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Promoting Youth Development: Strengthening the Role of Youth Service and Community Organizations

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**PROMOTING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT:
STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF YOUTH SERVING
AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS**

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PROMOTING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT:
STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF YOUTH SERVING
AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS¹

Concern about youth problems is escalating. The volume of task forces, reports, initiatives, coalitions and media specials confirm that there is broad agreement that too many youth are "at risk."

- *Too many youth lack the requisite skills and competencies needed for adult success.* Whether because of changing demographics, changing times, or changing labor force requirements, young people are not entering adulthood ready for adult life. Many youth fail to find employment. Of those who do enter the work force, too many possess weak academic skills, little understanding of the rules of the workplace and limited ability to work as members of a team, solve problems or make decisions. Too few understand and/or are willing to accept the responsibilities of parenthood, citizenship.
- *Too many youth are engaging in behaviors that threaten their health and/or their futures.* Dryfoos (1990) estimates that one-quarter of our 10- to 17-year olds are "high-risk" youth, engaged in multiple problem behaviors -- heavy alcohol, tobacco and drug use, delinquency, unprotected sexual intercourse, poor school performance or non-attendance and that an additional 25 percent are at moderate risk.
- *Too many youth are poorly connected to family, school, community, society.* Changes in family structures, maternal employment, neighborhood cohesiveness and expectations about what roles are appropriate for adolescents have left too many young people without supervision, contact, counseling or constructive opportunities to contribute and connect to their families and communities.

Comparisons of this country's youth problems to other industrialized countries and many less developed countries has left journalists, researchers, policymakers, and service providers pondering a common question: Why are American youth faring so poorly?

There is a growing recognition that the existing system of supports and services for youth needs to be reexamined. Many argue that programs and services would be improved, if they were: 1) less fragmented, 2) less problem-focused, and 3) more adequate in either their number, their duration or their outreach to those most in need. The current drive to develop comprehensive youth programs, cross-sector collaborations, and "high risk" youth programs, and the growing interest in offering young people new opportunities and options both in school (e.g. middle-school reform) and

¹ Paper based on a larger report "A Rationale For Enhancing the Role of the Non-School Voluntary Sector in Youth Development" done for the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, Task Force on Youth Development and Community Programs.

out (e.g. community service) are largely the results of this reassessment.

These efforts, while commendable, are likely to fall short of the mark. The problem is more than an inadequate base of youth services, it is an inadequate vision of youth needs and youth potential. For years, the country has worked under the notion that, with the exception of education, formal programs for youth particularly publicly funded programs, should address youth problems. Positive youth development, it was assumed, occurred naturally in the absence of youth problems. Whether the concern is early pregnancy, substance abuse, delinquency, or dropping out, we will not progress in addressing these problems unless we emphasize *positive youth development* strategies as much as we do problem prevention and intervention strategies (e.g., contraceptive services, dropout prevention, substance abuse education and recovery programs).

Preventing high risk behaviors is not enough to ensure that youth are ready to assume the responsibilities and challenges of adulthood. Moreover, there is increasing evidence that the high risk behaviors that have garnered so much public and political concern cannot be reduced without attention to meeting youths needs and developing their competencies -- without addressing the broader and more positive issue of youth development. There is ample evidence that suggests that those youth who have skills and goals and have adequate family, peer and community supports and opportunities to contribute are much less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors than those who lack these skills and supports (Bogenschneider, Small and Riley, 1991; Benson, 1990; Dryfoos, 1990; Berlin and Sum, 1988).

What is needed, we believe, is a widespread conceptual shift from thinking that youth problems are the principle barrier to youth development to thinking that youth development is the most effective strategy for the prevention of youth problems. Achieving this shift will require the work of many people over several years. Two things, however, are needed if it is to begin; 1) We need a clear definition of youth development that specifies outcomes and strategies and 2) A strong base of evidence that programs that have been labeled youth development, are both theoretically sound and potentially, if not already effective.

DEFINING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Youth development programs have come to be so closely associated with the voluntary non-school sector that youth development supports have become defined as the array of activities, opportunities and resources offered by youth-serving organizations; and youth development outcomes as the goals stated in these organization's programmatic and mission statements. If policymakers, researchers and the general public are prepared to push for a definition of education that is independent of what schools do, then it seems wise to push simultaneously for a definition of youth development that is independent of what youth-serving (often called youth development) organizations do.

We suggest that, first and foremost, the term *youth development* be attached firmly to young people, not to the institutions that serve them. Youth development should be seen as an ongoing, inevitable process in which all youth are engaged and all youth are invested. Even in the absence of family support and formal or informal programs, all young people will seek ways to:

- 1) meet their basic physical and social needs (some of which change considerably during the course of adolescence);
- 2) build the individual assets or competencies (knowledge, skills, relationships, values) they feel are needed to participate successfully and fully in adolescence and adult life, and use them in self-gratifying and self-fulfilling ways.

Based on a review of the literature, we have developed definitions of the needs and competencies of adolescents (see figure 1).

Needs and assets are the two axes of youth development (see figure 2)--empowerment and competence. We argue that young people, in addition to being problem free, (e.g. not pregnant, not delinquent, not dropouts) need to develop in both of these areas in order to succeed as adults. We suggest, furthermore, that needs and competencies are interactive (e.g., young people who feel competent are more likely to seek new tasks than those who do not feel competent) and that needs can be met (and competencies used) in socially acceptable or socially unacceptable ways (adolescents, for example, can fulfill their need for group membership and structure by joining a youth-serving organization or a gang).

Identifying Positive Youth Development Agents

Whether and how young people meet their basic needs and apply the competencies they develop depends in large part on the strength and direction of influences in their lives. Ample research and theory exist that suggest that family, peers, school, community groups, religious organizations and places of employment are all important in determining youth development. We suggest that these people, places, programs and institutions be seen as youth development agents and, based on the literature review, make the following assertions:

- Every individual, program, organization with whom an adolescent interacts is not an agent. Agents, by definition, have to influence young people.²
- All agents do not have a substantial and positive impact on youth. Complementary influences are reinforcing and have an enhancing effect on youth development; competing influences are confusing and have a dampening effect.
- Agents' influence can vary in both strength and direction:

² The term agent is used here broadly. We are not referring specifically to USDA extension agents, rather to any individual, program or institution that acts as an *agent* for change or growth.

- Agents that address multiple needs have a larger potential impact on youth development than do those that address a single need; agents that address multiple competencies have a larger potential impact on youth development than those that address a single competency.
- Agents that address both multiple needs and multiple competencies will have the largest potential impact on youth development. These agents should be considered *primary youth development agents*.
- Even though their goals are positive, *agents that create an environment that devalues youth* by actively inhibiting their ability to contribute, to form close relationships, to master any tasks which are perceived as important, etc. cannot be considered positive youth development agents.
- Even though their impact on needs and competencies may be positive, *agents that encourage young people to develop self-limiting and/or socially undesirable behaviors or to apply their skills in self-limiting and/or socially undesirable ways (e.g. gangs)* cannot be considered positive youth development agents.
- *Primary positive youth development agents*, then, are agents that address the multiple needs of youth and foster the development of competencies and behaviors that are seen as desirable and important by family, community, society.

The distinctions just made are critical. Many programs address competencies but inhibit, rather than promote young people's ability to contribute and to feel ownership. Others, often reacting to the "cold, assemblyline" approach taken by organizations charged with developing skills, attempt to address young people's need for a safe, caring, supportive environment but fail to offer and assess systematically the opportunities to build and use skills that are critical to successful development.

