



# Preventing Problems, Promoting Development, Encouraging Engagement

*Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals?*

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**the forum**  
FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT  
*moving ideas to impact*





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**The Forum for Youth Investment** (the Forum) was created to increase the quality and quantity of youth investment and youth involvement by promoting a “big picture” approach to planning, research, advocacy and policy development among the broad range of organizations that help constituents and communities invest in children, youth and families. To do this, the Forum builds connections, increases capacity and tackles persistent challenges across the allied youth fields.

Relationships are at the core of the Forum’s work. The Forum builds connections by developing relationships with organizations and individuals throughout the allied youth fields, and by identifying, facilitating and brokering relationships among these contacts. The Forum builds capacity by offering tools, training, advice, presentations, papers, commentary and international perspectives. The Forum tackles challenges by offering fresh ways of looking at old issues, synthesizing information about current efforts

and creating neutral forums for diverse leaders to share experiences, develop joint strategies and align efforts.

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To help realize this commitment, in 2003 the Forum joined forces with Community IMPACT!, a national organization working with a small network of local nonprofits that involve young people in community change, to form Impact Strategies, Inc. Impact Strategies, Inc., is dedicated to moving ideas to impact in neighborhoods and across the nation. Also committed to bringing international lessons into U.S. conversations, the Forum is a member of the International Youth Foundation’s Global Partner Network.



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## Introduction

Over the last 15 to 20 years, there have been several major shifts in what researchers, policy makers and practitioners think about what young people need, what they get and where they get it. There have also been shifts in thinking about what young people do, should do and can do and when it is reasonable to expect to see results. These shifts have not been universal — there are still differences among the various theories and strategies proposed and the populations addressed. But shifts have occurred.

*Preventing Problems, Promoting Development, Encouraging Engagement* is an attempt to summarize the shifts that have occurred, to emphasize the common threads in several important fields and to spell out the implications of those shifts for those who work with or advocate for young people where they live, learn, work, play and contribute.

The paper is based on work started in 1990 at the AED Center for Youth Development and Policy Research and continued at the International Youth Foundation and the Forum for Youth Investment (formerly IYF-US). It builds directly upon Pittman and Irby's 1996 paper, *Preventing Problems or Promoting Development*. This updated version incorporates critical ideas about young people as participants and change makers — ideas that, in our minds, are the next, most powerful iterations of the youth development approach.

This paper is based on research, but it does not present detailed research findings. It is a summary of key ideas. It presents these ideas in five parts:

- **The paradigm shifts.** A quick map of the progress that has been made in our approaches to thinking about what young people need, do and can offer.
- **What it means to prepare and engage.** A review of what is known about development — the process, the key inputs and the primary outcomes.
- **Connections to research and practice.** How research on development, resilience, competence, prevention and engagement links together.
- **How families, schools and communities invest in youth.** A reminder that young people do not grow up in programs but in families, organizations, neighborhoods and cultures. A discussion of how and why institutions and communities need to be more intentional about what they provide.
- **How young people invest in schools and communities.** A walk through what is meant by youth engagement and why increasing youth involvement is essential to improving youth investments.

Together, these five sets of ideas help to define a youth development approach. “Youth development” is a fuzzy term that is used simultaneously to describe the process of development, the outcomes of development, and the programs and organizations that focus, in

particular, on non-academic outcomes and operate in the non-school hours.

Behind all of these uses, however, are a set of linked ideas about the who, what, when, where, why and how of development that combine to describe an approach for working with young people. Many organizations (e.g., Search Institute, the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, the National Collaboration for Youth, Public/Private Ventures) have described the basic elements of this approach. Most, if not all, share common themes about the need to push beyond current thinking about what outcomes, inputs, settings, strategies and actors are needed to help young people become address problems, build skills and pursue opportunities for learning, work and contribution.

## Broadening the Agenda: Critical Ideas

In *Unfinished Business: Reflections on a Decade of Promoting Youth Development* (2000), we summed up the major principles that flow from a development-driven analysis of what young people need, do and offer as a set of nine “above and beyond” goals:

1. **Broader Outcomes.** Problem prevention and amelioration are absolutely critical. But too often, young people’s well-being is measured only by school achievement and problem avoidance. We need to be intentional about expecting and measuring what we want them to do, not just what we do not want them to do.
2. **Broader Inputs.** When we talk about problems we tend to talk about services — things done to or for youth. But young people also need supports and opportunities. Basic services — health care, housing, transportation — are essential. But young people also need adults to listen, guide and set goals. They need opportunities to earn a living, opportunities to learn, to explore, to contribute.

3. **Broader Time Frame.** Too often, young people are “inoculated” with curricula and short-term programs aimed at fixing a problem. Everything we know about development suggests that young people need ongoing relationships and support.
4. **Broader Settings.** We know that young people go to school, but we have to make sure that those supports and opportunities are available where they live, learn, work, play and contribute. Every setting is an opportunity for development and engagement, or for derailment.
5. **Broader Times.** The hours when young people are in school are critical. So are the hours directly after school — a time of day that is receiving increasing attention at the moment. But young people are developing 24 hours-a-day, seven days-a-week; they deserve access to services, supports and opportunities throughout their waking hours.
6. **Broader Actors.** There are many adults who are not paid to work with young people who need to be acknowledged, and others who need to be involved. Too often, the families of adolescents are left out of the equation, and young people themselves are not seen as resources.
7. **Broader Roles.** Young people, even young people with serious problems, should not just be recipients of services. It is clear that they can play roles as planners and implementers; and that having broader roles motivates them to address problems and build skills.

**TABLE 1**  
**PROMOTING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**  
A QUICK HISTORY OF GOALS

1. **Broaden the outcomes:** beyond prevention and academics.
2. **Broaden the inputs:** beyond services.
3. **Broaden the time frame:** beyond quick fixes.
4. **Broaden the settings:** beyond schools.
5. **Broaden the times:** beyond the school day.
6. **Broaden the actors:** beyond professionals.
7. **Broaden youth roles:** beyond recipients.
8. **Broaden the targets:** beyond labeling.
9. **Broaden the numbers:** beyond pilots.

Youth development advocates have set their sights on several critical goals aimed at changing perceptions of who young people are, what they can do, how we can support them and who shares responsibility.



- 8. Broader Targets.** The distribution of supports and opportunities across communities is uneven. Quality, as well as quantity, is uneven. High-risk young people are targeted with high-risk services. Low-risk young people receive low-risk supports and opportunities. Yet all young people deserve access to a full range of developmental and engagement inputs.
- 9. Broader Numbers.** It is time that we to go to scale with the opportunities that we provide young people — saturating every neighborhood with services,

supports and opportunities. No one organization or institution will be able to provide this range of supports for young people; it will require a concerted and aligned effort on the part of organizations, individuals, public institutions and others.

The past two-and-a-half decades have seen remarkable progress in advancing work based on these connected principles. But the work is far from done. With this in mind, we begin by reaffirming the importance of two basic paradigm shifts.



## Part I

# THE PARADIGM SHIFTS

Concerns about youth problems continue to grow, fueled by incidents and trends as varied as school shootings and declining test scores. These concerns are valid. But while solving youth problems is critical, it is not enough. Too many conversations about young people focus only on their problems, not on helping them grow and develop. Even fewer programs and policies focus on engaging young people in their schools, organizations and communities. Three goals — solving young people’s problems, preparing them for adulthood and helping them get involved — are too often seen as competing priorities. It is time that they are recognized as inseparable goals.

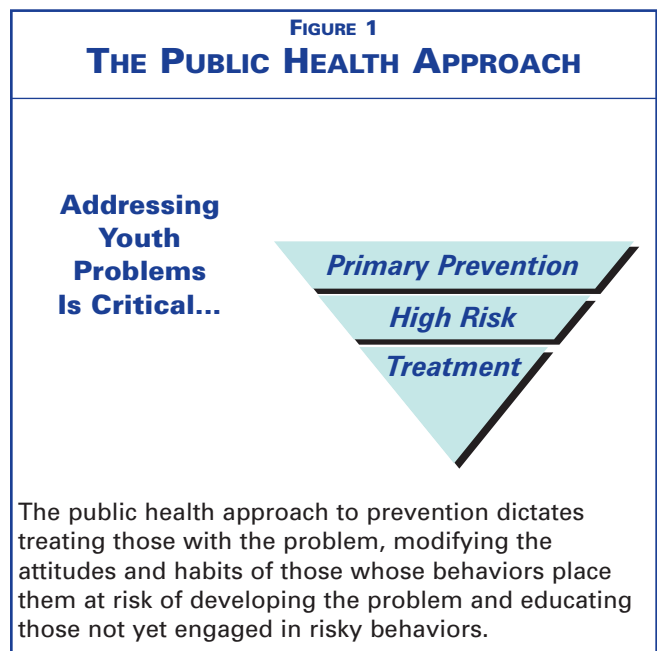
## Preventing Youth Problems: The Glass Half-Empty

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the public health model — with a focus on treatment, intervention and prevention — was brought to bear on the full range of youth problems. The idea of primary prevention — reaching young people earlier, before the problem occurs — helped move pregnancy and substance abuse prevention curricula and services into schools, often down into the middle and elementary grades.

The model has merit, and it has brought legitimacy to much of the non-academic focused work in the youth

fields. But it is not sufficient on its own. When applied to more complex individual issues such as violence, unemployment, or early pregnancy, it limits strategies to those that aim to fix what is broken. When we talk about prevention, we are talking in terms of problems. No matter how early we commit to addressing them, there is something fundamentally limiting about having everything defined by a problem. In the final analysis we do not assess people in terms of problems (or lack thereof), but potential.

