



THE EXCHANGE

News from FYSB and the Youth Services Field

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THINKING POSITIVELY: FYSB GRANTEES PROMOTE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN EXEMPLARY WAYS

Nineteen-year-old Nathalie* admits that she felt skeptical when she first joined the board of directors of Oasis Center, the Nashville youth-serving agency in whose transitional living program she resides. She thought that she and the two other young people serving on the board this year would just be “show and tell.”



Positive Youth Development creates strong bonds between young people at Valley Youth House.

But several months into her tenure, Nathalie changed her mind. “The board really wants to listen to us,” she says. The young woman who landed in Oasis Center’s transitional living program in February 2004, after 5 months without a home, now counts herself among the first to make a donation to the center’s capital fundraising campaign.

Nathalie’s work on the board has given her opportunities to master communications skills, contribute to the health of an organization she loves, deepen her sense of belonging to the Oasis community, make connections with caring adults, and exert control over her future, as well as over the future of the organization. (Read Nathalie’s story on page 2.) Her experience exemplifies how the Positive Youth Development approach can put at-risk youth on the road to a successful adulthood. Her story also highlights the important contributions youth-serving organizations are making toward promoting youth development.

“[Positive Youth Development] has to be part of the organizational culture,” says Bob Robertson, executive vice president of Valley Youth House, a youth and family services agency in Allentown, Pennsylvania. “It has to be who you are.”

Opportunities for Success

The Positive Youth Development approach promoted by the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) suggests that helping young people to achieve their full potential is the best way to prevent them from engaging in risky behaviors. When youth have the chance to exercise leadership, build skills, and get involved in their communities, they gain self-confidence, trust, and practical knowledge that helps them grow into healthy, happy, self-sufficient adults.

* All names of clients of youth service programs have been changed in this publication.

Nathalie: Pedaling Forward

In Nathalie's life, things always seemed to go wrong.

Weeks before her 18th birthday, she and her mother had an argument that ended in violence.



Members of Nathalie's church sheltered her for 4 months, passing her from family to family. Then she moved in with one of her teachers, who told her about Oasis Center's transitional living program (see page 7).

At Oasis, things started to go right. Living there, she says, is a little like learning to ride a bike. "There's always that person to support you when you fall ... like Dad's holding the handlebars," she says. And if she falls, she says, someone always urges her on with "Get back up there and go again."

Last summer, Nathalie worked for the TenneSenior Service Corps, an AmeriCorps program based at Vanderbilt University's Center for Health Services, running health fairs for senior citizens. She racked up 300 hours of service. She's also one of three young people on Oasis Center's board of directors; together, the three youth directors have worked on a fundraising brochure for the center.

"It's so awesome to be able to see myself help others," Nathalie says. In fact, it takes effort to hold herself back. Sometimes she thinks, "If I dropped out and did my GED, I'd be running wild helping people." But Oasis Center staff convinced her to stick with high school. She'll graduate in May 2005, and then she'll be off to Sullivan University in Louisville, Kentucky, to study culinary arts.

Her time at Oasis has helped her to see that things may continue to go her way, and she's not alone in learning positive lessons at the center. "I don't think I've seen anyone who's left here who hasn't been touched by this place," she says.

"Youth development is about providing meaningful opportunities for success. The more successful an experience [youth] have, the more likely they'll be successful," Robertson says.

Some ways that FYSB grantees have made opportunities for success available to youth include inviting them to join the organization's board of directors, giving residents of runaway and homeless youth programs a say in their own bedtime or curfew, and employing young people as peer advisors and educators.

Staff at these youth-serving organizations work hard to give youth many chances for positive development. They believe youth in challenging circumstances can succeed if they have access to such opportunities, along with services and the support of caring adults.

The youth workers also encourage an affirming attitude toward young people, their potential, and their abilities. As a result, youth have a say in determining what they need—for themselves, from the organization, and from their community. Michael McSurdy, associate executive director of Oasis Center, says adults at his organization never talk about what young people need without young people present.

Youth at some grantee organizations sit on youth boards at local grant-making institutions, where they help decide which projects and groups will get grant funding. Other grantees' youth are actively advocating for a larger say in local or State government by creating or serving on youth advisory councils, playing a role in community planning,

and voicing young people's concerns at town hall meetings and youth summits.

In addition, many youth-serving organizations encourage volunteerism and community service. They host or collaborate with AmeriCorps programs, create programs where youth mentor or tutor younger children, and organize youth service days in their wider communities. These opportunities give at-risk youth the chance to give back and discover their own potential for generosity to others. Youth who volunteer "learn more than they give," says Steve Chaplain, former director of the transitional living program at Latin American Youth Center in Washington, DC. They gain competence in useful work skills, feel more closely tied to their communities, and are likely to pursue careers in social services or to volunteer as adults.