There is much discussion about current programs ability or inability to compete with gangs. If youth programs are to capture youth's attention and allegiance and become the positive alternative to gangs and "the street" they will have to examine both the content of their programming and the philosophy and practice that determines its delivery. Gangs clearly meet many of young people's personal and social needs -- the need for safety, structure, membership, opportunities to contribute - and both develop and reward skills. The toughest challenge in developing effective supports for youth in high risk environments, may well be to change the mindset that suggests that these young people need to be fixed. If gangs have rigorous training, high expectations and tangible rewards and programs do not, youth will continue to choose the streets.

DEFINING THE ROLE OF YOUTH-SERVING AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS IN PROMOTING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

There is no definitive way to categorize the organizations that comprise the group of non-school and, for the most part, non-public organizations offering community programs for youth. Indeed, this

clustering of organizations cuts across several more commonly recognized sectors (e.g. public, religious, civic). These organizations are by no means a monolithic group. They range from large national organizations, like the Boy Scouts, that serve millions of youth and have annual budgets upwards of \$10 million, to small community programs that have no full-time paid staff. But while there are substantial differences within this group, the majority of these organizations share some common characteristics, especially when compared to schools.

These organizations tend to have broader missions than schools, backed with strong traditions and philosophies that define their use of volunteers and their commitment to service and approach to the delivery of services in the communities in which they are a part. While there is wide variation, these organizations tend to be smaller and more loosely structured than schools. The loose structure, diverse funding base, and heavy use of volunteers that seems to typify these organizations contributes to their flexibility.

The sharpest distinctions between schools and the youth-serving organizations are translated in their programs and practices. As a group, these organizations tend to offer a much wider array of programs and supports than do schools, place a higher value on youth participation, and rely heavily on non-formal educational methods. The programs and activities offered span the full set of competency areas and include activities such as sports and recreation programs, life skills courses, community service, homework monitoring, problem prevention services and experiential science and math education (see figure 3). Equally important, the practices and strategies used in delivering these services reflect a very clear understanding of the importance of meeting young people's basic physical and social needs. The almost universal use of small groups, flexible grouping practices, symbols of membership (e.g. uniforms, t-shirts), and clear structures (e.g. regular meetings, codes of conduct) reflects an organizational and programmatic recognition of the importance of structure, belonging, and group membership to adolescents. Most striking, however, is the strong emphasis placed on making sure that adolescents have manageable challenges that allow for progress, rewards and the development of a personal sense of achievement. This conscious emphasis on broadening the opportunities for success, reward and recognition sharply contrasts the approach usually taken in schools.

Assessing the Evidence

There are some 400 national youth-serving organizations listed in the latest *Directory of American Youth Organizations* and over 17,000 U.S. non-profits that classify themselves as youth development organizations. Seven out of ten eighth graders report that they participate in outside-of-school activities. If presence counts for anything, the ubiquity of these organizations and programs suggests one reason to make them a logical focus of attention. While far from a cohesive network of

actors, these thousands of community organizations and programs do offer a way to reach youth.

However, a rationale for strengthening the role of the youth-serving organizations in youth development must be based on more than head counts. There needs to be empirical evidence that demonstrates that participation in these organizations is 1) perceived as valuable by youth and adults and 2) found to have a significant impact on some if not all of the competencies and needs that define youth development. Additionally, there needs to be theoretical evidence that these organizations play instrumental, supplementary and/or unique roles in youth development because of what they offer young people and how, when and where they offer it.

A Sampling of Empirical Evidence

It is not difficult to outline why strengthening youth programming within youth serving and community organizations make sense:

Young people, particularly, young adolescents, may spend too much time alone:

- One-quarter of the eighth-graders surveyed for the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 reported spending two or more hours alone each day after school.

Teachers and school administrators feel that isolation contributes to school problems:

- Thirty-seven percent of principals who responded to a 1988 survey done by the National Association of Elementary School Principals felt that children would perform better in school if they were not left unsupervised for long periods of time outside of school. Twenty-two percent reported having before- or after-school programs in their buildings; 84 percent agreed that such programs were needed.

Young people and their parents want programs in the schools and neighborhoods:

- Asked what supports they thought would be helpful when youths could not be with parents after school, the most frequent responses given by third- through twelfth-grade students in a St. Louis survey were "a safe place to go if they are afraid," "planned activities in the school building," "after-school programs in the neighborhood," and "ideas about how to take care of yourself after school."
- A 1983 survey of Oakland sixth-graders and their parents found that regardless of income, race, or ethnicity, three-quarters of parents felt that organized activities were an important part of their children's education. The sixth-graders surveyed felt they had plenty of free time but too little to do during that time that was worthwhile or interesting -- 41 percent reported being bored and at a loss for things to do.

Young people value and want more programming to help them build personal and social skills:

- Nearly four out of 10 teens polled in a 1988 survey sponsored by the American Home Economics Association felt that schools, at best, do only an adequate job of teaching the life skills necessary for responsible and productive adult life.

Young people and adult alumni value their participation in non-school youth programs:

- Alumni of youth-serving organizations report that their membership contributed significantly to their personal development. A 1987 survey of alumni of 4-H and other youth groups found that, on average, alumni felt that their participation had contributed to their personal development in nine areas: pride in accomplishment, self-confidence, ability to work with others, ability to communicate, ability to set goals, employment skills, leadership skills, and community involvement.
- Eighty-one percent of the girls surveyed in a recent Harris poll commissioned by Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. report that Girl Scouting is either very or somewhat important to them. Girl Scouting is especially important to black and Hispanic girls and to girls living in urban areas. Six out of 10 black Girl Scouts and more than four out of 10 Hispanic and American Indian/Alaskan Native Girl Scouts reported that Scouting was personally very important to them compared to one-third of whites and one-quarter of Asians. Forty-four percent of Girl Scouts living in urban areas said Scouting was very important compared to 33 percent in the suburbs and 27 percent in rural areas. The reasons given for why Girl Scouting was important were that it offered opportunities for fun, learning, making friends/meeting new people, and service.

Participation in non-school programs builds competencies and reduces problems:

- Several studies have found that participation in extracurricular activities appears to have a positive effect on educational attainment and to later participation in voluntary organizations. (Hanks and Eckland, 1978; Otto 1975; Spady, 1971). Similarly, participation in voluntary activities and associations is associated with adult participation in civic and political organizations and in the political process in general (Ladewig and Thomas, 1987; Hanks, 1981).
- Participation in community service programs appears to have the broadest impact on youth competencies. A survey of a random sample of ACTION volunteers age 12 to 23, in the Young Volunteers for ACTION program found both gains in understanding of community service, ability to work with others, development of career objectives, increased willingness to learn and reduced need for supervision. (ACTION, 1986). Other studies of service participants found similar improvements in personal and social skills, vocational skills, orientations and earnings, and appreciation and continued involvement in community service (Hamilton and Fenzel, 1978; Wolf, 1987).