Case in point. Suppose we introduced an employer to a young person we worked with by saying, “Here’s



Johnny. He’s not a drug user. He’s not in a gang. He’s not a dropout. He’s not a teen father. Please hire him.” The employer would probably respond, “That’s great. But what does he know, what can he do?” If we cannot define — and do not give young people ample opportunities to define — the skills, values, attitudes, knowledge and commitments that we want with as much force as we can define those that we do not want, we will fail. *Prevention is an important but inadequate goal... problem-free is not fully prepared.*

## Developing Positive Youth Outcomes: The Glass Half-Full

In the 1980s and early to mid-1990s, policy makers and program planners began to take this statement and approach — problem-free is not fully prepared — to heart. They recognized the need to *broaden the outcomes* — to help young people learn and develop across a full range of developmental areas, taking into account cognitive, social, moral, civic, vocational, cultural and physical well-being. And, given that fixing problems was no longer seen as enough, they began to *broaden the strategies*. A range of services, supports and opportunities was recognized as the core of prevention and development strategies (Pittman & Wright, 1991).

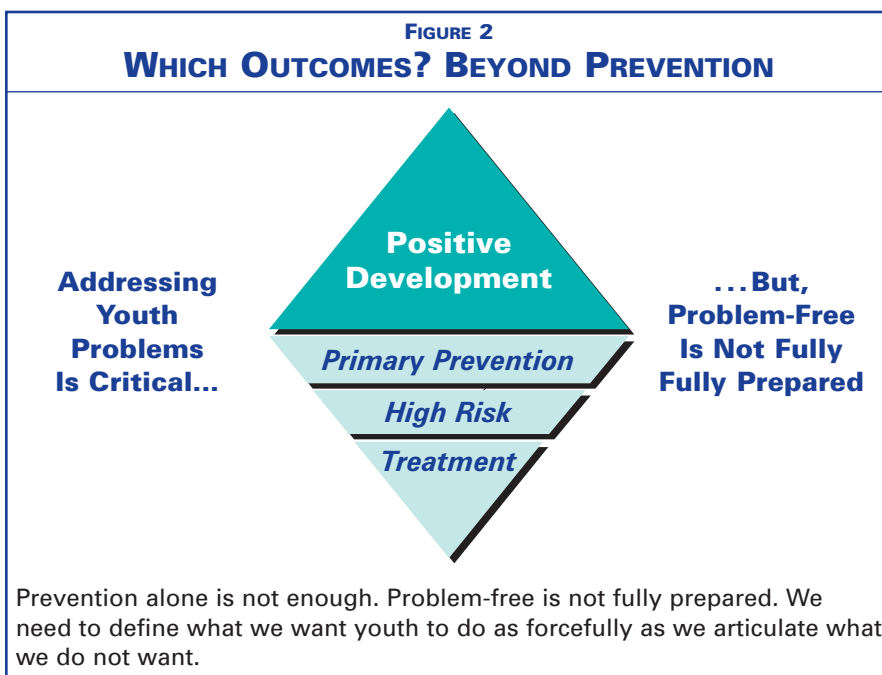
Asserting that problem-free is not fully prepared does not trivialize the importance of either problem prevention or academic preparation. The power of this first paradigm shift, to the extent that it is fully understood, is that it reaffirms the need to *help all youth achieve the goals that parents set for their children, and that young people set for themselves*. It reaffirms the need to invest fully in all youth. It urges us not to ignore the need to support those not in obvious trouble, while challenging us not to limit the expectations and range of supports offered to those who are.

## Encouraging Full Engagement: The Glass Runneth Over

Another sea change, as dramatic as the shift from prevention to development, is currently under way. The 1990s witnessed a growing commitment to youth engagement — both as a tenet of the youth development approach and as a reaffirmation of what young people can do. It is time to move from problem-free is not fully prepared to a new catch phrase: fully prepared is not fully engaged.

Research on development increasingly emphasizes the importance of participation — choice and voice — for adolescents (Pittman & Wright, 1991; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002). Mounting evidence suggests that young people who take active roles in organizations and communities have fewer problems, are better skilled and tend to be lifelong citizens (Irby, Pittman & Ferber, 2001). Development is triggered by engagement — young people learn best when they are engaged with their heads and their hearts, and where they have real choice in the situations in which they are involved.

Data on program enrollment cast an equally long shadow and add practical urgency to developmental



research. Young people vote with their feet and older youth simply do not show up for programs that do not challenge them and provide opportunities to engage:

*...Many youth programs nonetheless are not responding as fully as they might to the needs and wants of young adolescents and are thus failing to attract young people after the age of twelve or thirteen — even to such potentially attractive offerings as sports. In particular, youth programs are failing to reach out to young people in low-income environments; to solicit their views, listen to them and act on their suggestions . . . [to] address the needs for earned income and initial paid employment experience. In general programs do not adequately acknowledge the role of gangs in addressing young adolescents' needs (for safety, status, meaningful roles, a sense of belonging, a sense of competence) and they do not actively compete with gangs for youth membership.*

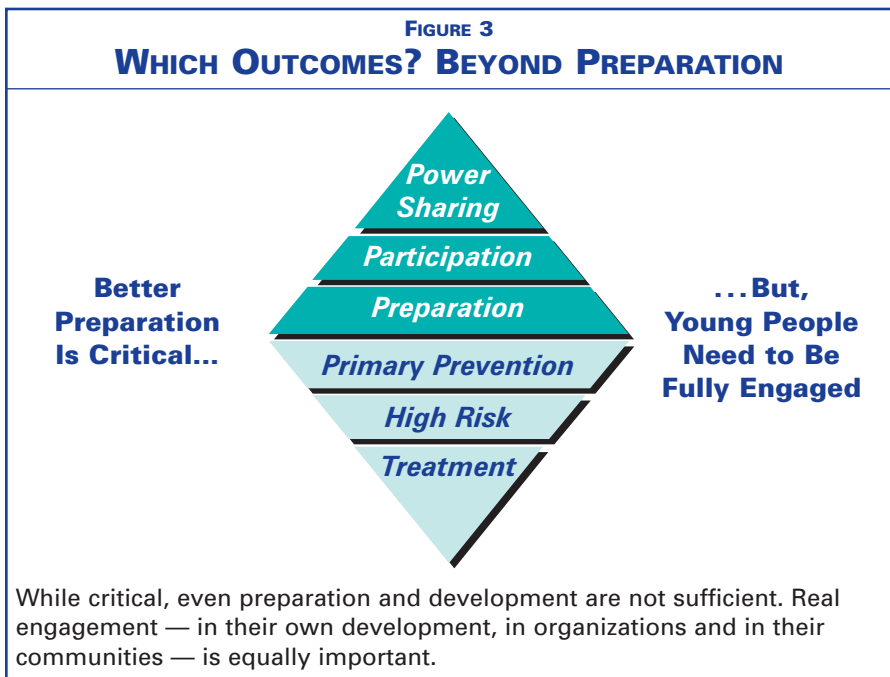
— *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Non-School Hours*,  
Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992

These developmental and practical realities are forcing a change in the way that youth organizations do business. At a minimum, youth development organizations have begun to operate on the principle that young people be given more meaningful choices and roles in the activities in which they are involved, shifting from receiving knowledge to creating knowledge

(passive to active learning strategies) and from being service recipients to being program planners and deliverers. Taken at its broadest, the commitment to youth participation translates into an organizational commitment to involve young people in all aspects of decision making — from programming to fund development to personnel to governance.

Today it is not at all difficult to point to youth-serving organizations, even institutions and systems, that have young people making decisions about their own activities and contributing to the larger organization as volunteers, paid staff, committee members and board members. But efforts to engage youth within youth-serving organizations are not always accompanied by efforts to engage them in their communities. Nor are they always offered with an eye toward meaningful public results. Young people are participants, but are not consistently real problem solvers (Irby, et al., 2001).

There is no doubt that a shift is occurring. Increasingly, youth participation is discussed as a vehicle for strengthening young people, their organizations and their communities (Flanagan & Faison, 2001). Where the shift from a focus on active participation to public participation falls short, however, is at the point of arguing that young people's participation in addressing community problems is not only possible and useful, but fruitful — that it pays off against adult standards of success.

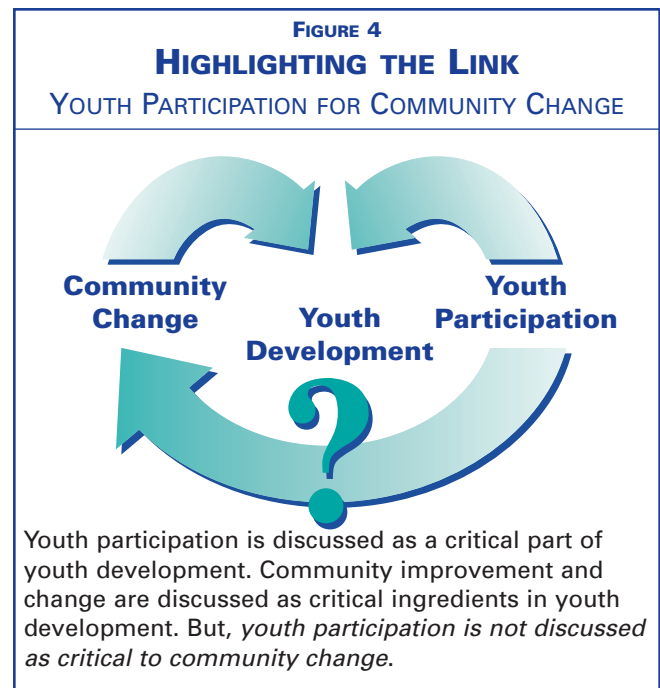


Efforts to promote and support youth action in community problem solving all share an assumption that the work done will be meaningful to the participants and meaningful to a larger group of beneficiaries. But this assumption is not translated into success indicators. The outcomes defined most clearly and measured most carefully are those that pertain to young people themselves: increases in skills and knowledge, changes in attitudes, increases in short term and/or long term involvement in organizations and the community, changes in adult perceptions of youth. Benefits to the organization and to the community are suggested

and often achieved (Zeldin et al., 2000), but these are neither the primary rationale for youth involvement, nor the primary evidence of success offered.<sup>1</sup>

This additional criterion of participation for meaningful change is the main distinction made by a growing number of newly created youth organizations that have a dual commitment to youth development and broader change. But for the most part, youth-focused organizations have not been held accountable to the type of strong, external goals many change-focused organizations use to mark success: Did power shift? Were new resources acquired? Was social justice served? Was lasting change achieved? Were lasting action groups formed? New partnerships forged? More volunteers recruited? Or, more simply, did change occur that was meaningful to a broad group of young people or adults?

