



The 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development

Media Backgrounder

The 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development (PYD) is the first-ever longitudinal study to measure the characteristics of PYD. Findings reveal that involvement in structured programs and activities during out-of-school time like 4-H play a critical role in helping young people achieve success. Led by Richard M. Lerner, Ph.D., professor at Tufts University, the study was sponsored by National 4-H Council. It involves more than 4,000 youth and 2,000 parents from 25 states and measures the impact personal and social factors have on a young person's development.

What is Positive Youth Development?

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, like 4-H:
 - 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; and
 - 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, like 4-H, 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.

4-H, more than any other youth development program, creates civically engaged youth and develops leaders.

- A snapshot of the fourth year of the study shows that eighth grade youth in 4-H programs are far more likely to exhibit stronger civic engagement than youth not involved in 4-H. Youth with strong civic engagement are more inclined to volunteer; participate in school and community activities; speak against inequality and for social justice; stand up to bullies; and trust adults, friends and the community.
- Early and ongoing involvement in youth development programs, like 4-H, helps children develop confidence and leadership skills where they learn what they like, are able to make choices, be leaders and have their voices heard.

To learn more about PYD, 4-H and The 4-H Study of PYD, visit www.fourhcouncil.edu/newsroom.aspx or contact Crystal Borde at cborde@vancomm.com.



Essential Elements of 4-H



Using the Essential Elements of 4-H, we create opportunities and environments that meet young people's needs and build life skills.

- 4-H offers opportunities for **Belonging** - young people don't just join 4-H. . .they belong!

Youth need to know they are cared about and accepted by others. Youth also need to experience a sense of physical and emotional safety. They need to feel a sense of connection to others in the group. Current research emphasizes how important it is that youth have opportunities for long-term consistent relationships with adults other than their parents. In fact, the research suggests that a sense of belonging may be the single most powerful positive ingredient we can add into the lives of children and youth.

- 4-H offers opportunities to experience **Mastery** - young people master skills that are relevant.

Mastery includes the development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes followed by the competent demonstration of these skills and knowledge. In order to develop self-confidence and a sense that they matter, young people need to feel that they are capable. They must also experience success at solving problems and meeting meaningful challenges. Mastery is sometimes called "self-efficacy." Settings that promote self-efficacy and mastery encourage youth to take risks, seek out challenges, and focus on self-improvement rather than comparing themselves to their peers.

- 4-H offers opportunities to experience **Generosity** - young people become active and engaged citizens.

Young people need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. They need opportunities to connect to their communities and learn how to give back to others. As part of this process, youth gain an understanding of others' needs and learn how to respond to these needs. Generosity may also include the development of values such as compassion and tolerance for diversity and the ability to take the perspective of others, and to approach problems as "a member of a global society," through participation in local, and national politics.

- 4-H offers opportunities to experience **Independence** - young people have opportunities to choose. . .and learn to make good choices.

Youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action. Independence refers to an adolescent's growing ability to think, feel, make decisions, and act on her or his own. This continues to develop whenever someone is challenged to act with a new level of self-reliance. By gaining a sense of independence, youth develop personal responsibility and discipline.

National 4-H Headquarters

http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov/about/4h_elements.htm

External Assets	Support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family support—Family life provides high levels of love and support. 2. Positive family communication—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents. 3. Other adult relationships—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults. 4. Caring neighborhood—Young person experiences caring neighbors. 5. Caring school climate—School provides a caring, encouraging environment. 6. Parent involvement in schooling—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.
	Empowerment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Community values youth—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth. 8. Youth as resources—Young people are given useful roles in the community. 9. Service to others—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week. 10. Safety—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.
	Boundaries & Expectations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Family boundaries—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person’s whereabouts. 12. School Boundaries—School provides clear rules and consequences. 13. Neighborhood boundaries—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people’s behavior. 14. Adult role models—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior. 15. Positive peer influence—Young person’s best friends model responsible behavior. 16. High expectations—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.
	Constructive Use of Time	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Creative activities—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts. 18. Youth programs—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community. 19. Religious community—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution. 20. Time at home—Young person is out with friends “with nothing special to do” two or fewer nights per week.

Internal Assets	Commitment to Learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 21. Achievement Motivation—Young person is motivated to do well in school. 22. School Engagement—Young person is actively engaged in learning. 23. Homework—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day. 24. Bonding to school—Young person cares about her or his school. 25. Reading for Pleasure—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
	Positive Values	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 26. Caring—Young person places high value on helping other people. 27. Equality and social justice—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty. 28. Integrity—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs. 29. Honesty—Young person “tells the truth even when it is not easy.” 30. Responsibility—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility. 31. Restraint—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.
	Social Competencies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 32. Planning and decision making—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices. 33. Interpersonal Competence—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills. 34. Cultural Competence—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds. 35. Resistance skills—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations. 36. Peaceful conflict resolution—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.
	Positive Identity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 37. Personal power—Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.” 38. Self-esteem—Young person reports having a high self-esteem. 39. Sense of purpose—Young person reports that “my life has a purpose.” 40. Positive view of personal future—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.