A growing amount of research speaks specifically to the short-term and long-term benefits of participation in youth serving organizations:

- The preliminary evaluations of the Boys and Girls Clubs' new housing project-based substance abuse prevention program, Smart Moves, are both impressive and surprising. Outside evaluators found that, while the differences between the impact of Clubs without Smart Moves and Clubs with Smart Moves on the lives of youth and adults in housing projects were not great, the differences between the housing projects that had clubs and those that did not was substantial. Compared to those without Clubs, the projects with clubs had fewer unoccupied or damaged units, lower estimated rates of drug activity and substance abuse, higher rates of parental involvement in the community and a substantially greater presence of recreational facilities and recreational, educational and drug abuse prevention programs.

A Sampling of Supportive Theories

The empirical evidence that non-school community programs do make a difference in young people's lives may not be all that we would want, but the theoretical groundings exist in the general literature on the role of community in adolescent development, in the literature on leisure time use, and, most strongly, in the recent literature on middle grades reform.

Theories of Community. The ecological model of human development formalized by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and applied by researchers such as Garbarino (1985) and Bogenschneider et al. (1990) sees individual development as the result of a series of ongoing interactions and adaptations between the individual and a set of overlapping systems that relate both to the individual and to each other. Thus, adolescents are influenced most by family, school, church, peer group, community programs are the microsystems in Bronfenbrenner's terms. These, microsystems, however, connect to form larger systems (mesosystems) that have an added impact on youth.

Peter Benson in *The Troubled Journey* (1990), offers strong empirical evidence that validates this theory of additive levels of influence. His work is reinforced by the ongoing work of Bogenschneider, Small and Riley at the University of Wisconsin. Benson defines twenty at-risk indicators covering nine major problem areas such as alcohol, drug and tobacco use, sexual activity, school behavior, anti-social behavior. Using the ecological approach, he then looks for evidence that internal and external assets (e.g. parental standards, positive school climate) and individual deficits (e.g. unsupervised time at home, stress, physical abuse, negative peer pressure) have an impact on at-risk behavior. Bogenschneider et al. do a similar analysis using the concepts of protective factors and risk factors.

We have summarized the main findings of the two studies in Figure 4. A quick read of these factors brings several points into focus:

- there are protective and risk factors at work in every system -- family, peer, school, work, community.
- the factors, both protective and risk, map almost perfectly into our lists of competencies and needs with adequate performance in the competence areas (e.g. cognitive/creative, personal/social) and adequate fulfillment of needs (e.g. belonging to a supportive community, close relationship with at least one person) related to little or no at-risk behavior and inadequate performance or needs fulfillment related to multiple at-risk behaviors.
- competencies have a value not just in the adult world, but in adolescence. The timely development and reinforcement of academic, social, vocational and citizenship competencies has a strong preventive effect on the development of risk-taking behavior.

One additional point needs to be made: The more assets an adolescent has, the lower the likelihood that there are at-risk behaviors. Sixth through eighth graders with zero to 10 assets had twice as many at-risk indicators as those with 11 to 20 assets, four times as many as those with 21 to 25 assets and ten times as many as those with 23 to 60 assets. Equally important, Benson reports at least preliminary evidence about the importance of having assets across the spheres of influence. Using four key assets (positive school climate, family support, involvement in structured youth activities and involvement in church or synagogue), Benson finds that at-risk indicators are reduced almost on a one-to-one basis as key assets are added (figure 3). Bogenschneider et. al reached similar relationships.

The Importance of Youth Programs and Community Organizations. In the ecological model, community refers to much more than community programs. It refers to the range of formal and informal supports and risks that exist outside of the family. Wynn et al. (1987) have defined community supports in a very practical way:

Community supports are both the informal and the organized resources within communities that contribute to the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development of individuals. Community supports include (1) opportunities to participate in organized, ongoing groups, (2) avenues for contributing to the well-being of others, (3) sources of personal support, and (4) access to and use of community facilities and events including museums, libraries, parks, civic events, and celebrations (p.11).

They go on to discuss the importance of community supports for adolescent development:

For adolescents, we believe that community supports provide a link between the contexts of family and school and a wider world of issues, events, and people. Through direct experience, community supports offer opportunities to learn practical and social skills and to apply and consolidate academic skills and interests. Community supports provide forums for taking on aspects of adult roles such as the care of others. They offer adolescents chances to test a variety of potential work roles, to seek and supply support across generations, and to develop a sense of competence and responsibility...(p.11)

The separate contexts for socializing adolescents -- families, schools, peers, the media, the workplace, and communities -- have distinct functions in enhancing the development of youth. One context cannot take the place of others. Nevertheless, one of the values of community supports is that they can respond and accommodate to the changing structure and function of other socializing contexts for adolescents (p.13).

Community programs are only one form of community support. Are they critical? The Youth Committee of the Lilly Endowment suggests that they are:

Youth development ought not be viewed as a happenstance matter. While children can, and often do, make the best of difficult circumstances, they cannot be sustained and helped to grow by chance arrangements or makeshift events. Something far more intentional is required: a place, a league, a form of association, a gathering of people where value is placed on continuity, predictability, history, tradition, and a chance to test out new behaviors. (p.3)

Interestingly, the recent work on middle grades reform, while school focused, gives one of the strongest endorsements for community programs. Youth-serving organizations are much closer to realizing the vision set forth by middle grades reformists than are schools. Epstein, in a thought-provoking article on building effective students, introduces the idea of TARGET structures -- tasks, authority, rewards, grouping, evaluations, and time. She argues that the content, difficulty, interdependence and sequencing of tasks can be varied to make learning enjoyable; that student participation in planning and decision-making; that more and varied systems of reward should be developed so that student progress is adequately recognized and student enthusiasm encouraged rather than drained; that students should be grouped flexibly and heterogeneously; that standards for evaluation are set that give students insight into their own effort, abilities; that connections be made between time and task.

These themes came through very clearly in both the content and practice analyses of the programs of youth-serving organizations presented earlier. Flexibility, decision-making, leadership skills, teamwork, structured paths for achievement, were all themes that emerged repeatedly from the published literature of youth-serving organizations. Equally important, they are themes that are carried out in practice.

Beyond the powerful arguments that the community setting is an important stage for adolescent development, there are also strong theoretical rationales for ensuring the availability of non-school, non-required programs and activities for youth. Larson and Kleiber (in process) present a thorough theoretical argument for elevating adolescent free time activities to the level of developmental importance attached to childhood play. They argue:

...[free time] activities provide important opportunities for the development of self-direction, self-expression, and motivated involvement. Free time activities such as socializing, sport, playing a musical instrument, or even in some cases, deviant activities provide a transitional link between the spontaneous play of childhood and the more disciplined activities of adulthood (p.3).

The authors argue that it is only in activities that are found enjoyable, seen as challenging and seen as voluntary, that young people get the opportunity to set personal goals and assess their own progress in relation to personal standards. These "transitional activities" as they call them, are rarely found in families, schools, or the work setting. Community programs are one of the chief places where young people have these opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that youth-serving organizations have the design and expertise that will enable them to play a much more active role in assuring that the needs of all youth are met through positive youth

development. To effectively do this, we recommend that youth serving organizations focus on the following areas:

- Within and Cross-Sector Collaboration: Youth-serving organizations need to make a concerted effort to work more collaboratively with each other and with other organizations, (especially those in the public sector) to 1) draw national attention to positive youth development and the needs that these organizations have been attempting to meet for years 2) develop common goals and strategies and 3) ensure that programs complement rather than duplicate or compete against each other.
- Broad Programs and Services: Youth-serving organizations need to increase their efforts to recognize the full range of youth's needs, thus looking beyond the area of responsibility they have traditionally assumed. Youth have a variety of needs, and comprehensive strategies that address the whole adolescent are more likely to succeed than isolated attempts to meet unmet needs.
- Outreach to Low-Income and Minority Youth: Youth-serving organizations need to make a much more systematic effort to reach low income and minority youth. These youth are most at risk and have the greatest needs. It is important for youth-serving agencies to seize the chance to meet these needs through the opportunities they provide youth, the relationships that staff can form to provide guidance and support and the specific problem interventions they can offer.