<sup>1</sup> The New York State Youth Council, for example, identifies the three categories of benefits. The benefits to youth, however, stand out as the strongest and most measurable. The organizational benefits listed mirror the roles young people can play in organizations and in their communities.



In order to complete and connect the shifts in thinking that have begun over the past decade, we need to take a more careful look at what it takes to prepare and engage young people, and shed some light on the meaning of these important goals.

## Part II

# WHAT IT MEANS TO PREPARE AND ENGAGE

We have suggested that problem-free is not fully prepared and that fully prepared is not fully engaged. But what does it mean to be fully prepared and fully engaged? What are the goals that society has for its young people? Are they held equally for all young people? What are the supports offered to ensure that these goals are met? What are the settings in which these supports are offered?

We offer four answers to these basic questions:

- 1. Academic competence, while critical, is not enough.** The outcomes and indicators described span several functional areas, pushing beyond academic knowledge to encompass the broader cognitive, moral, cultural, physical and many other areas.
- 2. Competence itself, while important, is not enough.** Skills and knowledge are needed across functional areas (mentioned above) but, within those areas, competence is not the only goal.
- 3. Services, in and of themselves, are not enough.** Young people need basic services — from health care to housing to recreational facilities. But they also need supports and opportunities.
- 4. Programs, in and of themselves, are not enough.** Development is an ongoing process. Programs are ways to structure specific services, supports and opportunities to achieve a specific goal (i.e., employment training). Adults have to work with young people to help them access and use the programs and opportunities they need to create pathways to success.

## Broadening the Outcomes: What Do We Want for Young People?

Beyond the specific goal of staying out of trouble, policy literature generally contains broad statements about how we want young people to be good citizens, good neighbors, good workers and good parents. Academic and programmatic literature generally push further, articulating a range of crucial developmental tasks. Numerous commissions and organizations, most recently the National Research Council (2002), have defined generic sets of outcomes that include but go beyond academic or cognitive competencies to reflect development across the full range of areas of development. These areas — synthesized from a scan of numerous sources — are summarized in the box below.

Just as we hope that young people will be prepared across this full range of developmental areas, we can — and should — expect engagement in all aspects of their lives. Although participation and engagement are often defined in the civic realm — young people voting and doing community service, for instance — we must create equally clear and high expectations in other areas. Young people should be fully engaged in cognitive and academic development — as active learners, as educators of their peers and as decision makers in their schools, for example. We expect young people to be full participants in social life, and to have increasing power to make decisions about their social



**TABLE 2**  
**AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT**

- **Social/emotional** development and engagement — the ability to respond to and cope with positive and adverse situations, reflect on one's emotions and surroundings, engage in leisure and fun and sustain caring friendships and relationships with others.
- **Moral/spiritual** development and engagement — the exploration of one's assumptions, beliefs, and values in an ongoing process of understanding how one relates to others and to the larger world and developing a sense of purpose and meaning in life.
- **Civic** development and engagement — the growing recognition of one's impact on one's surroundings and responsibility to others, as well as the ability and opportunity to work collaboratively with others for a common goal.
- **Vocational** development and engagement — acquiring the functional and organizational skills necessary for employment, including an understanding of careers and options and pathways to reach these goals.
- **Physical** development and engagement — biological maturation and the developing ability to act in ways that best ensure current and future physical health for self and others.
- **Cognitive** development and engagement — the ability to gain basic knowledge, learn in school and other settings, use critical thinking, creative, problem solving and expressive skills and conduct independent study.
- **Personal/cultural** development and engagement — young peoples' increasing awareness of their own identity, including an awareness of the differences between and among individuals with different backgrounds, interests and traditions.

Development happens across a number of areas — not just academic and cognitive, but moral, cultural, physical, and many others. While development and engagement happen within a variety of domains or areas, this does not mean that these areas are distinct or unrelated. In fact, they are interdependent and overlapping. This list is meant only to give a sense of the range of tasks in which young people are involved as they grow and learn.

**TABLE 3**  
**PROBLEM-FREE, FULLY PREPARED AND FULLY ENGAGED:**  
**HOW DO WE TELL?**

	<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Vocational</b>	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Social/Emotional</b>	<b>Civic</b>
<b>Problem-Free Youth</b>	<i>Reducing</i> School drop-outs; academic failure	<i>Reducing</i> Poor work habits/work history	<i>Reducing</i> Substance abuse; early pregnancy; STDs	<i>Reducing</i> Violence; gang participation; antisocial behavior	<i>Reducing</i> Voter apathy; hate crimes
<b>Fully Prepared Youth</b>	<i>Increasing</i> High academic motivation and aspirations	<i>Increasing</i> Employed/ seeking employment; positive attitudes towards work	<i>Increasing</i> Engage in regular exercise and healthy diet; practice "safer sex"	<i>Increasing</i> Teamwork; valuing diversity; navigation skills; supportive relationships	<i>Increasing</i> Awareness of current events; skills for making political decisions
<b>Fully Engaged Youth</b>	<i>Fostering</i> Peer tutoring; critical problem-solving; engaging in school decision-making	<i>Fostering</i> Youth entrepreneurship; youth-led training programs	<i>Fostering</i> Peer-led safe-sex campaigns; youth-led sports programs; peer STD education	<i>Fostering</i> Social clubs; peer counseling; youth-led identity organizations; youth-initiated gang intervention	<i>Fostering</i> Youth organizing; political engagement; community service

Up to this point, we have not established developmental benchmarks for these areas of development and engagement. But this is not an impossible task — we do know what preparation and engagement look like, in terms of concrete behaviors. This chart gives a sampling of a few of the concrete behaviors that could serve as indicators for prevention, preparation and engagement.



circles, not just to be “prepared” in these areas. In short, we expect young people to act and lead, not just to be ready to act and lead.

A key challenge is that we have not come to consensus on developmental benchmarks or defined the steps needed to achieve full preparation and engagement. As end goals, high school and post-secondary education and employment are the primary measures of “developmental success.” Consequently, the education field is littered with benchmarks — individual benchmarks such as being at grade level, passing courses, achievement tests and national benchmarks such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Vocational experts and the business community are developing indicators of vocational competence or readiness. Definitions in the other areas are blurry at best. In these areas, success is still largely defined as lack of problems (e.g., pregnancy, violent or delinquent behavior, gang involvement, open racism). A key task in linking prevention with development and engagement is broadening our definitions beyond academic skills and employment. Shifting goals from gang prevention to civic involvement, for example, is much more than a semantic exercise; it calls for a fairly dramatic shift in strategies as well.

But thinking beyond academic competence is only half the challenge. As we add new areas in which we expect young people to develop and engage, our sense of positive outcomes needs to expand in another direction, as well. Young people should not only be competent in each of these areas, but also connected, caring, confident and contributing. In addition to skills, young people must have a solid sense of safety and structure, membership and belonging, mastery and sense of purpose, responsibility and self-worth. And, recognizing the importance of full engagement, young people must have opportunities to make a difference — to participate and to influence.

These outcome areas apply to each area of development. For example, social competence or skills are remarkably important. But so are social connections, social character, social confidence and social contributions. A young person who knows how to listen and interact in groups, but who does not use those skills responsibly, or does not have a social network in which to use them, is neither fully prepared nor fully engaged. The same can be said of academic development — academic character, connection, contribution, competence and confidence are all critical in youth and adulthood.

**TABLE 4**  
**DESIRABLE YOUTH OUTCOMES**

<b>Confidence</b>	<b>Character</b>	<b>Connection</b>	<b>Competence</b>	<b>Contribution</b>
<p><b>Self-Worth</b> The perception that one’s ideas and contributions are meaningful.</p> <p><b>Mastery and Future</b> Awareness of one’s progress in life and projecting into future.</p>	<p><b>Responsibility and Autonomy</b> Accountability for one’s conduct and obligations. Independence and control over one’s life.</p> <p><b>Spirituality</b> Connectedness to principles surrounding families, cultural groups, communities and higher deities. An awareness of one’s own personality or individuality.</p>	<p><b>Safety and Structure</b> Having access to adequate food, clothing, shelter, and security, including protection from hurt, injury or loss.</p> <p><b>Membership and Belonging</b> Being a participating member of a community. Being intimately involved in at least one lasting relationship with another person.</p>	<p><b>Knowledge</b> Developing and reflecting on one’s knowledge and experiences.</p> <p><b>Skills</b> Developing a range of skills across developmental areas (health, civic, physical, social, emotional, cognitive, personal).</p> <p><b>Behavior</b> Applying and practicing new life skills and new roles.</p>	<p><b>Participation</b> Assuming roles as participants and leaders in various settings (family, school, community).</p> <p><b>Influence</b> Making a difference, advocating for a cause, making meaningful decisions and accepting responsibility for mistakes.</p>

Competence alone is not enough — it is important to broaden our definition of positive youth outcomes.

These basic outcomes are not peculiar to youth. Safety, structure, belonging, purpose — these are the essential elements of Maslow’s basic needs hierarchy (1962). Defining youth outcomes solely in terms of competencies — skills, behaviors, knowledge — that we want them to have, and not in terms of broader psychosocial characteristics that make them confident young men and women, limits our strategies and undermines our chances of success.

## Basic Inputs: The Ingredients for Youth Development

If these are the outcomes we want to achieve, what are the basic inputs or raw resources that young people need? Richard Murphy, former commissioner for youth services in New York City and executive director of the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, insists that every young person needs people to talk to, places to go and possibilities — things to do. America’s Promise urges communities to ensure that all young people have five fundamental resources: safe places, caring adults, a healthy start, education for marketable skills and opportunities to give back. Public/Private Ventures identified five vitamins that young people need. These lists share common themes that reinforce the need to think beyond services to ensure that young people also have supports and opportunities.

