenager’s personal competencies, values, and attitudes. Just as there are nutritional building blocks in the food pyramid that are necessary for healthy physical

development, assets are the necessary building blocks within the positive youth development framework (Blyth, personal communication, 1999). For example, one needs to eat dairy products for calcium to have strong bones, and, similarly, youth need opportunities for skill development to gain a sense of self-efficacy. One also needs to eat vegetables for iron to build red blood cells to fight infections, and youth need a caring adult for emotional support in the normal struggle to develop their identity.

Assets are not the outcomes of positive youth development; rather, they are elements of the developmental process through which young people are contributing members of their communities now and are also launched on a positive trajectory toward becoming productive citizens of society in adulthood. The relationship between assets and risk behaviors, as well as between assets and healthy and positive outcomes, has been clearly documented in research. The more assets youth possess and have available to them, the less likely they are to engage in “risky behaviors” and the more likely they are to engage in healthy and positive behaviors (Benson, 1997; Benson et al, 1998; Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, 1995; Leffert et al., 1998; Perkins, Haas, & Keith, 1997; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000; Scales & Leffert, 1998). In order for youth to reach their full potential, they must have multiple assets available throughout their formative years, rather than just at specific points in their development. Therefore, the various contexts that comprise a youth’s world (e.g., family, school, neighborhood, and youth programs) need to incorporate developmental assets.

Each context must intentionally provide assets that promote the positive development of young people. For example, schools may want to target school environment or providing opportunities for community service through service-learning. Youth development professionals may want to examine their program characteristics for programming efforts that specifically address the different developmental assets. Intentionally programming to address the developmental assets needed by young people does not mean that there is not an effort to reduce risk. Rather, professionals need to develop programs that have a dual focus of asset building and risk reduction (Bogenschneider, 1998). Moving from positive youth development to community youth development is about engaging youth as partners in the development of external assets and in the development of opportunities for skill and competency development.

## **Defining Community Youth Development**

Simply put, community youth development involves creating opportunities for young people to connect to others, develop skills, and utilize those skills to con-



tribute to their communities. This, in turn, increases their ability to succeed. As with positive youth development, a community youth development orientation involves shifting away from just concentrating on problems toward concentrating on strengths, competencies, and engagement in self-development and community development. As such, community youth development is defined as purposely creating environments that provide constructive, affirmative, and encouraging *relationships* that are sustained over time with adults and peers, while concurrently providing an array of opportunities that enable youth to build their *competencies*, and become engaged as *partners* in their own development as well as the development of their communities.

The development of youth, either positive or negative, occurs as youth interact with all levels of their surroundings, including others in their environment: family, schools, peers, adults, youth programs, and their communities. The importance of different levels of a youth's ecology and the systems within those levels has been defined and studied by several scholars (Bogenschneider, 1998; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Small & Luster, 1994). Drawing on that research, a community youth development framework shifts the focus from the individual to the *interaction* of the individual with the multiple levels of his or her environment. Therefore, fostering community youth development requires positive supports, opportunities for skill and competency development, and partnerships with young people at multiple levels of youth's ecology and within the systems that comprise their ecology. Partnership represents youths taking *action* with adults to be producers of their own development and shapers of their communities. The definition of community youth development is explained in four parts as outlined in Textbox 1.

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**Text Box 1. *Community Youth Development: A Definition in Four Parts.***

Community youth development is an integration of youth development and community development. The first three parts of the definition described below address youth development. These three parts are taken directly from Hamilton's "Youth development: A definition in three parts" (Cited in Lerner, in press).

1. *A natural process*: the growing capacity of a young person to understand and act upon the environment. Youth development (synonymous in this sense with child and adolescent development) is the natural unfolding of the potential inherent in the human organism in relation to the challenges and supports of the physical and social environment. People can actively shape their own development through their choices and interpretations. Development lasts as long as life, but youth development enables individuals to lead a healthy, satisfying, productive life, as youth and later as adults, because they gain the competence to earn a living, to engage in civic activities, to nurture others, and to participate in social relations and cultural activities. "The Five C's" are a useful summary of the goals of youth development: caring/compassion, competence, character, connection, and confidence. The process of

development may be divided into age-related stages (infancy, childhood, adolescence, and smaller divisions of these stages) and into domains (notably physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and moral).