Traditional youth-serving, community, civic and religious organizations found in communities - offer programming and supports that *fill gaps*. They engage children and youth when they are *not* in school. They offer them opportunities to learn and develop skills that are *not* solely academic and to learn in ways that are *not* formal and they involve them with young people *not* in their age group and with adults who often are *not* paid professionals. They also offer them opportunities *not* to be judged by past failures. They give them places to be that are *not* family and *not* school.

Clearly, there is a general public sense that the programs and supports offered by this sector are *beneficial* to adolescents -- donations to and involvement in these organizations remain high. Groups such as the Scouts, 4-H, the YWCA and YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, reach an estimated 30 million children and youth annually. The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 found that 71 percent of eighth graders participate in some type of organized outside-of-school activities.

There is not, however, a strong public sense that the programs and supports offered by this sector are *necessary*. There is no broad sentiment that the non-formal, non-academic, non-employment experiences, opportunities and skills provided by these organizations are as critical to adult success as is education. Nor is there agreement that this sector, or more generally, the community, is as critical to youth development as is family or school. In part, this is because there is not, among those outside of the youth development "field," a clear sense of whether and why these particular non-

formal, non-academic functions 1) are not being performed by families, or 2) cannot be performed by schools.

Equally important, there is little compelling argument being presented by or to policymakers to suggest that either improving these non-academic programs or strengthening the non-school voluntary sector should be seen as an effective strategy for addressing the needs of the population of young people who have been designated "high risk." And there is concern, particularly among minority groups, about the potential effectiveness of national youth-serving organizations in reaching and serving high-risk youth. Without a clear definition of youth development, discussion of the role community programs play, and evidence that participation in these programs affects youth outcomes, it will be difficult to enhance or sustain the role of community youth programs.

Figure 1.

THE TWO COMPONENTS OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

COMPETENCIES

The five basic competency areas which define the range of behaviors and skills needed for adult success are:

health/physical competence: good current health status plus evidence of appropriate knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that will ensure future health (e.g. exercise, good diet/nutrition, effective contraceptive practices)

personal/social competence: intrapersonal skills (ability to understand personal emotions, have self-discipline); interpersonal skills (ability to work with others, develop friendships and relationships through communication, cooperation, empathizing, negotiating); coping/system skills (ability to adapt, be flexible, assume responsibility); judgement skills (ability to plan, evaluate, make decisions, solve problems)

cognitive/creative competence: broad base of knowledge, ability to appreciate and participate in areas of creative expression; good oral, written language skills, problem-solving and analytical skills, ability to learn/interest in learning and achieving

vocational competence: broad understanding/awareness of vocational and (and avocational) options and of steps needed to act on choices; adequate preparation for chosen career, understanding of value and function of work (and leisure)

citizenship (ethics and participation): understanding the history and values of one's nation and community and the desire to be involved in efforts that contribute to the nation and community.

NEEDS

There are six basic human needs that are fundamental for survival and healthy development:

- a sense of safety and structure
- a sense of belonging/group membership;
- a sense of self-worth/contributing;
- a sense of independence/control over one's life;
- a sense of closeness/relationships;
- a sense of competence/mastery.

Figure 2.

A Framework for Mapping Youth Development Agents

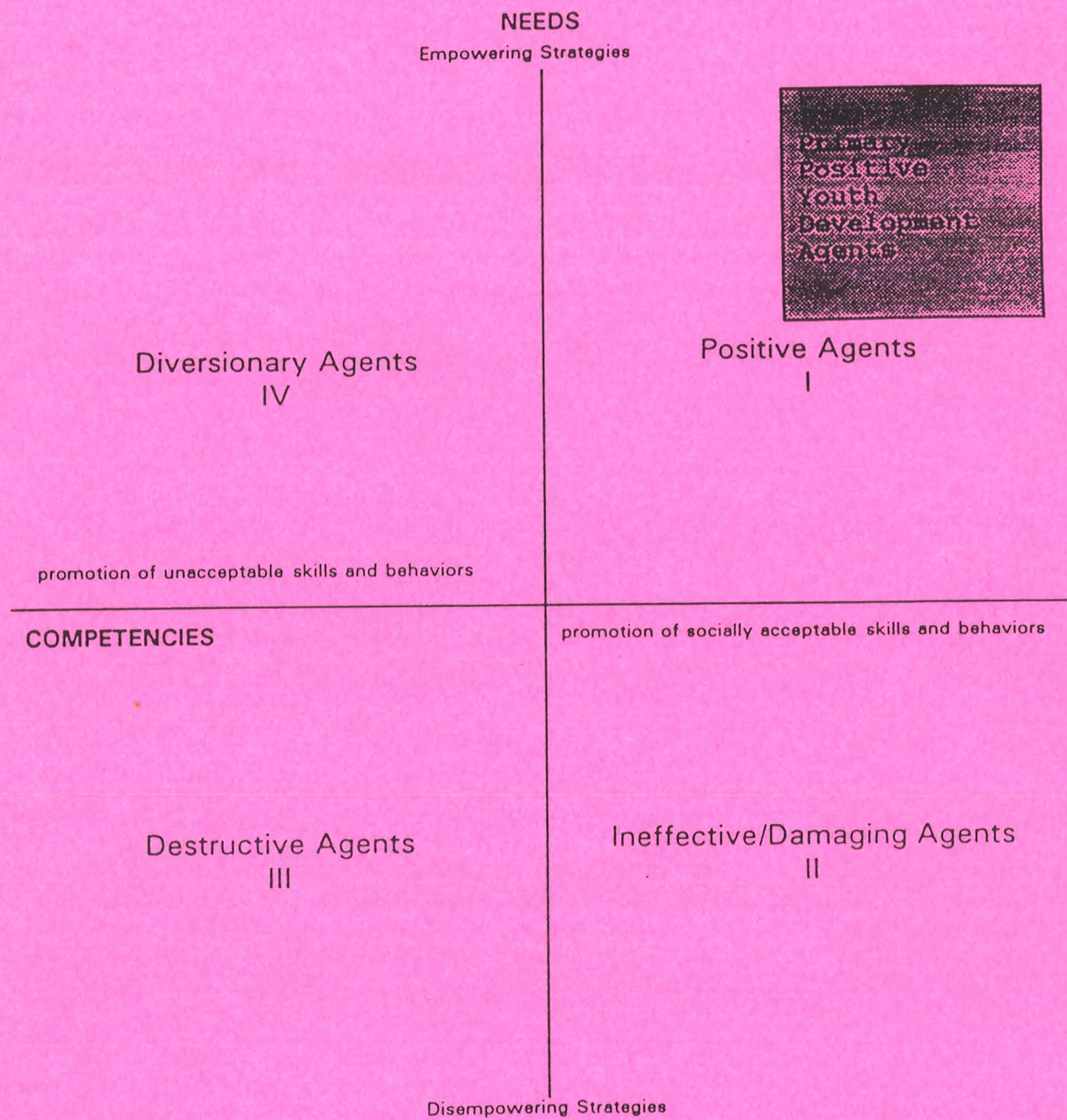


Figure 3. Programs Offered by National (NYSO) and Community Based (CBO) Youth Serving Organizations by Competency Areas

