

Engaging young people in opportunities to gain leadership skills and build power in order to reach their full potential and contribute to positive social change.

What is Youth Development?

Positive youth development involves providing youth with opportunities for enrichment, exploration, independence, and choice – not treating them as problems to be fixed or adults in training.¹

The approach hinges on two beliefs: (1) all youth are worthy of investment, regardless of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, grades, family structure or involvement with government agencies; and (2) all youth can contribute positively to their world. Positive youth development can occur in or outside of school and can incorporate any range of activities – from the arts to recreation to civic, academic, and vocational engagement. Wherever youth interact with adults, the goal should be to engage young people in their own development, not simply provide services.²

As part of its Community Grantmaking Program, Triangle Community Foundation will fund youth leadership and development initiatives focusing on young people ages 8-14.

Guiding Principles for Youth Development³

The most successful youth development programs involve the following guiding principles:

- Adult caring behaviors – Young people are in a safe, respectful, nurturing, fair, well-supervised environment where they are challenged to reach their full potential and provided a full range of support to ensure their success.
- Youth leadership – Young people are challenged to reach their full potential by meeting and exceeding high expectations.
- Youth participation – Young people have opportunities to make and implement decisions and assume ownership for outcomes. Youth make change, direct their own activity, and take responsibility.
- Opportunities, services, and support – Comprehensive opportunities and support services provide youth with positive outlets for satisfying their fundamental needs.
- Supportive organizations and communities – Programs include active participation of families, schools, community, religious and civic organizations, as well as other youth.
- Emphasis on competencies – In addition to academic and vocational skills, other competencies allow young people to successfully transition into adulthood. These competencies or assets are described below.

Developmental Assets or Competencies

Developmental assets are the positive experiences and personal qualities that young people need to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.⁴ External and internal assets have the power to influence the choices young people make. For complete information, see Search Institute’s *40 Developmental Assets for Middle Childhood* and *40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents*. Examples of external and internal assets are listed below:

	<i>Asset Area</i>	<i>Specific Asset</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
External Assets	Support	Other Adult Relationships	Young person receives support from adults other than his or her parent(s).
	Empowerment	Service to Others	Young person has opportunities to help others in the community.
Internal Assets	Commitment to Learning	Reading for Pleasure	Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
	Social Competencies	Planning and Decision Making	Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.

Best Practices for Youth Development Programs⁵

Regardless of their content, responsive programs should:

- Tailor content and processes to the needs and interests of the young people being served.
- Recognize, value and respond to the diverse background and experiences that exist among young people.
- Work collectively, as well as individually, to extend their reach to underserved adolescents.
- Actively compete for young people’s time and attention.
- Strengthen the quality and diversity of their adult leadership.
- Reach out to families, school and other community partners.
- Enhance the role of young people as community resources.
- Serve as vigorous advocates for and with young people.
- Specify and evaluate their intended outcomes.
- Establish a solid organizational structure, including energetic and committed board leadership.

(Endnotes)

¹ Out of School Time Matters: What Can Community Foundations Do? 2002. Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth. 5.

² Pathways to Promise: A Funder’s Guide to Positive Youth Development. 2005. Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers. 4.

³ DC Standards for Out-of-School Time, DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation.

⁴ “What are Developmental Assets?”. Search Institute. <http://www.search-institute.org/assets/>, 2/26/07.

⁵ “Where Need Meets Opportunity: Youth Development Programs for Early Teens.” The Future of Children: When School is Out. 1999. David and Lucille Packard Foundation.