More Work Ahead

Despite impressive gains, there's lots more work to be done to promote Positive Youth Development, youth service providers say. They'd like to see youth become more involved in policy decisions, and they'd like adults to view youth as important community resources, rather than potential troublemakers. They want undergraduate and graduate programs that train educators to incorporate Positive Youth Development into their curricula, and they want more parenting courses to teach moms and dads what their children need to develop into healthy adults.

"You truly have to embrace [Positive Youth Development] in order for it to work," Robertson says. That goes for communities, as well as youth service providers. ■

For more information on Positive Youth Development and on FYSB's grant-making programs, contact the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth at (301) 608-8098 or info@ncfy.com, or go to www.ncfy.com.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE

DreamTree Project

Taos, New Mexico
www.dreamtreeproject.org

When the DreamTree Project opened its doors in 2000, its founders had an idealistic vision of how their transitional living program would work.

“We thought, ‘The kids will be so grateful they’ll respect all our rules,’” says Kim Treiber, codirector and cofounder of DreamTree.

That didn’t exactly happen.

The youth who come to DreamTree come from challenging backgrounds, Treiber explains, and face issues such as drug abuse, violence, poverty, and difficult family relationships. But with time, the staff of DreamTree Project, which serves about 25 young women and men a year, have found a formula that gives youth decisionmaking power, while at the same time setting boundaries. That can make a big difference for at-risk youth who have always felt controlled by circumstances and have never had “a forum for making change in their lives,” Treiber says.

Positive Youth Development is an ongoing philosophy at DreamTree, Treiber says, a continuous exercise in drawing out the positive rather than the negative. DreamTree’s staff developer and family counselor speak about the approach at every staff meeting, and trainers from New Mexico’s Department of Health also visit periodically.

This summer, DreamTree will inaugurate an independent living program that will double the organization’s residential capacity to 16. Graduates of the transitional living program will be eligible to move into neighboring *casitas* (little houses), five small apartment buildings with a circular common room. The youth will govern

themselves, and the responsibility of “youth manager” will rotate among them. The manager collects rent and utility payments, plans the Sunday meal, and gets compensation and reduced rent in return.

“I’m hoping the kids take on a much larger leadership role out there,” Treiber says. She’d also like to see *casitas* residents becoming spokespeople for the transitional living program.

Speaking out for DreamTree is just one way youth can feel useful and connected, and those feelings can keep them from acting destructively, Treiber says. “Anytime anyone—not just youth—feels like they’re worth something, that they’re part of something bigger, you’re just going to see the results.”

Programs

- ❖ Transitional living program for homeless youth
- ❖ Wilderness therapy
- ❖ Independent living program, opening summer 2005

How DreamTree Promotes Positive Youth Development

- ❖ **Life-Skills Curriculum:** Youth must complete a life-skills curriculum—which teaches them how to change a tire, write a resume, open a checking account, live with a roommate, and do other handy and necessary things—within the first 2 months of their 6-month commitment to the program.
- ❖ **Money Management:** Youth put 60 percent of earnings from their full- or part-time jobs into savings accounts, and a staff member helps them make wise spending decisions. In addition to job income, youth receive \$20 a week for living by the program’s rules (doing chores, being up by 9:30 a.m., and going to



A youth pitches in to build DreamTree Project’s new residential facility.

school, work, and therapy). They are charged \$80 a month for rent. Youth who neglect one item in a week—say, washing the dishes or seeing the therapist—lose half their allowance. Two infractions mean no allowance. Four or more: the young person owes \$5 per item. “Believe me, it doesn’t go on very long,” Treiber says.

- ❖ **Internal Youth Council:** Each resident of the transitional living program automatically joins DreamTree’s biweekly youth council. Attendance is mandatory; even job schedules can’t interfere. Youth vote on officers and submit to DreamTree staff their proposals for policy or rule changes. Staff will okay a council decision “as long as it’s reasonable and safe,” Treiber says. Youth voted to get rid of bedtime, and staff went along with it. But no one was getting up in the morning, Treiber says. So a compromise was reached; instead of 10:30 p.m., youth would go to bed at 11:00 p.m. Though a half hour might seem insignificant to staff, being involved in the decision mattered to the youth, Treiber says.
- ❖ **Welcoming New Youth:** The senior member of the transitional living program (whoever has lived there the longest) mentors new youth, showing them the ropes for their first month.

David: Clearing a New Path

Using power tools. That's what David likes most about his work sawing timber for Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, an AmeriCorps agency in Taos, New Mexico. Next best: the satisfaction of supporting himself and of having held a job for more than a year.



David is turning around his former life of drug and alcohol abuse, building a stronger future for himself with the help of his employers and the DreamTree Project's transitional living program (see page 2), which he completed last year.