Health/Physical	Personal/Social	Creative/Cognitive	Vocational	Citizenship Ethics	Participation
NYSO					
-sports -recreation health education -prevention of high-risk behaviors -nutrition	-self-reliance -safety -peer tutoring counseling -life/social skills -social* services -delinquency* prevention	-science, math, technology & computer education -arts exposure participation -outdoors & nature education	-career education	-ethics & values education	-community service
CBO					
-sports -recreation -health education -prevention of high-risk behaviors -health care services -family planning	-peer tutoring* -counseling -case management -survival skills -social services -delinquency prevention -parenting education -referral services -parental/family support -crisis intervention	-academic enrichment -homework & tutoring -computer education* -drop-out prevention -culture and history -field trips	-job training & placement	-culture & history	-community service

Program Practices of National and Community Based Youth Serving Organizations by Youth Needs*

BASIC HUMAN NEEDS						ADOLESCENT NEEDS
Safety/ Structure	Belonging/ Group Membership	Self-worth/ Contributing	Independence/ Control Over Life	Closeness/ Relationships	Competence/ Mastery	Diverse Opportunities/ Exploration
-safe environment -structure -age appropriate activities -regular meetings -codes of conduct	-small groups -flexibility grouping -uniforms/ symbols of membership -recognize ethnic & cultural diversity	-peer tutoring -active participation -project presentations	-decision making	-youth/adult partnerships -role models -family & community involvement	-progression -achievement -accomplishment -rewards	-flexibility -range of experiences -informal education -hands on experience learning

*Programs are offered by a minority of the organizations reviewed.

Figure 4. FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE 'AT RISK' BEHAVIOR¹

PROTECTIVE FACTORS/ASSETS	RISK FACTORS/DEFICITS
INDIVIDUAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -problem solving skills intellectual ability -self-esteem, self efficacy, personal responsibility -social/interpersonal skills -religious commitment, involvement in church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -anti-social behavior hyperactivity -rebelliousness -social isolation -stress -hedonistic values -TV overexposure
FAMILY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -close relationship with at least one person -family support -parent as social resource -parent communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -poor parental monitoring -distant, uninvolved, inconsistent parenting -unclear family rules, expectations, rewards -at home alone
PEER	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -a close friend -positive peer influences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -association with peers engaged in similar behaviors -negative peer pressure
SCHOOL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -achievement motivation -educational aspirations -school performance -homework -positive school climate -involved in school extra-curricular activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -school transition -academic failure -low commitment to school -absenteeism -desire to drop out
WORK	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -required helpfulness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -long work hours
COMMUNITY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -belonging to a supportive community -bonding to family, school, other social institutions -other adult resources and communication -involved in community organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -low socio-economic status -complacent/permissive laws and norms -low neighborhood attachment, community disorganization, high mobility -media influences

¹ Factors listed are drawn from Benson (1990) and Bogenschneider et al. (1990)

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YOUTH AT RISK

Reprint of Part II of a Special Twelve-Month Series

During the next 12 months YPI will publish in this special section a wide variety of articles that address youth at risk issues from a youth development point of view. We will feature work that is occurring nationally among the major youth development organizations, and will publish articles that suggest new opportunities for local collaboration.

Youth-Serving Organizations Have Much of What Youth Need

By Karen Pittman and Ray O'Brien
Children's Defense Fund

Adolescence, the transition from childhood to adulthood, is often accompanied by risk-taking, limit-testing, and challenges to adult conventions. Within limits, adults have always expected and even encouraged teenagers to "sow their wild oats," assuming that most of the teen behaviors that emerge during these years are both short-term and fundamentally harmless—a transitional phase ending when youths step across the threshold into adulthood.

But recent years have seen a growing concern about youth problems as either the real or perceived consequences of many adolescent behaviors are realized. This growing concern has been sparked to some extent by the recognition that the fact that there are growing numbers of youth at risk means a society at risk of skilled labor shortages. Youth represent a declining proportion of the American population and by the year 2000, 1 in 3 of these young people will be minority—the youths who typically have gotten the least training and have the poorest credentials. As researchers, journalists, service providers, and policy-makers have taken a closer look at our society's ability to produce youth capable of meeting our future needs, several facts have been repeatedly raised:

a. Too many youths are engaging in risk-taking behaviors (like drugs and sex) that have increasingly serious consequences (like addiction and AIDS), and, while the numbers are still small, too many youths are engaging in or being exposed to these behaviors at earlier ages.

b. Too many youths are not progressing through the traditional steps that mark the transition from adolescence to adulthood (school completion, employment, marriage, parenthood); more specifically, high school dropout and unemployment rates remain high, and teen pregnancy, particularly among unmarried adolescents, remains a

problem. In large part, youths are failing at higher rates because society has "upped the ante"—for example, a high school diploma is now the minimum credential needed for employment, and full-time employment does not guarantee wages that can support a family.

c. Too many youths are "high-risk" because they have multiple unmet needs. They are at risk for the reasons mentioned above—they are engaging in risk-taking behaviors, they are not progressing through the traditional steps from adolescence to adulthood quickly or in the prescribed order (for example, having children before marrying or finding employment; or trying to find employment with inadequate educational credentials and skills). It is becoming clear that they are growing up in families with inadequate supports.

d. A disproportionate number of poor and minority youth, the very groups of young people our society will be depending upon in the future, comprise this high-risk group of youth with multiple unmet needs.

Whether the focus is on the extreme problems encountered by today's youth, or on the consequences of these youth for broader society, the central question being asked by all involved is the same. What are the solutions to the problems facing today's youth, and how can we make strides in reducing the number of adolescents at risk of not successfully completing the transition to adulthood and developing into healthy, self-sufficient members of society?

We are convinced that whether the concern is early pregnancy, substance abuse, delinquency, or dropping out, we will not make substantial progress in addressing these problems unless we place as much attention on positive youth development strategies as we do on problem prevention and intervention strategies (such as contracep-

tive services, dropout prevention, and substance abuse education and recovery programs). As discussed above, most of the recent concern in youth has been focused on the problems they confront, as opposed to the most basic reasons for the persistence of these problems. We should be asking what it is that our youth need in order to develop into responsible, self-sufficient adults, not merely what we can do to prevent adolescent pregnancy or school dropout. Preventing negative outcomes is not enough to ensure that our youth are ready to assume the responsibility that will confront them in adulthood. We need to make sure that the void created by the prevention of these negative outcomes is filled with positive developmental experiences.

Meeting the needs of youth must be at the core of any positive youth development strategy. We argue that six essential needs must be met if youth are to successfully complete the transition to adulthood:

- Academic Education—youth need to develop solid academic skills (the ability to read, write, and perform basic mathematical functions), sound decisionmaking and

problem-solving skills, and a good knowledge base.

- Health Care—youth need assistance in getting healthy, staying healthy, and avoiding prevalent health-related risks in adolescence such as pregnancy, substance abuse, depression, and stress.

- Work Exposure and Experiences—youth need to identify and build work-related skills and get exposure to a wide range of work experiences, both on the job and through contact with adults.

