Colorado’s Positive Youth Development Movement

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Colorado’s PYD Movement

• Background
  • Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment’s adult and youth advisory boards wanted to shift the way we think about young people and focus on their strengths

• November 2007 – Creation of the Colorado Youth Development Team (CYDT); Youth and adults began with defining positive youth development
What is Positive Youth Development?

• PYD is an approach, not a program, that guides communities in the way they organize services, opportunities and supports so that young people are engaged and reach their full potential.

• It’s a shift in the way we work with youth. Namely, we must engage all youth as resources instead of seeing them as problems to fix.
“We need to focus on the positives, personal strength and skills to help kids overcome risky behaviors and not only focus on educating about the drawbacks of risky behaviors.”
~ Steamboat Springs Youth

“We have everything we need. We just need to develop a way to work together to collaborate, decrease duplication and utilize each of our community’s strengths.”
~ Arkansas Valley Youth-Serving Professional

“I’m hearing that we are waiting until they get into trouble. Why wait? Any services for the ‘not yet into trouble?’”
~ Colorado Springs Family Advocate
Colorado’s 7 PYD Principles

These are the principles that all communities, organizations, families and individuals should incorporate when working with, living with and even thinking about young people.

1) **Strengths-Based** – a focus on existing physical and mental health, education, social, vocational, creative, spiritual & civic assets to get to additional outcomes

2) **Youth Engagement** – youth are connected to themselves and positive peers, adults & communities

3) **Youth-Adult Partnerships** – youth work with adults to make decisions for program and policy planning, implementation & evaluation
Colorado’s 7 PYD Principles (cont’d)

4) **Culturally Responsive** – people recognize & respond proactively to variations in backgrounds/ cultures, including but not limited to ethnic, racial, linguistic, learning and physical abilities, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status and geographic location, to ensure inclusivity and equity.

5) **Inclusive of ALL youth** (not just youth in risky environments or exhibiting risky behaviors) regardless of the participant base for more targeted prevention, intervention and treatment programs.
Colorado’s 7 PYD Principles (cont’d)

6) **Collaboration** – private and public agencies; state and local; and the community, *including families*, work together to support youth

7) **Sustainability** – long-term planning through funding, capacity building, professional development and evaluation exist for ongoing support of youth
Colorado Youth Development Team

- A statewide partnership of youth, young adults & adults who work and/or care for young people

- **Vision**: Colorado is a state where all people value and pursue respect, communication and understanding between youth and adults to achieve a unified, healthy and engaged community, so that both adults and youth reach their full potential and lead healthy lives.

- **Mission**: To raise awareness, promote, increase and unify positive youth development efforts and strategies across the State of Colorado.
CYDT’s 5 Action Plan Objectives

All begin with, “In partnership with diverse youth”:

1. Develop a team of champions made up of youth and adults to develop and implement an action plan to address PYD in Colorado.

2. Conduct a statewide assessment to determine what supports are necessary and desired of the State and CYDT to increase PYD efforts across Colorado.

3. Promote positive youth development and incorporate its principles and strategies into state and local infrastructure, including policies, regulations, strategic plans and evaluation indicators.

4. Provide training and technical assistance on PYD to build capacity at the state and local levels

5. Identify and further develop sustainable funding streams to support PYD activities
Colorado Statewide PYD Assessment

- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment supported the research through Maternal Child Health funding

- Statewide Assessment
  1. Statewide Online Survey
  2. 13 Community Conversations
We are Walking the Talk!

- The entire assessment process has been guided by a small group of young people from Colorado’s Youth Partnership for Health, the youth advisory board for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

- They provided their insights and feedback from developing the research question, to analyzing the results and drafting the report.
Online Survey Highlights

- Comprised of 51 questions seeking information on how programs across Colorado are utilizing a positive youth development approach
- Electronically sent to 400 stakeholders across a variety of disciplines (education, public health, human services, afterschool programs, etc.)
- Received 348 completed surveys representing all 64 Colorado counties, including Ute Mountain Ute and Southern Ute Tribal communities!
Community Conversations

• Essential to hear the voices and stories behind the numbers in the survey.

• Held thirteen 2 ½ hour community meetings with 20-60 youth, parents, youth-serving professionals and other interested community members attended each meeting. (Youth and parents received gift cards for their time and travel expenses.)

• They were held in 12 areas across Colorado - Alamosa, Aurora*, Avon, Colorado Springs, Denver, Durango, Grand Junction, La Junta, Loveland, Pueblo, Steamboat Springs and Yuma.