DreamTree staff always seemed ready to talk to him and give him their time, David says; their openness made him feel accepted. "It was pretty cool to have a bunch of strangers that I didn't know care about me," he says. "They seemed to take me under their wing."

He considers himself a better person today than he was before he went to DreamTree. "I don't think about drugs and alcohol as much," he says.

Now studying for his GED, David plans to go to college. His time at DreamTree made him a better leader, he says, adding: "When you go for a job, they look for leaders instead of followers."

He's also developed a knack for reaching out to others, something he couldn't do before. His good deeds include working to set up a youth council for the town of Taos and mentoring young people on juvenile probation.

"That's my main thing now: to help people," he says. "I've helped myself for too long. I thought it was time to turn it around."

❖ **Food on the Table:** Youth plan menus and shop for groceries, within a budget, giving them "some power over what we're eating," Treiber says. Youth in the program are putting together a cookbook that will be sold to benefit DreamTree.

❖ **Grant Review:** Youth from DreamTree serve on the youth advisory board of the Taos Community Foundation. They review grant proposals from youth organizations and decide who will receive funding. Being grant reviewers teaches them about the finite amount of cash available to community organizations and the difficulty of deciding who gets funding and who doesn't, Treiber says. Plus, she says, "They have power over what's happening in their community."

❖ **Mentors:** DreamTree youth mentor younger students at a local alternative school, grading papers and running activities for the children. Residents also mentor youth drug offenders in the Taos youth court.

❖ **Speaking Out:** Youth act as spokespeople for the program on radio spots and in other public forums. Staff members accompany the youth and give them instructions on public speaking. Youth usually say the right things, Treiber says. When they don't, as in the case of the young man who announced on the air, "I hope my parents are listening because I hate them," staff discuss with them afterward why their remarks were inappropriate.

Valley Youth House

Allentown, Pennsylvania
www.valleyyouthhouse.org

At Valley Youth House, Positive Youth Development (PYD) flows in the blood, says Bob Robertson, executive vice president and a staff member for 26 years. "We were 'PYD' long before anyone started talking about it," Robertson says. "It's who we are."

Founded in 1973, the organization began as a nontraditional agency serving runaway and homeless youth with a nonmedical model that worked creatively with youth and families rather than simply treating a problem or illness, Robertson says. "We've never lost that," he says. Today, Valley Youth House has 10 offices that serve about 6,000 youth and families a year.

Robertson believes that for organizations to really promote Positive Youth Development consistently, they have to positively develop their staff as well. Each Valley Youth House staff member has the opportunity to create a "management development plan," similar to a case management plan, that helps answer the question "What do you need to be successful?" Then Valley Youth House makes those ingredients—job, housing, education, training—available, he says.

"For as long as staff are with you, they'll be happier if they're working toward something they want," Robertson says. Encouraging staff to think "intentionally" about their futures helps them work with youth, too, he adds, because it's a process similar to the Positive Youth Development approach staff use with clients. Staff who have learned to take charge of their own lives are better at encouraging youth to do the same, he says.

The organization's attitude toward "people development" has kept Robertson and many other staff

members at Valley Youth House for more than two decades; several former clients have returned as employees, as well. When it comes to Positive Youth Development, Robertson's advice to other youth providers is "Just do it."

Programs

- ❖ Residential services including two runaway shelters, a group home, and a large independent living program at about two dozen sites
- ❖ Drug, alcohol, and mental health counseling
- ❖ Child abuse prevention and child welfare services

How Valley Youth House Promotes Positive Youth Development

- ❖ **Internal Youth Advisory Boards:** Each residential program has its own youth advisory board, made up of all the young people in that program. They meet daily, weekly, or monthly to provide staff with input and direction and to discuss problems. Staff moderators help them come up with solutions.
- ❖ **Youth House Managers:** Youth in the residential programs are chosen to serve as house managers who assign and check chores and mediate issues between residents. House managers, Robertson says, learn about the use of authority, the value of peer respect, and the drawbacks of power. "They can't assign all the bad chores to people they don't like."
- ❖ **Teen Court:** At teen courts in the agency's shelters, youth play all the roles: prosecutor, judge, and jury. Staff moderate, but youth take the lead in resolving disputes over such things as property destruction, fights, stealing each other's stuff, and other inappropriate behaviors. "Because the kids are dealing with each other, there's a more honest outcome," Robertson says. The

youth learn "how things work" and gain a sense of competence and power from actively participating in the process, he says.

- ❖ **Hiring Decisions:** Youth interview final candidates for staff positions after some initial training from staff. Youth can and will ask things that adults can't and won't, Robertson says. Letting young people interview prospective staff fulfills two functions: it gives them a say in who will work with them, and it allows hiring staff to see how candidates interact with youth.
- ❖ **Board Membership:** Valley Youth House has one young person on its board of directors. Although by Pennsylvania law she cannot make motions or vote until she is 18,

her input influences adult board members, Robertson says. When she first joined the board, she received training and mentoring—and the assurances of older members that learning how to be on a board was difficult for them, too.