A scan of the literature on factors influencing youth development suggests at least seven key inputs.<sup>2</sup> Places are important. Young people need stable places, which are theirs and where they feel safe. One place can — and should — be home. Others can be religious organizations, schools, community centers. Young people need access to basic care and services that are appropriate, affordable and, if necessary, confidential. Also essential are high quality instruction and training. Places, services and instruction frame the resources that families and communities offer youth. But it is the supports and opportunities offered in these settings that

<sup>2</sup> This synthetic list is supported by a review of a half-dozen key frameworks drawn from youth development and education research. For more information, see *FYI Newsletter* (August, 2001). Topic: Young People Continually Learning, available online at [www.forumfyi.org](http://www.forumfyi.org).

**TABLE 5**  
**INPUTS THAT PROMOTE YOUTH  
DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT**

- 1. Stable Places**
- 2. Basic Care and Services**
- 3. Healthy Relationships with Peers and Adults**
- 4. High Expectations and Standards**
- 5. Role Model, Resources, and Networks**
- 6. Challenging Experiences and Opportunities to Participate and Contribute**
- 7. High Quality Instruction and Training**

Young people need places, services and instruction. But they also need supports — relationships and networks that provide nurturing, standards and guidance — and opportunities for trying new roles, mastering challenges and contributing to family and community.

are critical. Young people have to have opportunities to develop sustained, caring relationships and social and strategic networks.

Young people need challenging experiences that are appropriate, diverse and sufficiently intense. They need opportunities for real participation and involvement in the full range of community life — not just picking up trash on Saturdays. All young people, affluent or low-income, high achievers or out of school, need a mix of services, supports and opportunities in order to stay engaged. Services alone will not draw youth in from the streets — in large part because we cannot match the intensity of supports (e.g., protection, belonging) and opportunities they receive from their peers in informal settings.

## The Obstacles to Acting on What We Know

This list of inputs is simple and sensible. It identifies those resources necessary to promote development and also to encourage engagement — high expectations, relationships, instruction and challenging opportunities help young people become change makers, as well as fully prepared human beings. Moreover, this list is achievable by most communities and even most programs. But several realities help explain why lists like this are seldom used to guide decisions about policy.

First, the list of basic inputs is often seen as a list of programs, rather than program elements. Over the years, we have seen a proliferation of drop in centers, one-stop shop service centers, mentor programs, self-esteem classes, service programs that are added onto or clustered to complement the academic instruction offered in school. Relatively few of these, however, assess their programming against this full list. Most take responsibility only for what is in their name.

It is natural and appropriate for programs and institutions to focus on and be held accountable for only one or two of these key inputs. These are the areas in which they should do maximum good. But there are many low cost ways that programs and institutions can be supportive in the other areas simply by adjusting programming or practices. And there is absolutely no reason why any program or institution that touches young people’s lives should be allowed to do harm in any of these areas.

Second, in spite of what is known about human motivation and development, we insist that youth must be “fixed” before they can be developed. While problems must be addressed, it is a commitment to development — the offering of relationships, networks, challenges, opportunities to contribute — that motivates growth and change.

No one is inspired when they walk in the door and are greeted with “We’re here to fix you.” But that is what we do. We do it to young people. We do it to families. We do it to communities. We assume that if young people’s families have problems, these must be fixed prior to exploring opportunities for

development. With some exceptions, low-risk youth in low-risk communities get orchestras, summer camps, accelerated learning opportunities. High-risk youth in high-risk communities get substance abuse prevention counseling and diversion programs. Until they are presented with a meaningful challenge, there is no reason that any person, young or old, is going to be sufficiently engaged to change.

In thinking about vulnerable, disadvantaged, or marginalized youth (or families or communities), the “fix problems first” assumption is particularly detrimental — and particularly prevalent. Implicitly or explicitly, policy makers, planners and sometimes even practitioners, act according to the “fix, then develop” rule.

- Kindergarten classes with high proportions of non-readers are required to increase reading and math drills, at the expense of music and art.
- Many after-school programs are funded with the explicit expectation that they will address academic problems first.

**TABLE 6**  
**BASIC INPUTS**  
SERVICES, SUPPORTS, OPPORTUNITIES

<b>Services</b>	<b>Supports</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
<p><b>Basic Care and Services</b> Vocational Educational Health/Mental Health Social Recreation and Leisure Law Enforcement Rehabilitation Transportation Public Maintenance Housing</p> <p><b>Stable Places</b> Homes Schools Neighborhoods Community Meeting Places Retail</p>	<p><b>Healthy Relationships</b> Nurturance Friendship</p> <p><b>Role Models, Resources and Networks</b> Options Assessment Planning Assessing Resources • Financial • Connections</p> <p><b>High Expectations and Clear Standards</b> Guidance Monitoring</p>	<p><b>Quality Instruction, Training and Informal Learning</b> Learning and Building Skills Exploration and Reflection Expression and Creativity Leisure and Play</p> <p><b>Challenging Roles and Responsibilities</b> Employment and Earned Income Influence and Advocacy Interaction and Membership</p>
<p><b>Main Actor:</b> <b>The Provider</b></p>	<p><b>Main Actor:</b> <b>The Individual with Partners</b></p>	<p><b>Main Actor:</b> <b>The Individual</b></p>
<p>Gangs offer young people protection, structure, personal ties and real challenges. We have to offer services, supports and opportunities to compete with the streets.</p>		

- High school students who are disruptive in school are suspended or expelled rather than counseled and challenged.

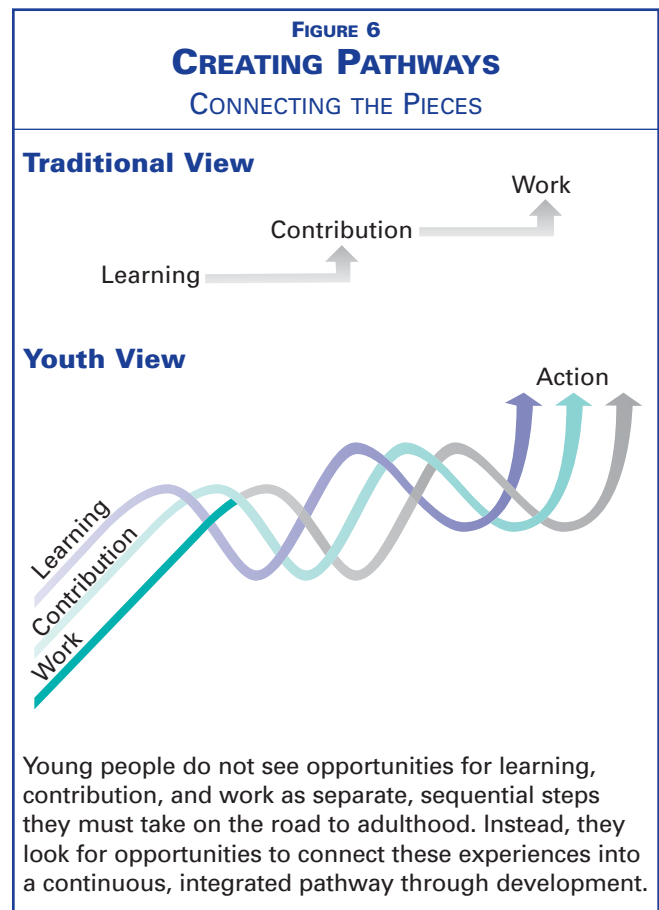
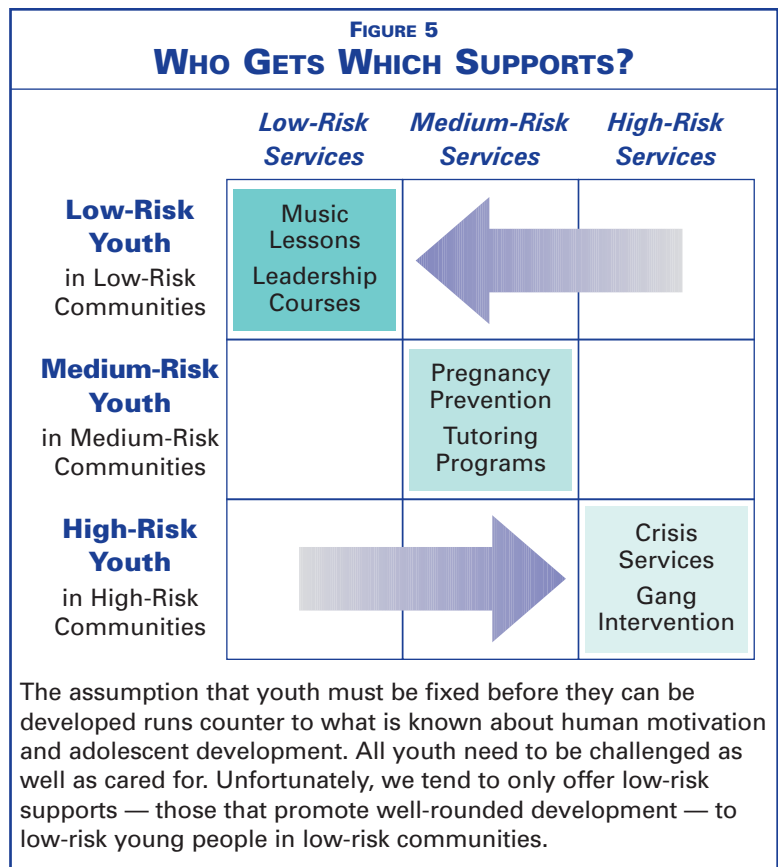
## Beyond Programs: Pathways to Preparation and Engagement

Around the world, young people find the language of preparation equally uninspiring. Samantha Neves, a young Brazilian activist, expresses a remarkably widespread response to learning in the absence of real engagement: “I hate it when adults say, ‘You are the future.’ They expect us to get prepared, not get involved. They tell us to study for careers, but don’t teach us what we need to know to make a difference.”