- Opportunities for Personal Growth and Social Development—youth need experiences that will help them strengthen their self-esteem and life skills; they need productive recreation, and structured activities designed to foster the development of leadership skills.

- Community Involvement and Contact with Adults—youth need to develop a sense of connection with the community, and to understand how it functions and how it can be changed; they need to interact with those beyond their peer group, including adults and older youth.

- Family Support Services—youth need to live in

Preparing Youths For Adulthood

	EDUCATION	HEALTH	WORK	SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY/AWARENESS	PERSONAL GROWTH
Information/ Decisionmaking Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -basic skills (verbal, writing . . .) -basic knowledge -problem-solving skills -learning skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -education, understanding growth, development, and health risks -value of regular health care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -understanding function and value of work -developing healthy work attitudes -exposure to variety of work environments, jobs, and adult workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -understanding of individual's role in society and societal change -cultural awareness -social awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -development of self-identity, self-discipline, interpersonal skills, and coping strategies
Assessment/ Guidance/Referral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -monitoring progress -assessing special educational needs -helping with school choices -curriculum/class choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -identification of problem/need -assessment/ screening -counseling -locating affordable and appropriate health resources -understanding health systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -defining criteria for choosing job/ assessing interests, skills, and goals -making job preparation plans -job search assistance -college choice assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -identification of antisocial behavior -recognition of socially responsible behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -assessment of talent, interests, potential -mental health screening
Direct Supports/ Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -formal instruction -informal instruction -homework assistance -tutoring -remedial instruction -special/alternative instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -preventive health care -general exams -mental health services -medical treatment for illness or injury -therapy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -post-secondary education -vocational training -on the job training/work experience -part-time work and summer employment -volunteer/paid jobs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -counseling/group homes -community group membership -community volunteer services -leadership opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -counseling (indiv., family, group) -developmental education (sexuality, family life, relationships) -non-academic opportunities for success
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -high school diploma/basic competencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -good health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -community involvement/ citizenship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -strong positive self concept

Youth At Risk

families with adequate supports, ranging from services for fairly well-functioning families to keep them functioning well, to the provision of crisis services for families in need.

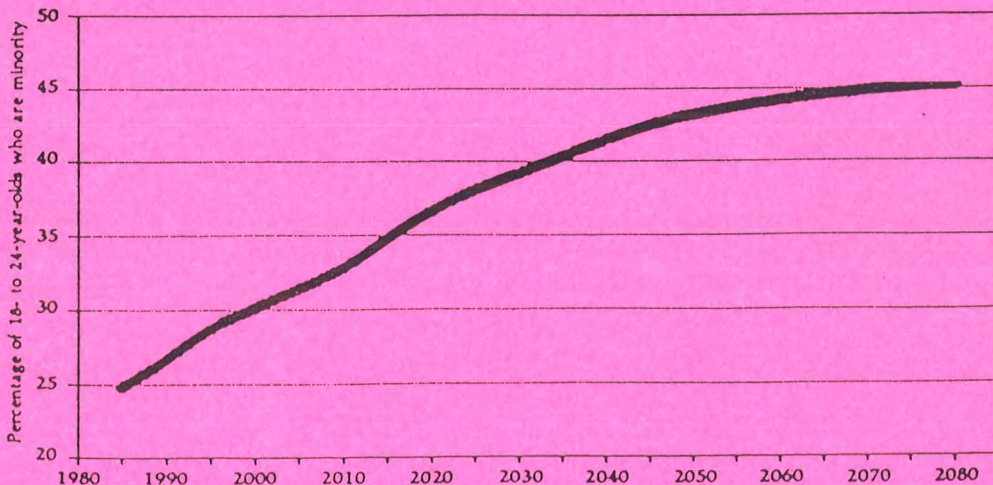
The connection between the first three of these needs—education, health care, and employment—and youths' successful transition to adulthood is generally acknowledged. Systems are in place to meet these needs. But as was mentioned earlier, considerably more emphasis must be placed on promoting the fulfillment of the need, and considerably less emphasis placed on temporarily patching systems that many acknowledge are poorly designed to meet that need. Larger reforms do appear to be on the horizon. Evidence to this claim can be found in the recent interest on both the federal and state levels in educational reform and school restructuring. Further, the Grant Commission's research on non-college bound youth represents an attempt to assess the degree to which the current systems in place are capable of meeting the needs of a large group of our young people.

It is the last three needs—opportunities for personal growth and social development, community involvement and contact with adults, and family support services—that are of particular concern to us for several reasons. First, for

most policy-makers, the connection between these needs and successful transition to adulthood is not as clear as it is for the first three needs. Too often, it is recreation, counseling, after-school, and related programs which are first to be cut in times of fiscal constraint. In this sense, the importance of these needs is "hidden," and therefore efforts to meet these needs receive far less public support.

More important, however, are demographic and societal changes which affect the degree to which these needs are met. Unlike education, health care, and employment, there are no formal public systems in place to meet these hidden needs. Rather, they have traditionally been met informally by family and community. Changing family roles, however, have resulted in fewer adult family members available to provide for adolescent needs. With smaller families, the majority of women in the labor force, and more single-parent families, Americans are having to depend more on the outside procurement of services to provide for needs that used to be met informally by the family. Parents of middle-class youths are buying services in the form of after-school care, counseling and therapy, tutoring, and youth development activities that provide adult guidance and support to adolescents. And since parents of poor children cannot afford to purchase these

Minorities in the Young Work Force



Year	1985	1990	1995	2000	2010	2020	2030	2050	2080
Percent	24.8%	26.7%	28.7%	30.1%	32.8%	36.6%	39.2%	43.2%	45.2%

- Nearly one-third of the nation's 18- to 24-year-olds will be minorities in 2000, compared with less than one-quarter in 1985
- There will be 26 percent fewer white, non-Hispanic 18- to 24-year-olds in the year 2030 than there were in 1985.

Source: Based on Census Bureau projections.

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services, the children with the greatest need for the provision of services outside of the family are not having their needs met.

Our society has systematically downplayed, undervalued, and underfunded programs and services that address adolescents' broader developmental needs. We are now facing a time when our overall success at producing healthy, self-sufficient citizens hinges on taking these needs and the informal services and programs designed to meet them much more seriously. It is not just the fact that these needs are going unmet for large numbers of youth that makes them (and positive youth development efforts to meet them) important. Rather, it is also the fact that there is a synergistic relationship between the hidden needs and the more commonly supported needs. For instance, healthy youth perform better in school, and youth with opportunities to apply what they have learned in school learn better and want to learn more. Comprehensive strategies which take into consideration all the complex needs of adolescents—including comprehensive school-based clinics, and promising statewide initiatives like the New Jersey-based Youth Service Program—have demonstrated the success that can be achieved if the interconnectedness between the multiple needs of youths is recognized.

Once these needs have been recognized, and once energy is shifted from problem-focused prevention and intervention to positive youth development, the challenge that remains is to develop effective programs and strategies designed to meet these needs. The difficulty in meeting this challenge will be in devising ways to actually bring this about at the local level. At a minimum, two things must happen. First, service providers must attempt to meet youths' needs in as overlapping a way as possible, whether

by providing individual programs which focus on more than one need, by offering a range of specific programs that are more limited in focus, and/or by providing linkages with other providers who are offering complementary services. Second, supports must exist in all four sectors of society—family, community, public institutions, and private organizations. There must be both a strengthening of capacity in the four main sectors and a much improved commitment to collaboration between sectors.