2. *Philosophy or approach*: active support for the growing capacity of young people by individuals, organizations, and institutions especially at the community level. The youth development approach is rooted in commitment to enabling all young people to achieve their potential. It is characterized by a positive, asset-building orientation, building on strengths rather than categorizing youth according to their deficits. However, it recognizes the need to identify and respond to specific problems faced by some youth (e.g., substance abuse, involvement in violence, and premature parenthood). The most important manifestation of youth development as a philosophy or approach is the goal of making communities better places for young people to grow up. Youth participation is essential to the achievement of that goal.
3. *Programs and organizations*: a planned set of activities that foster young people's growing capacity. Youth development programs are inclusive; participation is not limited to those identified as at risk or in need. They give young people the chance to make decisions about their own participation and about the program's operation, and to assume responsible roles. They engage youth in constructive and challenging activities that build their competence and foster supportive relationships with peers and with adults. They are developmentally appropriate and endure over time, which requires them to be adaptable enough to change as participants' needs change. Youth development is done with and by youth. Something that is done to or for youth is not youth development, even though it may be necessary and valuable. Youth development organizations exist specifically for the purpose of promoting youth development. Some other organizations operate youth development programs but have other functions as well. Programs to prevent or treat specific problems stand in contrast to youth development programs; however, problem-oriented programs may incorporate youth development principles by acknowledging participants' strengths and the wider range of issues they must cope with and by giving participants a strong voice in the choice to participate and in the operation of the program.
4. *Partnerships for the community*: collaboration and teamwork define the relationships between adults and youth on behalf of their communities. Of course, youth participation is required in every step of programming process (e.g., planning, implementation, and evaluation), but just as important or even more important is youth participation in their community. Youth are fully invested in their community and are empowered as full partners to provide direction, insight, energy, and efforts around problem-solving for the community. Youth are full contributors to community and are called upon to employ the skills and competencies that they are developing. Indeed, youth have a right and a civic responsibility to participate and contribute to their communities. Youth participation is essential to youth's development and to the thriving of communities and the institutions within those communities. Youth participation involves learning and work that is woven throughout the community not just in specific projects (Pittman, 2000a). If engaged as partners, youth can be powerful change agents for the betterment of their community. Thus, the engagement in the community represents the fourth leg of this stool known as community youth development. Pittman (2000a, p. 35-36) summarizes this point in the following quote.

*We will have to work carefully in this country to identify or create the public ideas that undergird a sustained effort to bring all young people into civic, social, and economic arenas of their communities as lifelong learners, workers, and change agents. We must recognize that this public idea, like any stable platform, must have at least three legs: one leg in policy, one in public opinion and values, and a third in organizational practice. We could argue for the importance of a fourth leg in youth culture, for this idea must resonate with young people, tap into their resources, and unleash their potential.*

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Therefore, community youth development means providing youth with the necessary opportunities for them to acquire a broad range of competencies and demonstrate a full complement of *positive* connections to self, others, and the larger community (Pittman, 1992; Pittman & Zeldin, 1994; Takanishi, 1993). More than that, though, creating communities that promote community youth development means engaging youth as full partners in the process of positive development, that is, in providing young people with sustained positive relationships with adults, and opportunities for new and “real-world” experiences for skill development and mastery.

Community youth development can be further explained by analogy, utilizing a medical model for an intervention and prevention perspective. Intervention is defined as discontinuing or stopping an already exhibited problem behavior, such as when an individual goes to the doctor to get medicine to help stop the flu from progressing. Prevention, on the other hand, means to take advance measures to keep something (e.g., youth participation in problem behaviors) from happening, as when a person goes to the doctor and has a flu shot, thus building up their immune system so as to prevent him or her from catching the flu. Community youth development goes beyond prevention. Community youth development is a process by which youth’s developmental needs are met, engagement in problem behaviors is prevented, and, most importantly, youth are empowered to use their developing competencies/skills for their communities’ betterment. Thus, community youth development enables youth to be healthy contributing citizens *now* and as adults. In terms of a medical example, the individual takes an active role in his/her health by getting an immune shot and by strengthening the body through physically appropriate exercise and dietary actions and shaping their environment to support them in their efforts.