While young people value opportunities to learn and grow, they see no need to delay full citizenship and real problem solving until they reach adulthood. They look to weave together learning, work and contribution — preparation and engagement — throughout their lives.

This need to weave together the experiences through which young people develop and engage underlines an important reality. To be effective, strategies to engage youth should not be hit or miss or isolated opportunities offered in a vacuum. A decade ago, the Youth Committee of the Lilly Endowment issued a report in which it stated “youth development is not a happenstance matter.” Supporting young people throughout the adolescent and young adult years requires more than casual checks to see if there are things for them to do. It requires careful monitoring against clear goals.

The same is true for efforts to promote and support youth action or engagement. It is not enough to offer a service opportunity in fifth grade, a summer job in eighth grade and an internship in tenth grade. Young people need ongoing opportunities to participate meaningfully in organizations and activities that they believe will make a difference. Equally important, young peo-



ple need to know — or, to state it more forcefully, need to be able to envision — how they might build the skills that allow them to act on their interests and beliefs.

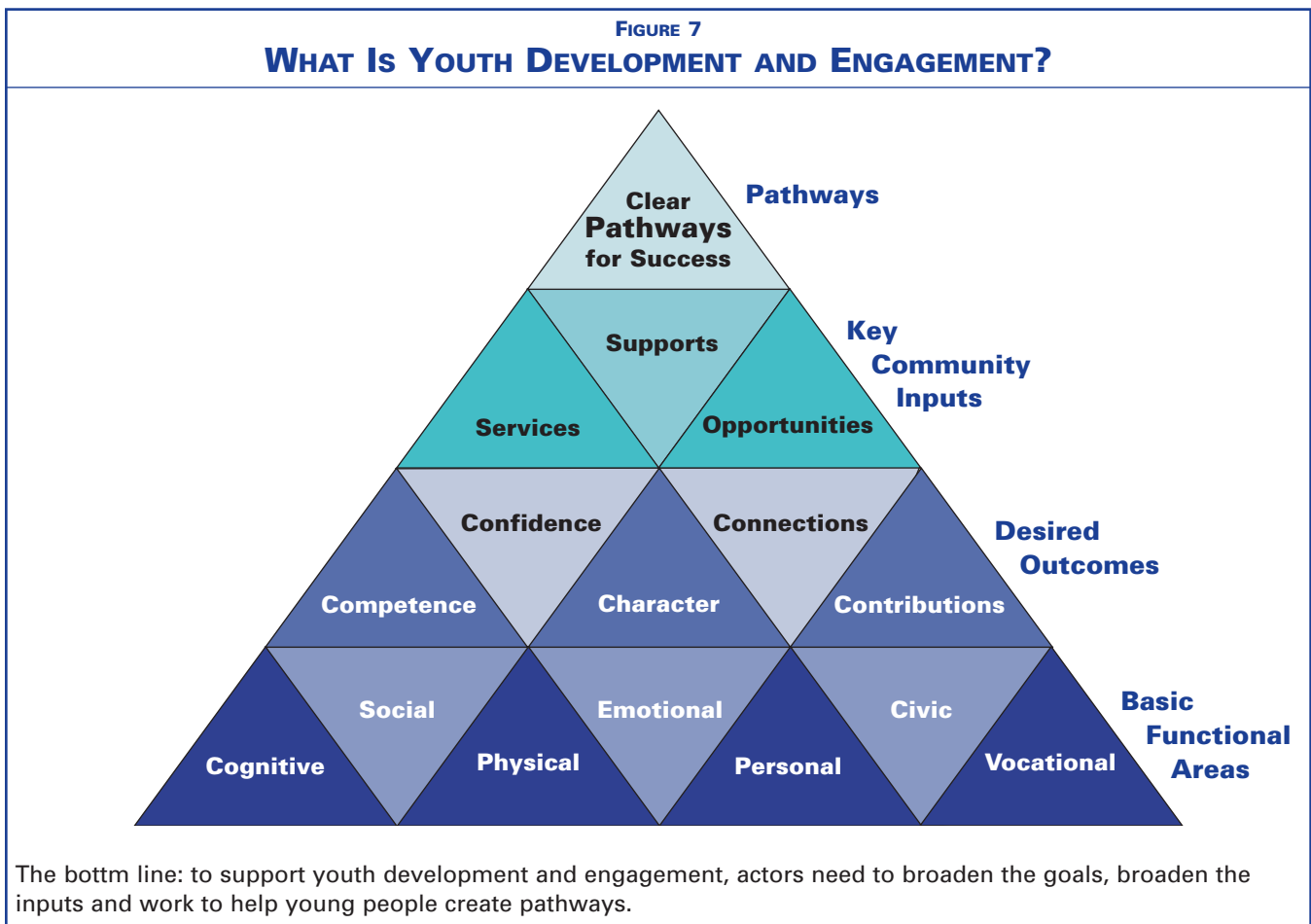
Young people need to be on pathways through development and engagement — pathways that connect experiences, supports and opportunities into a coherent journey and that provide direction, hope, achievable dreams and opportunities for meaningful action. Action pathways can be like sidewalks — paths that a young person steps onto at various intersections that lead them through options and opportunities to learn, work and contribute in ways that are relevant to them and to others. But pathways can also be like well placed stepping stones that allow young people to leap from one issue, role or organization to another. Such pathways can exist within individual organizations, but it is neither essential nor optimal that young people remain in one organization, program or issue area as they engage in developmentally appropriate and challenging opportunities.

## The Bottom Line: Building Blocks of Youth Development and Engagement

In sum, there is a logic to ensuring that all young people are problem-free, fully prepared and fully engaged. It begins with a clear understanding that development is an ongoing, goal-oriented process that we can support or thwart with our actions.

It continues with a commitment to help young people accomplish what they need to accomplish to be healthy, productive and engaged as adolescents and adults by providing the services, supports and opportunities they need.

It ends with recognizing of the reality of young people’s lives — that their lives begin in families and expand across multiple institutions and settings that can either provide pathways or roadblocks to their development.





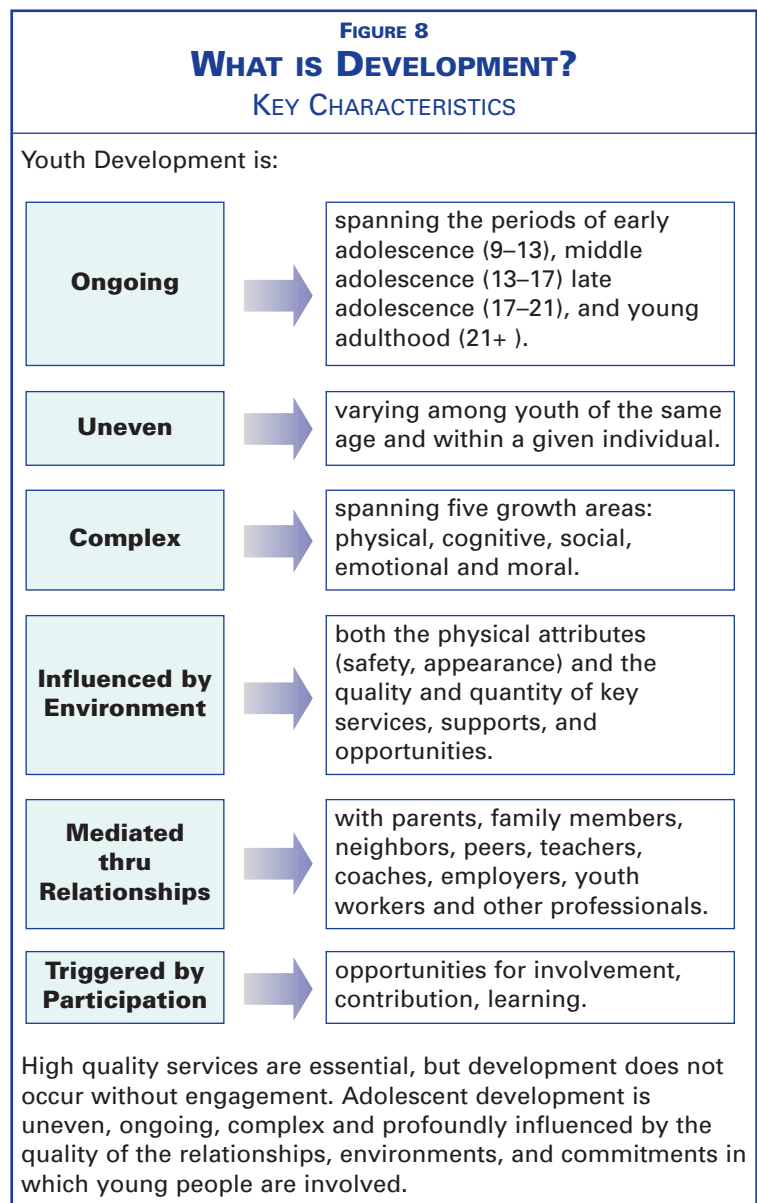


### Part III

# EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Much of what we know about development and engagement is common sense — as one practitioner noted, it is what “a good parent does on a good day.” Anyone who has spent time with young people will recognize that there is much more going on in their lives than just academic learning, and that they do not see their lives primarily as a series of problems to be avoided or solved. The key inputs that promote development and engagement — healthy relationships, challenging opportunities, and the rest — are not new to parents or to young people themselves. Yet far too many young people do not have access to even basic services, and are themselves treated as problems to be solved.

Research footnotes this common sense, and underlines the consequences of not focusing on the healthy development and engagement of all young people. Research on adolescent development, resiliency, education and prevention all help to corroborate a youth development approach. This research focuses on the nature of development, but also on youth problems and on programs that help youth get involved and make a difference. As a whole, it confirms our baseline belief: that problem-free is not fully prepared, and that fully prepared is not fully engaged.