To truly make a difference for youths with multiple needs, however, we must go beyond addressing the full array of needs through the coordination of multiple programs and services. We are convinced that, in the end, each youth must have access to and be firmly connected to a place and cadre of people that:

- are oriented toward the "whole adolescent" rather than a particular problem;
- are available year-round and open long hours (including before school, after school, weekends, and holidays);
- provide multiple entry points by offering an array of activities and services—remedial, crisis and enrichment;
- attract a wide age group, providing youths with exposure to people of various ages;
- allow for long-term membership and continuity (e.g., youth do not have to leave after 18 months or when they are 15);
- provide both role models for youth and opportunities for youth leadership;
- have the capacity to monitor youths' needs and do outreach and case management; and
- have the system knowledge to refer to other providers and the system clout to broker for services.

Children and Young Adults Are Becoming Scarce Resources

Year	Total population (thousands)	Population under age 18 (thousands)	Percent of total population	Population 18-24 years (thousands)	Percent of total population
1985	238,631	62,838	26%	28,739	12%
1995	259,559	67,133	26%	23,702	9%
2000	267,955	67,389	25%	24,601	9%
2030	304,807	65,866	22%	26,226	9%

- The nation's young work force is shrinking. By 1995 there will be 5 million fewer 18- to 24-year-olds than there were in 1985.
- Although the actual number of children under age 18 will increase until the year 2000, the percentage of the population that is under 18 is decreasing. After 2000 the total number of children will begin decreasing as well.

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These central places or points of contact do not have to provide the full array of services required to meet youths needs. They do, however, have to assess needs, monitor progress, and broker for services.

It is probably obvious that this place can be, and for many youth is, the family. And all-out efforts should be made to strengthen families' capacity to fulfill these functions. But given the changing role that the family is playing in the lives of our young people, there are youth who will need a secondary place (or small set of places) to fulfill these functions. These are the youth who are most at risk. And additionally, an argument can be made that all adolescents need, in addition to their families, a place to go and a group of peers and caring adults with whom they can spend time. This environment provides them with a safe alternate testing ground as they complete their development through adolescence.

A New Challenge for Youth Serving Agencies

There is a tremendous need for all institutions who work with youth to step up their efforts to address the unmet need that place American youth "at risk." Clearly the burden of this overwhelming challenge should not rest on the shoulders of any one sector of society, or any one type of organization. But in this challenge rests a tremendous opportunity for youth serving organizations to translate their expertise in working with youth in voluntary settings into strategies for meeting these needs and to take the lead in a variety of areas.

The following points about youth serving agencies not only further explain this expertise, but also suggest that it is only natural for these organizations to lead the way in this endeavor.

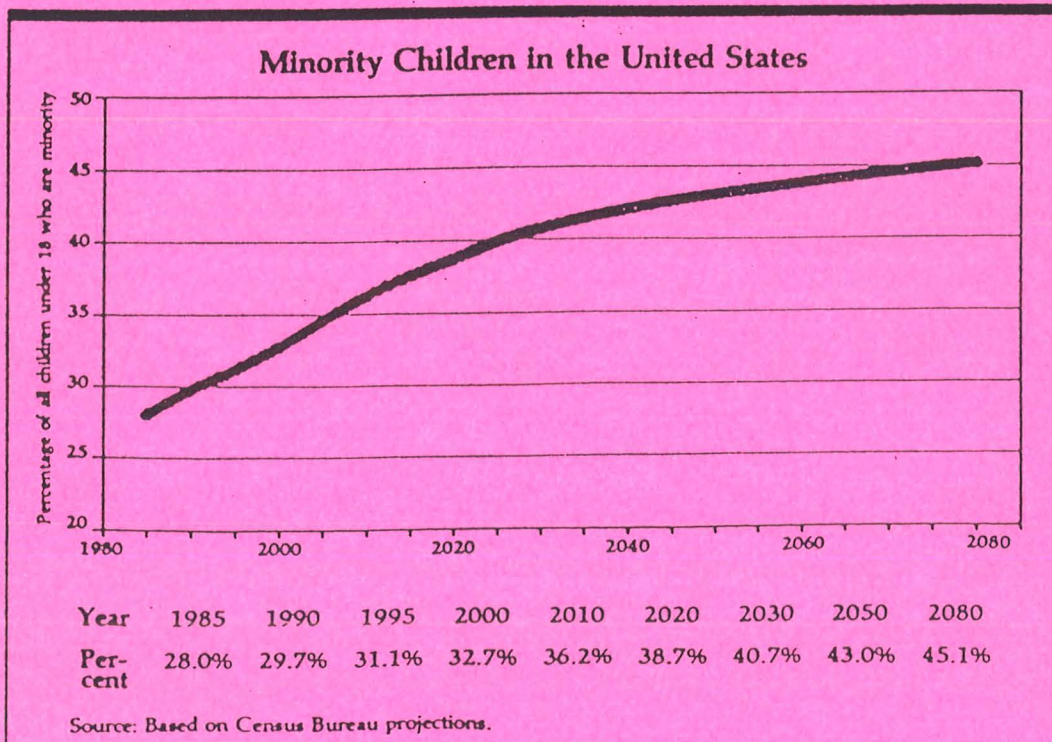
1) Youth serving organizations have long understood the importance of the "hidden" needs and have, in fact, made them central to their mission.

2) Youth serving organizations have a rich history of working in communities, organizing volunteers to work with youth, and organizing youth to volunteer in their communities.

3) Youth serving organizations, because of their informal structure and the priority which many place on the development of personal relationships with youth, have been the central place—or at least the central point of contact for non-facility based organizations—for many youth. They have provided an array of after-school, weekend and summer activities; opportunities for working with adults and children of other ages; safe places to "hang out"; role models; and a variety of additional services.

4) Youth serving organizations have a long history of providing opportunities for the development of youth leadership skills through a wide variety of activities and experiences that encourage and foster these skills.

5) Youth serving organizations have, in recent years, improved their program development capacity as they have recognized the need to deal with some of the issues that place youth at risk.



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Thus it is clear that youth-serving organizations have the design and expertise that will enable them to play a much more active role in assuring that the needs of all youth are met through positive youth development. In fact, some youth-serving organizations have been moving in this direction of late, recognizing that if we are to truly make a difference for American youth, we cannot continue to function in a "business as usual" manner. In light of the dramatically changing demographics, all institutions and organizations serving and working with youth need to reevaluate their goals, as well as to reassess their roles in the development of adolescents. Traditional youth-serving organizations are no exception.