## Implications of Community Youth Development

National and local leaders of youth programs, government officials, and policy makers are all seeking direction which will help them address the needs of young people and foster their citizenship in their local and national communities. We believe that community youth development provides such a framework and direction by being intentional about creating and sustaining environments for socialization and learning that surround youth with external developmental supports and assets and also foster skills, competencies, and internal assets within youth (Villarruel & Lerner, 1994). Indeed, young people who have grown up in communities that promote their positive development have a better understanding of their own values, often become life-long learners, are actively engaged in their communities, and are more likely to promote the positive well-being of other young people (Benson, 1997; Blyth & Leffert, 1995; McLaughlin, 2000). The goals of community youth development involve what scholars (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Lerner 1995; Lerner et al., 2000; Little 1993; Pittman & Irby, 1996) have identified as “The Five C’s” of positive youth development. These include: (1) competence in academics, social, emotional, and vocational areas; (2) confidence in who one is becoming (identity); (3) connection to self and others; (4) character that comes from positive values, integrity, and a strong sense of morals; and (5) caring and compassion. However, from a community youth development framework there is a sixth “C” as highlighted by Pittman, that of contribution (Pittman, 2000a, 2000b). By contributing to their families, schools, neighborhoods, and communities, youth are afforded practical opportunities to utilize “The Five C’s.”

Practitioners, researchers, and policy advocates in partnership with youth have a critical role in providing direction and applying the community youth development framework. From a practitioner’s point of view, employing a community youth development framework means including youth as *partners* in program planning, implementation, evaluation, and community mobilization efforts to create environments that link youth with adults in positive *relationships* and provide new opportunities for youth to develop *skills and competencies*. For instance, as mentioned at the beginning of this article, there is direct application of this framework to 21st CCLC programs for schools. Thus, schools who want to increase their chances of positively impacting the youth they are attempting to serve will empower a group of those youth to assist in the development of a 21st CCLC program. Practitioners must continually draw from research that provides pertinent information for program design and provide feedback to researchers and policy advocates in terms of needs.

From an applied researcher's point of view, utilizing a community youth development framework is about focusing on specific identified skills (e.g., competencies and assets), linking them to real outcomes, and creating a feedback loop with youth, practitioners, and policy advocates. In addition, it is also about conducting scientific inquiry into youth programs as a context for development (Larson, 2000). For example, a recent study identifying the assets that a group of 4-H youth possessed provided critical information that led to concrete changes in programming (Perkins & Butterfield, 1999). Because of the study's findings, 4-H staff provided training to adult leaders who work with youth on specific assets and on relationship building skills; this training transformed the interactions of those leaders with the young people. These youth professionals reported being attentive to developing positive relationships with youth by interacting with youth as partners and by promoting their development through engaging them in the decision-making process. Moreover, adult staff and leaders requested additional information from the researcher to help them understand which components of the adult-youth relationship were critical for fostering positive youth development.

While this example represents use of a positive youth development framework, it would need to be taken one step further to reflect a community youth development framework. Although youth were partners in the problem solving process, they were not engaged in other parts of the process. A community youth development approach would have engaged the youth in the interpretation of the results and the development and implementation of solutions. Again, we reiterate what Pittman has stated, "*problem free is not fully prepared*" and "*fully prepared is not fully engaged*" (Pittman & Irby, 1996, p. 2; Pittman, 2000b).

Employing community youth development from the policy advocates' perspective is about targeting their efforts to educate policymakers, providing directions to researchers in terms of how to communicate their findings to policymakers, and advocating for proven approaches. Moreover, they are called upon to engage youth as partners in the process of advocacy. That is, policy advocates must work with youth in the identification of issues, the development of solutions, and the writing of potential legislation for policymakers.

If we as practitioners, researchers, policy professionals, and citizens want our youth to do more than avoid risky behaviors and be contributing, engaged members of society, we must be intentional about creating places and opportunities that nurture their development and require their participation. Community youth development provides a framework from which communities can rethink how they invest their human and financial resources. Communities that wisely invest their resources provide their young people with opportunities to connect to others and develop skills, and a way to contribute their time, talents, and skills to their community. These core experiences, gained from participating and contributing to the

multiple contexts of community, provide young people with a clear sense of direction. Thus, offering youth the opportunities not only to be problem free, but the skills to be fully prepared and the opportunities to be fully engaged in their communities are essential elements of community youth development. Moreover, linking youth across sectors of communities, not simply in one limited arena, can help create not only building blocks for individual development, but also for community and economic development for a sustainable community. Finally, schools are an essential player in the community youth development framework; moreover, those schools that adopt this framework are transformed into viable school communities. According to United States Secretary of Education, the 21st CCLC program is really about getting us, “back to basics, back to active community involvement in raising and educating all of our children” (Riley, Smith, Peterson, & Ginsburg, 1997).

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