## Adolescent Development

Adolescent development is the subject of extensive research, and has been for well over a century. Researchers agree on a great deal — including a list of the basic characteristics of the development process. Yet few of their findings are consistently put into daily practice. What is known? Development is:

- **ongoing** — a continuous process that begins with birth and continues through adulthood. It does not take a break when the school day ends, or when young people move from early childhood care into the classroom, or when young people move into the workforce.
- **uneven** — both among individuals and within the same individual. Two 10-year-olds may be at very different points, physically, emotionally and intellectually. And a socially mature 16-year-old may still be struggling to grasp the challenges of critical thinking.
- **complex** — with a lot of moving parts, all of which interact in complicated ways. When physical needs are not met, it is difficult for young people to develop cognitively. And intellectual growth occurs best when young people are embraced in an environment that supports them emotionally.
- **influenced by environment** — profoundly shaped by the places in which young people live, learn, work, play and contribute. All of the settings that young people move through contribute to their development.
- **mediated through relationships** — significant people in a youth's life — peers, families, teachers, community members and others — influence both the direction and pace of development.
- **triggered by participation** — occurring when young people are actively engaged in interesting problems, relevant to both themselves and their communities.

These characteristics are not unique to youth development, or even to human development — they apply equally well to community development, economic development and other forms of growth. Looking more closely at the child and youth development litera-

TABLE 7  
ERIKSON'S STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Developmental Period</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>
<b>Industry</b>	<b>Childhood</b> (6 to 12 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responding to the demands of learning new skills and accomplishing tasks.</li> <li>• Interactions with peers key.</li> </ul>
<b>Identity</b>	<b>Adolescence</b> (12 to 20 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring self-identity, direction.</li> <li>• Exploring alternative solutions to roles.</li> <li>• Career exploration key.</li> </ul>
<b>Intimacy</b>	<b>Early Adulthood</b> (20s to 30s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forming intimate relationships (Intimacy defined as finding oneself yet losing oneself in another person)</li> </ul>

Industry, identity and intimacy — three tasks with which all youth struggle.

ture further reinforces our sense of what youth need and can do. Erikson's stages of development, for instance, build the case that all young people are involved in several basic tasks and are growing across a number of developmental areas. They are laboring toward industry — doing meaningful work and making meaningful contributions. They are struggling with their own identity — understanding who they are and the communities and cultures of which they are part. And, they are looking for intimacy — both romantic relationships and significant friendships, long term and short term (Erikson, 1968).

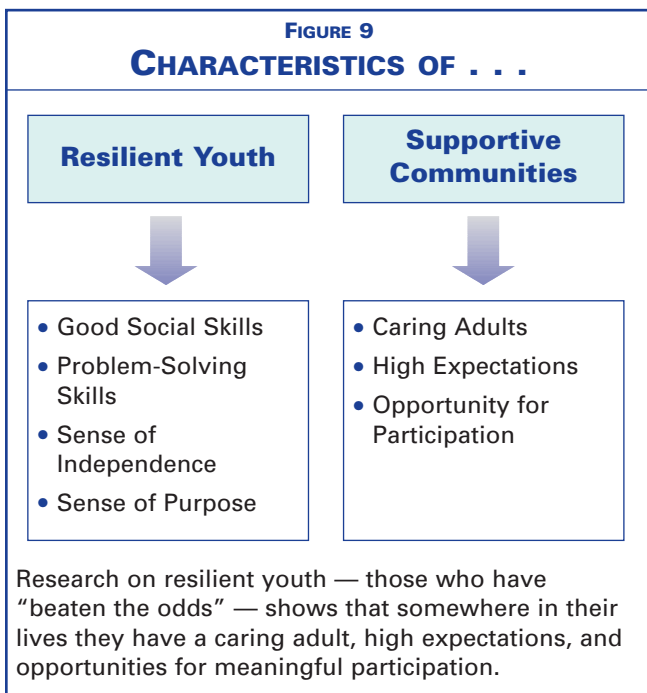
Erikson acknowledged two realities that are readily apparent to anyone working with young people at the turn of the millennium. First, these tasks are not sequential; while some may be priorities at particular stages in life, these three challenges remain significant throughout youth. Second, development is contextual, which helps to explain why the ages Erikson associated with particular tasks do not match up with current realities. In fact, young people today are engaged in all of these tasks from childhood well into their twenties.



## Resiliency Research

Resiliency research — studies of young people who succeed in spite of difficult circumstances — offers strong support for the argument to expand current thinking beyond services and beyond academics. Research on resilient children and youth suggests that three factors contribute to some high-risk children’s ability to “beat the odds”: a strong relationship with a caring adult, high expectations and opportunities for meaningful participation (Maston & Coates, 1999; Bernard, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1992). These ingredients may be supplied by formal programs, by immediate or extended family, by neighbors, or by significant adults such as teachers, clergy, coaches, youth workers, health care providers. They contribute to young people’s sense of connectedness and confidence and allow them to build competencies and contribute.

In addition to having these supports somewhere in their lives, resilient children and youth have a set of strengths and competencies that they draw upon. They often have strong cognitive skills — they think and reason well. They also have good social and problem-solving skills, which allow them to both make the most of relationships and mitigate the impact of challenges. Finally, they tend to have a strong sense of independence and purpose. These are important strengths in situations in which young people, in order to succeed,



face decisions that distance them from peers and perhaps from family.

## Prevention Research

Most telling, perhaps, is the research on effective prevention programs. Because funding dictates how services are put together, we have woven a crazy quilt of problem-specific interventions that often operate independently and inefficiently. We have reduced the challenge of youth development to a series of problems to be solved, leaving the core inputs for development and engagement — supports and opportunities — to be addressed in a catch-as-catch-can fashion. For the most part, substance abuse prevention, pregnancy prevention, drop out prevention and violence prevention programs all have separate funding and separate evaluation measures.

But the core of what is offered in these programs is the same: the services, supports and opportunities

**TABLE 8**  
**COMMON THEMES IN PREVENTION PROGRAMS**

<b>Skill Building</b>	Building social skills, problem-solving skills and communication skills
<b>Participation</b>	Engaging youth through offering real opportunities for participation (e.g., youth led discussions, real choices), leadership (e.g., youth as peer counselors, tutors, contributors)
<b>Norms and Expectations</b>	Establishing new norms and expectations for behavior that are sanctioned by the group
<b>Adult-Youth Relationships</b>	Establishing deeper and different ways for youth and adults to relate through the creation of different structures for interaction and specific training for adult leaders
<b>Information and Services</b>	Providing problem-specific information and services or access to services

Substance abuse prevention, pregnancy prevention, dropout prevention and violence prevention programs have separate funding and separate evaluation measures. What connects these disparate programs?

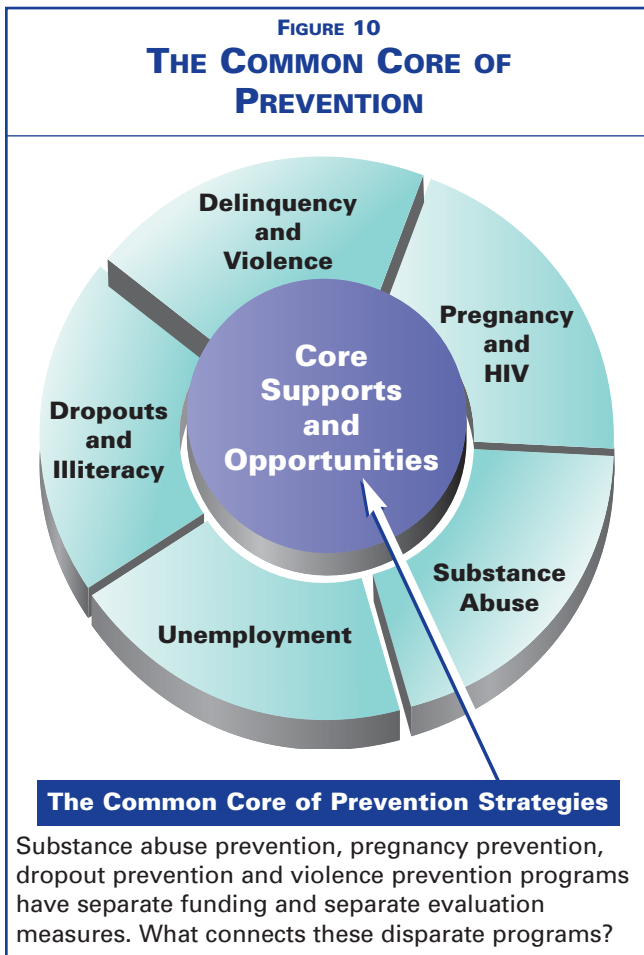
that guarantee successful development. In *Adolescents at Risk* (1990), Joy Dryfoos compiled information on promising and effective programs across four areas — substance abuse, delinquency, pregnancy and dropout prevention. A close analysis of these prevention programs indicated that the inputs provided are consistent across prevention programs and nearly identical to the list of basic inputs necessary to development and engagement: opportunities for membership, social skill building, participation, clear norms, adult-youth relationships and relevant information and services.

A close look at successful youth engagement strategies reveals the same lesson. Youth service, philanthropy, advocacy, entrepreneurship, governance, organizing and leadership — some of the most prominent approaches to engagement — all have distinctive characteristics. But interviews with the leaders of these programs and close examination of what goes on inside them reveals their common core. All are involved in

some combination of fostering the motivation and commitment of young people, building their capacity to act and helping them create and access opportunities for meaningful involvement.

When researchers and practitioners ask what motivates young people to become engaged, build their capacity and link with opportunities for real community impact, the answers are the same basic list of essential youth development inputs. Quality relationships with adults are critical. High-quality instruction, blended with opportunities to test new skills in real-life situations are critical. Role models and networks are critical. (Irby, Ferber and Pittman, 2001; Tolman and Pittman, 2001).