* A second conversation was held in Aurora with parents who predominantly speak Spanish.
Locations of Community Conversations

- Steamboat Springs, Feb. 25
- Loveland, Feb. 19
- Yuma, Feb. 9
- Denver, Jan. 31
- Aurora, Jan. 29
- Grand Junction, Feb. 24
- Colorado Springs, Feb. 12
- Pueblo, Feb. 23
- Otero, March 11
- Durango, March 10
- Alamosa, Feb. 11
Community Conversations Outline

• What does positive youth development mean to you?
• How youth-friendly do you feel your community is?
• What are some of the strengths and innovative practices that are going on in your community to make it more youth-friendly? How is your community addressing the 7 PYD principles?
• What are some of the challenges or areas of improvement that your community needs to address to be more youth-friendly and address the 7 PYD principles?
• What can your community do to tackle these challenges?
• How can the state and the CYDT support your community in being more youth-friendly and addressing the 7 PYD principles?
• How can your community be part of the CYDT and continue this conversation in making Colorado more youth-friendly?
Findings from the Online Survey

- 84 youth advisory boards exist across Colorado
- 66% of direct service providers’ and 56% of resource providers’ organizations’ mission, vision, goals and strategies reflect their commitment to positive youth development.
- 38% of direct service providers are providing exposure to and discussion of diverse cultural perspectives “most of the time”
- 26% of resource providers and 22% of direct service providers engage youth in their planning and program development “most of the time”
Findings from the Community Conversations

• Innovative and exciting PYD efforts exist across Colorado
• The most powerful experiences for young people are the ones where they have some level of contribution and decision-making power
• Communities expressed that convening parents/caregivers, youth and youth-serving professionals was both unique and powerful.
• Youth-serving organizations desire support in engaging culturally diverse families and youth.
Recommendations for PYD Principle: Strengths-based approach

• Focus and build upon youth’s strengths, skills and protective factors, as opposed to educating mainly on the consequences of the risky behavior.

• Provide physically and emotionally safe spaces for youth, which includes a caring adult. Facilitate opportunities for young people to talk with one another about issues that concern them, including those that make them similar and different.

• Increase the use and development of evidence-based programs (best and promising) that incorporate positive youth development principles.
Recommendations for PYD Principles: Youth Engagement & Youth-Adult Partnerships

• Provide a diverse array of school and after-school programming to effectively reach out and engage all youth in learning, working, connecting, contributing and thriving.

• Utilize one of Colorado’s 84 youth advisory boards when making decisions that affect youth. ([www.healthyouthcolorado.org](http://www.healthyouthcolorado.org))

• Create meaningful opportunities and spaces for diverse youth to contribute as equal partners in decision-making processes in organizations and the community.
Recommendations for PYD Principles: Cultural Responsiveness & Inclusive of ALL Youth

- Think of diversity broadly – developmental & mental abilities, sexual & gender identification, various living situations
- Create opportunities to build relationships across cultural divides
- Refraining from labeling youth as “at-risk”
- Increasing accessibility to youth programming for youth with disabilities & youth who live in rural & frontier communities
Recommendations for PYD Principle: Collaboration

- Coordinate programs & services to make resources more accessible to youth & families as well as to leverage resources.
- Collaborate with parents & families in the development & implementation of youth programs & policies.
- Expand the traditional school day by partnering with community organizations that can provide before/after school programming on campus.
Recommendations for PYD Principle: Sustainability

- Develop policies, procedures & practices that ensure a PYD approach
- Incorporate PYD into grant applications and funding guidance
- Create line items that support PYD
- Participate in & offer training and technical assistance opportunities
- Incorporate PYD into existing trainings & handbooks
Following the Assessment and Report:

• Followed up the conversations with individualized trainings in each area.

• Hosted 4 regional learning circles.

• Incorporated PYD language into the Prevention Leadership Council’s State Plan for Prevention, Intervention and Treatment Services for Children and Youth AND the common Request for Application/Proposal.

• Developed reliable and valid process and outcome PYD evaluation tools.

• Youth developed a video to explain PYD and CYDT to other youth and stakeholders (including legislators!)
Next Steps for PYD in Colorado

• Encourage stakeholders to utilize the report, recommendations and tools available online.

• Continue to host quarterly learning community meetings.

• Hiring a Youth Health Specialist who will provide consultation and technical assistance on PYD.

• Incorporate PYD questions into our youth surveillance system.

• Continue to “walk the talk” (i.e. Tier 1 funding)
Challenges:

• Working with youth takes more time and energy – but it is SO worth it!

• Balancing the needs of each community, agency and organization was tough.

• The nature of government systems creates challenges (e.g. getting a report out in a timely fashion.)
A full report, executive summary and other PYD tools are available at www.healthyouthcolorado.org

For questions or more information, please contact:

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