

Positive Youth Development

through the budget and policies

The value of and need for a positive youth development approach in the District of Columbia

The District must adopt and wholly embrace a positive youth development approach to serving children and youth especially as the city plans to address the spate of violence against youth and youth crime. The government must take the lead and embed positive youth development strategies in each District government agency. Youth violence is a symptom of a broader crisis: our failure to fully support and engage young people in their own development. Dramatic reductions in youth violence can only be achieved by transforming the experiences of whole communities, of young people and their families. The reality is that when young people seek to walk away from violence, they need positive opportunities to turn to.

Central to the framework of *positive youth development* are the core principles of:

- challenging youth to reach their full potential
- providing youth with opportunities to make and implement decisions
- providing environments in which young people can further develop their social, civic, cognitive, and emotional competencies
- ensuring that necessary services and supports are available to young people
- engaging the whole community
- ensuring that youth are engaged by caring and supportive adults

A structured and high profile youth violence prevention effort should be nested in this framework.

In addition to more specialized services, core elements of a positive youth development approach should include:

- providing out-of-school time programs that meet the needs of young people
- developing standards and definitions for services
- youth development training for all staff in public and private youth-serving agencies including schools
- using school facilities as central locations for youth services

Prevention and intervention efforts need to be targeted, extremely well coordinated and implemented with a sense of great urgency because youth violence is a public health issue.

A new approach to serving young people will require the programs and services serving children and youth to re-group and think and act differently. This new approach would provide a continuum of services and intervention intensities that meet children and youth where they are physically and emotionally. It necessitates a level of cooperation and collaboration that is by and large unprecedented in the District. Fundamental to this thinking and acting differently is the necessity of the government to implement strategies that capitalize on the proven strengths and capabilities of partners -- in and outside of government. Toward this end, we support an effort that

1. is asset-based
2. is evidence- and not just research-based
3. takes advantage of the wealth of resources and good work that is currently taking place in the District of Columbia before new programs are funded that have limited additional value
4. includes the whole of the community, especially business and higher education
5. includes an investment in evaluation and assessment
6. is strategic
7. involves cross-cutting and interdisciplinary strategies that blend funding to create flexible resources

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