What is telling about these lists is that they are truly generic — the same inputs support prevention, development and engagement. The next critical question: who ensures that young people have access to these critical inputs?



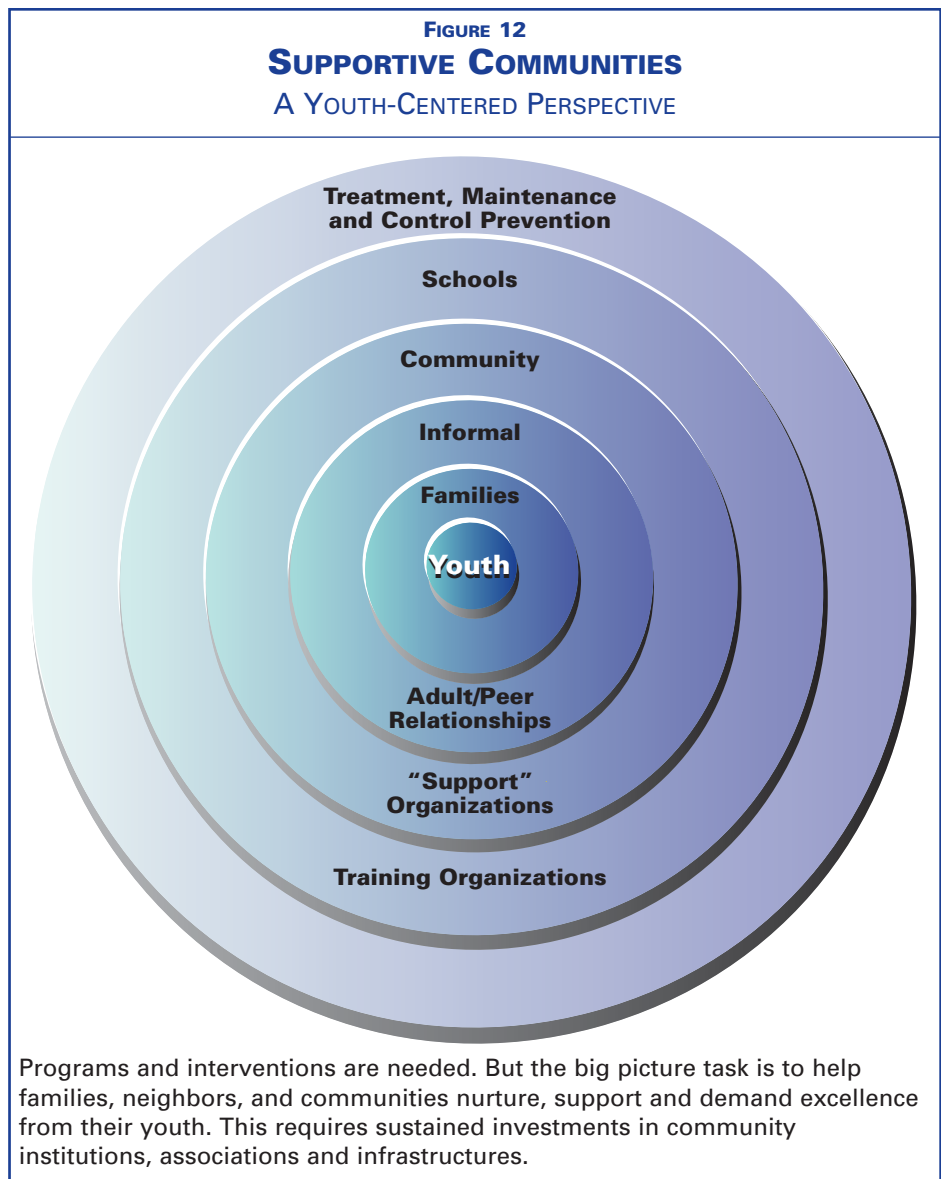
## Part IV

# HOW FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE

Programs and organizations can have an enormous impact on youths' lives, but this impact is either amplified or dampened by the quality and congruence of what else is going on in young people's families, peer groups and neighborhoods. There are young people who "beat the odds," but it is basic differences in family and community resources that determine what the odds are to begin with.

Ecological theory is based on an understanding that young people grow up in a set of nested contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The complexity and unevenness of adolescent development and the need for constancy in relationships, environments and engagement means that those best positioned to influence development are the "natural actors" in youths' lives — family, peers, neighbors and community institutions.

Ideally, children and youth have their broadest, strongest and most permanent connections



to family. Their development is enhanced when they are further supported by peers and neighbors; involved in an array of community organizations; engaged in school; exposed to work; and connected, as needed, with professionals that provide or broker for basic services such as health care, housing and protection.

In reality, the total community has a responsibility to provide the resources young people need, because it is the total community that suffers the consequences of not doing so. But what are communities? Communities are more than physical places. And they are more than businesses, organizations and indi-

**FIGURE 13**  
**COMMUNITY ASSETS THAT SUPPORT YOUTH**



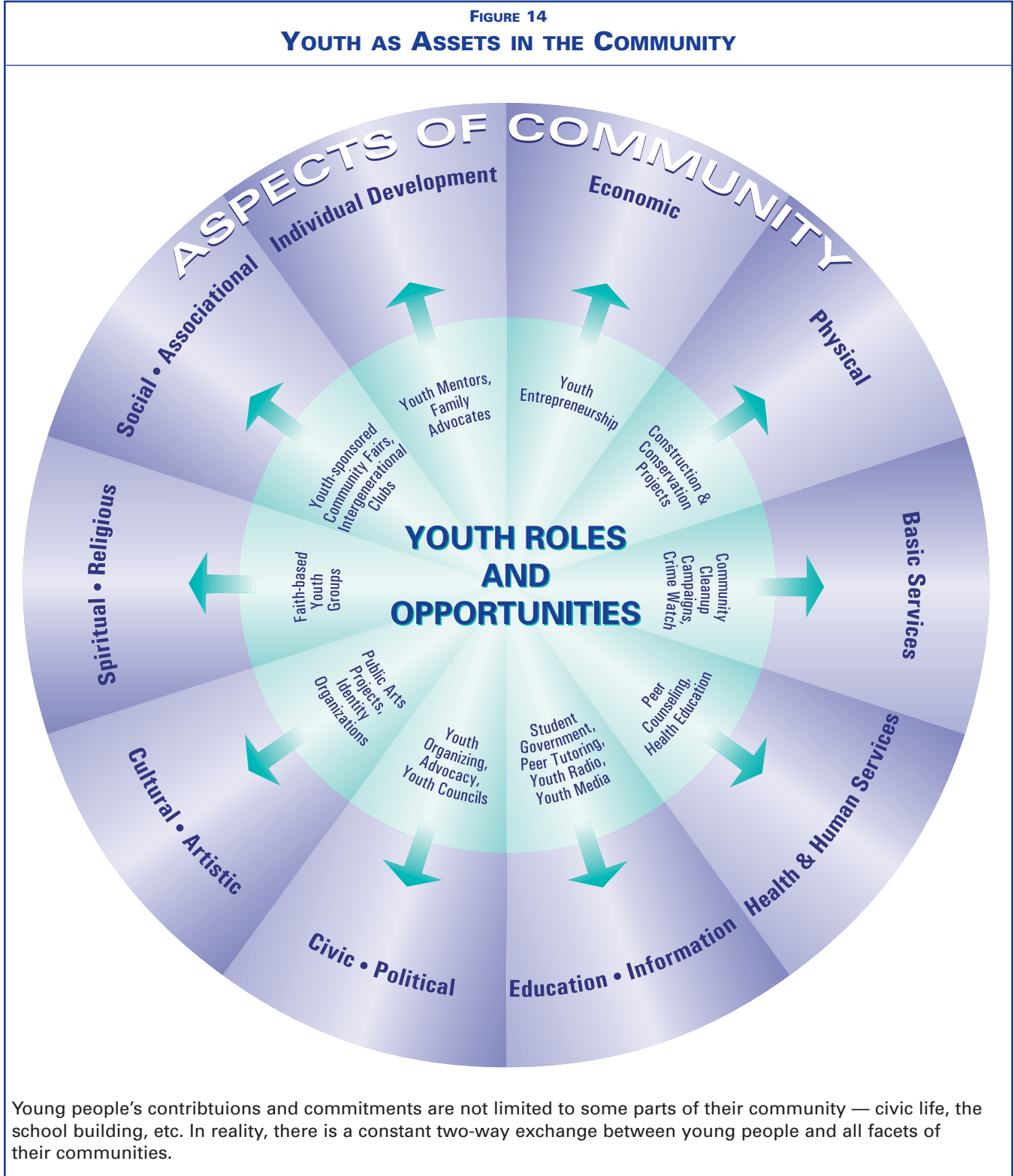
Communities are complex, with many aspects. Young people receive the supports and opportunities they need from all of these aspects of community.

viduals who inhabit them. Communities are also associations — people coming together, working toward common goals. A survey of the community development literature makes two things clear: First, all communities have assets to support young people. Second, these assets come from a consistent set

of spheres of activity within communities (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1990).

Any and all of these spheres can provide the key inputs needed; the list described earlier is intentionally place/provider generic. It states what is needed, but

**FIGURE 14**  
**YOUTH AS ASSETS IN THE COMMUNITY**



does not specify who supplies it or where it is found. Some communities are well equipped and well connected enough that a young person can get all that is needed from family, neighbors and an assortment of informal or individually negotiated experiences. In other communities, because these inputs are not available in sufficient quantity and quality, essential services, opportunities and supports may need to be supplemented or created (Werner, 1992; Scales & Leffert, 1999).

All of these community assets and all aspects of community can contribute to youth development and engagement. The reverse is also true. Young people can

engage and contribute to build each of these assets, and to impact every aspect of community life (Checkoway, 1996). Naming the specific dimensions of community serves multiple purposes. It gives communities and youth a framework for monitoring the services, supports and opportunities available to young people. It provides youth and communities with a range of examples that illustrate how youth can be valuable stakeholders in all aspects of community life and community development, countering stereotypes that young people are not involved. And it creates a framework into which community and youth development actors can jointly map their efforts, highlighting specific areas in which they are working to support and involve youth.



