

Hempstead Boys & Girls Club Positive Youth Development



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Ten years ago, the Hempstead Boys and Girls Club opened its doors with the goal of providing the young people in the community what they needed the most; a) a safe and positive environment where they can have fun and be themselves; b) interesting and constructive activities that serve to channel youthful energy into challenging life pursuits; and c) a group of adults, who respect them and are willing to listen to their ideas.

As an organization, we have adopted a philosophy of Positive Youth Development, a concept centered on the application of principles that promote the natural positive progression of youth development.

Positive Youth Development or PYD can trace its roots to the work of two researchers.

Emmy Werner and Ruth Smith conducted a research study in the 1980's based on 700 babies which they followed for a period of ten years. They found that 1/3 of their market group was exposed to several risk factors which impacted the development of their lives. These risk factors are social factors that serve to poison the well being of our youth and impede healthy development. They include: violence, poverty, racism, disrupted family relationships, sexual exploitation, and lack of benevolent adult authority. Although this study was

conducted twenty years ago, today's young people are still exposed to an impacted by these same risk factors.

Young people continue to be faced with a major dilemma... on the one hand they all have skills and talents which need to be developed; but they also have deficiencies and needs which have to be addressed. Unfortunately, the risk factors that were previously mentioned, serve to disconnect youth from programming, knowledge, and the interactions that address their needs and support their growth and development. Our youth require safe environments, where they can be positively engaged and connected. They require positive environments, where they have the opportunity to develop knowledge, values and their skills.

Researchers from the Search Institute took the work done by Werner and Smith, and were able to uncover 40 building blocks or assets, that all young people need to thrive, to do well, and become successful, competent adults. They categorized these assets into two major group, *external assets* and *internal assets*.

We define external assets, as things which focus on the support young people get in their lives from having others involved in their daily lives. This would include a sense of feeling valued, clearly defined boundaries, high expectations, and the opportunity to participate in activities. Internal assets focus on young people's commitment to learning, their sense of self-worth, their positive values, and the skills they possess to make good life choices.

We have found that young people with many assets are more likely to; succeed in school, show leadership, take care of their health, and value diversity. Consequently they are also less likely to be involved in violence, use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, and engage in early sexual activity. Developing these assets is the cornerstone of our PYD approach. It leads us into a strength based approach, in which we move away from merely fixing problems, and move towards building up their strengths.

Positive Youth Development requires a paradigm shift. Traditional Youth Services agencies focus on fixing problems, they are reactive, they deal with the troubled youth, focus on programs, and rely on the work of professionals. Their goal is providing services for youth. On the other hand, PYD is about building on strengths, it is pro-active, it includes all youth, and views them as a resource, it is about relationships, and relies on everyone's contribution. PYD seeks to have youth directly involved in the process and as a result they become accountable for developing their full potential.

The paradigm shift is *from a youth service agency into a youth serving agency...and the results are:*

- *Young People that understand how to build on their strengths*
- *Young People that develop their competencies*
- *Young People that are active and equitable partners in their development*
- *Strategies that attempt to incorporate all youth, not merely the high risk or gifted youth,*

Positive Youth Development is creating conditions for our young people to lead healthy, active and fulfilling lives...being the source of hope for our youth, it is creating a an environment that builds on strengths... and this environment is a good place for our youth to be, as it is a ***“Positive Place For Kids”***, who are the foundation of the future.

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