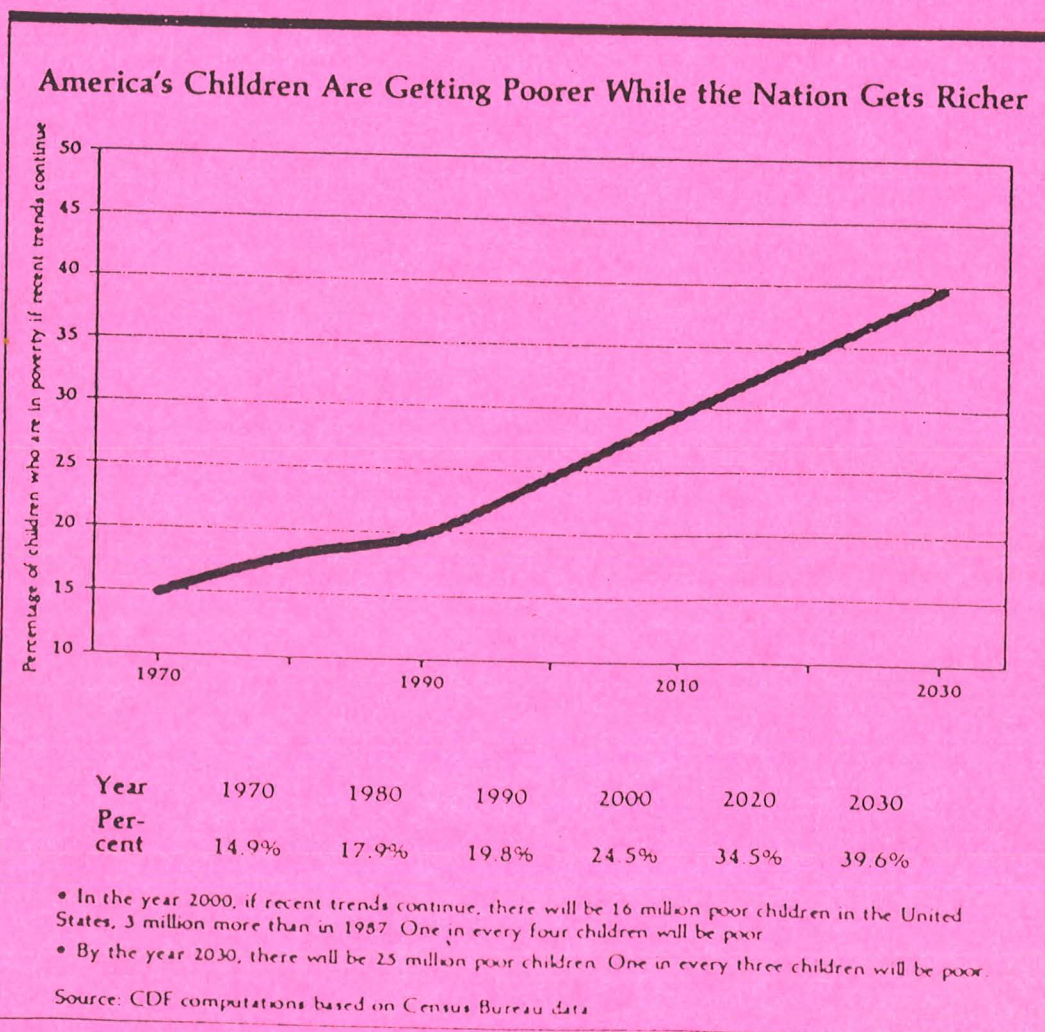
To effectively take the lead in assuring that the needs of today's youth are met, we recommend that youth-serving organizations focus on the following four areas:

1) Youth-serving organizations need to make a concerted effort to work more collaboratively with each other. This collaboration, in turn, will have implications in four areas:

- Elevation of positive youth development: Through a

collaborative effort, youth serving agencies can succeed in drawing national attention to positive youth development and the hidden needs that these organizations have been attempting to meet for years.

- Development of common goals and strategies: It is important for youth-serving organizations to come together and realize that their commonalities are much more important than any differences could ever be. What we are arguing for here is the coalescence of the groups to the degree that a "field" or "entity" will be developed—a youth-serving organization field with a clear responsibility for striving to promote positive youth development. Perhaps a first step in this process would be an agreement between organizations to document what they do to try to promote positive youth development. For example, the Children's Defense Fund has recently begun to take a look at recreation and related programs, activities, and facilities for youth. Given that this area has been one of the primary focuses of youth-serving organizations, it is surprising that common definitions and goals do not appear to exist, and that few comprehensive studies of this field have been



undertaken.

- **Public Education:** Given the extensive affiliate networks and captive audience of youth serving organizations, collaboration between these groups provides a unique opportunity for educating the public about all of the needs of youth at risk.

- **Programming:** Better collaboration can ensure that youth-serving organizations are not duplicating programs or competing with each other, but rather are offering programs which complement each other.

2) There needs to be much more collaboration between youth-serving organizations and other organizations, especially those in the public sector. In addition to schools, a great number of youth are already in place within such public structures as the juvenile justice and foster care systems, especially the youth who are most at-risk and therefore most in need of the youth development expertise of youth-serving organizations.

If youth-serving organizations are to work more closely with other organizations, they must begin quickly to move out of the volunteer mode of programming/service delivery, realizing that adolescents who are most in need may also be those least inclined to "drop-in." Furthermore, the need for increased assessment, monitoring, tracking, and reporting will be inescapable if these organizations are to become part of a collaborative approach to meeting the unmet needs of American youth.

At this point, a distinction should be made between collaboration at the national level and collaboration at the local level. In recent years, organizations have made great strides in coordinating at the national level. The work of the National Collaboration for Youth is a strong example of this. Although we are not arguing that all has been accomplished at the national level, the area of greater concern, for two reasons, is local collaboration.

First, it is at the local level that the gaps between services can be bridged through the collaborative efforts of youth-serving organizations and other organizations that work with youth. National organizations can develop creative, effective joint projects, but only individuals at the local level can accurately assess how these programs should be adapted to their community, and how each organization can complement the work of others. Second, it is precisely this type of collaboration that private funders and policy-makers alike support. Youth-serving organizations need to take advantage of this support at the local level, and in doing so can greatly increase their ability to make a difference for youth in their communities.

3) Youth-serving organizations need to increase their efforts to recognize all of the needs of adolescents, thus looking beyond the area of responsibility they have traditionally assumed. As was stressed earlier, youths have a variety of needs, and comprehensive strategies that address the whole adolescent will have much more success than isolated attempts to meet unmet needs. Is a youth-serving organization really looking out for the best interests of an adolescent if its staff does not concern itself with that child's needs beyond the scope of youth development (such as, for example, health care or education)?

An organization's response to these other needs falls along a continuum, with one end point of the continuum being awareness of the additional needs, and the other being structured programs that address the needs. At a minimum, youth-serving organizations must place themselves at the beginning of this continuum. And it will become increasingly important to move further along the continuum as the percentage of youth who are at-risk (and thus the percentage of youth-serving organization clients who are at risk) continues to grow.

4) Youth-serving organizations need to make a much more systematic effort to reach low income and minority youth, for it is these youths who are most at risk and have the greatest needs. For poor youth, and especially poor youth who live in relatively isolated communities, the two factors of family and economic change leave them especially vulnerable to not getting the kind of support and guidance needed by all young people. Therefore, it is important for youth-serving agencies to seize the chance to meet these needs through the opportunities they provide youngsters, the relationships that their staff form with youngsters for guidance and support, and the specific problem interventions they can offer.

It is clear to see, then, that youth-serving organizations are well equipped and perhaps the logical choice to take the lead in addressing the unmet hidden needs of American youth through the promotion of positive youth development. What should also be recognized, however, is the fact that there are real, compelling reasons for these organizations to actively pursue this role—that it is in fact in their own best interest as well as that of youth. The proportion of the youth population that are minority and poor (and therefore at greatest risk) continues to grow. The future of our society depends upon our ability to reach out to these children. And if youth-serving organizations hope to prosper in the future, they must develop effective strategies for working with youth at risk.

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