# CONCLUSIONS

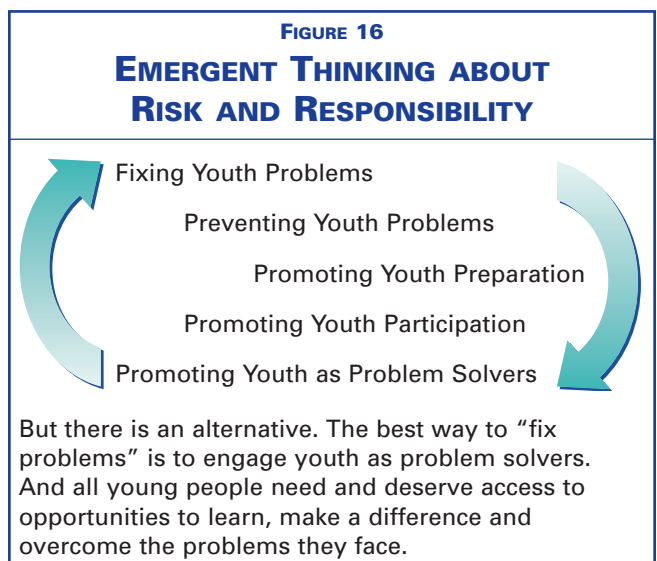
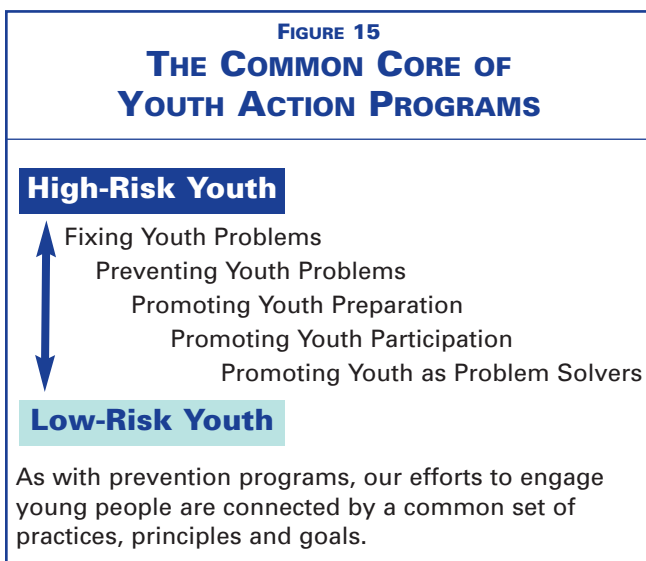
## MIXING IT UP, PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Vital shifts in perspective — the recognition that problem-free is not fully prepared, and that fully prepared is not fully engaged — have begun to take hold. But, in too many communities and for too many young people, prevention, preparation and engagement are still seen as competing options rather than complementary goals. And far too few young people have access to the services, supports and opportunities necessary to solve and prevent problems, develop fully and engage in community life.

An old paradigm — fix the problems of high-risk youth, provide opportunities for leadership and contribution to the lucky few, help the vast middle meet their basic needs — still holds sway. The options that we give

(or do not give) young people are often based on our sense of whether they are a problem, or are problem-free.

In reality, all young people need a full array of basic services, consistent supports and challenging opportunities. All young people have problems in need of fixing, as well as the capacity to contribute and solve problems. In fact, research suggests that the best way to help young people solve problems is to engage them as problem solvers — high-risk youth are perhaps those most in need of opportunities to participate and take action. Emerging thinking helps young people address problems by engaging, and at the same time works to prevent problems by ensuring access to basic supports and opportunities.



What should policy makers, advocates and practitioners do based on this new sense of what young people need and can do? If it is our goal to foster this emerging thinking — and thus to create a balanced focus on preventing problems, promoting development and encouraging engagement — we need a new set of principles for action. These are the principles with which we started this paper — they focus on broadening our thinking and moving beyond narrow answers. Again, we need to push:

- **Beyond prevention and academics.** Again, problem-free is not fully prepared. Addressing youth problems is critical, but defining goals exclusively in terms of problems is limiting. We should be as articulate about the attitudes, skills, behaviors and values we want young people to have as we are about those we hope they avoid. Academic competence is important, but not sufficient. Social, health (emotional and physical), vocational and civic competence are all needed to be fully prepared. Competence in-and-of-itself is not sufficient. Young people need skills, but they also need confidence, character, connections to family, peers and community, and opportunities to contribute to those around them.
- **Beyond basic services.** Young people need affordable, accessible care and services (e.g., health and transportation), safe and stable places and high quality instruction and training. But they also need supports — relationships and networks that provide nurturing, standards and guidance — and opportunities to try new roles, master challenges and contribute to family and community.
- **Beyond quick fixes.** Development does not occur in a vacuum, and it does not stop because program funds run out. Targeted, time-limited interventions may be needed. But, at a minimum, they should be offered with full knowledge that young people are attached to programs or environments that are not time-limited and not targeted solely on a specific population of young people with specific problems. There is a general need to foster investment in long-term, sustained services, opportunities and supports. Having these as a base decreases the chances that short-term, targeted strategies will be needed and increases the chances that, when delivered, they will be effective.
- **Beyond schools and school buildings.** Schools are pivotal institutions in most young people's lives. But they are just one of many that affect youth development. Young people grow up in families, in neighborhoods, with community-based organizations, service agencies and businesses and employers as well as schools. All of these are settings for interactions and, consequently, settings that can contribute to or undermine development. Equally important, all of these are real or potential coordinators of interactions.
- **Beyond the school day.** Adolescence is a time of significantly expanded interests and mobility. Young people want to (and have the mobility and skills to) seek relationships and experiences beyond the family and school. The non-school hours (evenings, weekends, summers) can be times of opportunity, risk, or stagnation. Young people can be offered a range of attractive opportunities, they can venture out on their own and encounter significant risks, or they can stagnate at home because of parental concerns for their safety.
- **Beyond youth professionals.** Adolescence is a time of relationship building. Professionals are important, but they are not sufficient. And the relationships they offer, while critically important, are often not sufficient unless they can demonstrate that they are there and involved, not just because they are being paid, but because they truly care (i.e., going beyond the job description). Parents, neighbors, relatives, business owners, non-youth focused professionals and older youth in the community have to be seen and cultivated as resources. Non-school and ultimately non-youth work professionals must be encouraged to view the preparation and involvement of young people as a part of their responsibility.
- **Beyond recipients.** Young people need services, supports and instruction. But they also need opportunities to contribute. The best preparation for tomorrow is participation today. Further, young people's participation should not be seen only as contributing to their development. Youth can, and do, play critical roles as change agents in their families, peer groups and communities.
- **Beyond labeling.** All young people are engaged in development. Most need additional support in



navigating choices and assessing options. A growing number need significant expansion in their supports, choices and options. All may be at risk, but the risks are not equal, and risks do not define potential. Targeting is fine, labeling is not. There have to be ways to ensure that those who need extra resources receive them without being labeled “resource poor.”

- **Beyond pilots.** All young people need the services, opportunities and supports described. No one program or organization can, or should be expected to, deliver all supports to all youth in a neighborhood, or even in a school or housing complex. Yet, to have a significant impact, these supports must be available to a critical mass of young people in a school or neighborhood. Too many programs remain at the pilot level, offering services and supports to a small fraction of those who need it. And too few neighborhoods weave

these small efforts together to create a web of supports available to 70 or 80 percent of the youth population.

This list of “beyonds” helps us reframe our goals, and thus reorient the strategies we use to achieve them. But moving beyond does not mean abandoning old approaches. When taken not as “instead of” but as “and also,” it is clear that the underlying themes of the calls for change combine in what could be considered the “above and beyond” principles for youth preparation and engagement. Restated, “beyond prevention” is really a call for problem reduction and full preparation and engagement. Similarly, “beyond quick fixes” is a call for a balanced focus on deficit remediation, crisis response, problem prevention *and* ongoing attention to development. It will take a range of strategies to make sure that all young people are problem-free, fully prepared and fully engaged.

**TABLE 9**  
**ABOVE AND BEYOND**  
NINE PRINCIPLES OF FULL INVESTMENT AND FULL INVOLVEMENT

<b>The Goal</b>	Problem reduction and full preparation for adult roles and responsibilities.	<b>Beyond Prevention</b>
<b>The Inputs</b>	Basic services (human, health, housing, economic) and a full range of ongoing supports and opportunities.	<b>Beyond Basic Services</b>
<b>The Focus</b>	Deficit-remediation, crisis response, problem prevention and long term attention to development.	<b>Beyond Quick Fixes</b>
<b>The Settings</b>	Schools and homes and a full range of community settings including community centers, youth organizations, libraries, parks, malls, faith organizations and businesses.	<b>Beyond the School Building</b>
<b>The Times</b>	24-7. During the school day and before and after school including nights, holidays, weekends and summers.	<b>Beyond the School Day</b>
<b>The Actors</b>	Teachers and youth workers and families, community members, volunteers, young people and non-youth focused professionals.	<b>Beyond Professionals</b>
<b>Youth Roles</b>	Young people as recipients and as active agents in their own development and that of their communities and society.	<b>Beyond Recipients</b>
<b>The Target</b>	Non-stigmatizing efforts for all youth, those living in high-risk areas and those with specific challenges and problems (e.g., dropouts, young parents, court-involved youth).	<b>Beyond Labeling</b>
<b>The Numbers</b>	Pilot programs and an array of services, supports and opportunities that are affordable, accessible and attractive enough that at least 80 percent of youth 10–22 are connected to something for at least 80 percent of their second decade of life and beyond.	<b>Beyond Pilots</b>



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