- ❖ **Tour Guides:** Youth lead tours of the residential facilities for visitors, such as people from other agencies, United Way representatives, and licensing officials.
- ❖ **High School Advisory Board on Drugs and Alcohol:** The agency's drug and alcohol program has a high school advisory board made up of former clients and students from the more than 17 high schools in the Lehigh Valley.

Sarah: Finding Therapy in Helping Others

When Sarah arrived at Valley Youth House's runaway and homeless youth shelter (see page 3), she didn't see a future for herself. She didn't want to live.

Suffering from depression and the effects of physical and emotional abuse, Sarah, then 15, found a place at Valley Youth House. Staff handled angry calls from her parents, but focused on her needs, she says.

After her stay in the shelter, she moved into the agency's transitional living program. There, she became a role model to other youth. Staff asked her to be a "peer counselor" who showed new youth around, ate with them, and buddied up with them for a few days.

When she left the transitional living program, Sarah moved into her own apartment, started waitressing, and went to high school. But something was missing. She sought advice from a Valley Youth House counselor, who put her to work mentoring daycare children.



Now 23, Sarah has mentored about 15 children and youth over the years. A psychology student at Kutztown University in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, she works 40 to 50 hours a week in Valley Youth House's runaway and homeless youth shelter and in its transitional living program.

Still not exactly sure what lies ahead of her, she says she'll probably become a therapist. "I'm a person people can vent to, and I can relate a lot to the youth," she says. "The way the counselors gave me therapy, I want to give that to other kids."

❖ **Speaking Out:** Present and former clients often speak at United Way events, community events, and Valley Youth House's annual comedy gala. "It gives them the opportunity to talk about their outcomes, to feel special, to reach out to others," Robertson says. Youth from the agency also have presented at State, national, and regional conferences and at a legislative hearing for the Younger Americans Act, which, if passed, would establish a national youth policy for the first time and help fund youth development programs.

❖ **Statewide Youth Board:** Valley Youth House is contracted by Pennsylvania to run its statewide Youth Advisory Board. Made up of youth who are or were in independent living programs throughout the State, the advisory board gives input to the Department of Public Welfare on policy and funding issues. The board also maintains a Web site.

Oswego County Opportunities

Fulton, New York
www.oco.org

"Youth always listen to other youth more than they listen to us adults," says Sarah Irland, youth services director of Oswego County Opportunities (OCO) in New York State. "It's just something we know."

Young people have plenty of chances to listen to each other at OCO, where 10 "peer employees" help facilitate activities in the organization's afterschool program, drop-in centers, street outreach program, and youth emergency services program.

Ideally, Irland would like all of her organization's programs to employ youth. "It's a powerful piece with young people," she says, because peer

workers gain feelings of competence and usefulness, and the youth they help acquire knowledge and a sense of belonging from their positive interactions with other young people.

A community action agency founded in 1966 (its runaway and homeless youth program began in 1991), OCO has always developed services "with people, not for them." That history made a good foundation for working with young people and building programs in partnership with them.

Over the years, Irland has seen adults warm up to the idea of young people participating in planning and running youth programs and in making decisions that affect them. That's important, she says, because youth know their own needs better than adults do. "I do think adults in the community are starting to get the message," she says. "I think there's more recognition that [involving youth] is an important thing to do."

Irland envisions a future in which youth make significant contributions to policymaking on the local and county government levels. She'd also like to keep young people in touch with OCO long after they stop needing its services.

"Long-term connection is really what helps people to grow," she says.

Programs

- ❖ Youth emergency services, street outreach program, and transitional living program
- ❖ Foster care group home
- ❖ Pregnant and parenting teen program
- ❖ Afterschool program, employment skills program, and mentoring services for young people
- ❖ Services for families, children, and seniors



Youth at Oswego County Opportunities enjoy a day of sledding.

How OCO Promotes Positive Youth Development

- ❖ **Case Plans:** Young people design their own case plans with staff. "We don't tell them what to do," Irland says; rather, staff help youth see what their options are and the steps they need to take to reach their goals.
- ❖ **Program Planning:** When OCO wanted funding to start an after-school program, they began by meeting with youth and families from youth groups and schools, Irland says. Young people talked about what they needed after school and what programs might address those needs. OCO used that input to write successful grant proposals.
- ❖ **Focus Groups:** Each of OCO's programs for youth has its own consumer "focus group," Irland says. The groups report to OCO staff about what's going on in the programs and what's going well. Youth who are OCO clients serve on the focus groups, sharing what works and what needs improving. Staff combine the results of these sessions with information garnered from quarterly outcome reports, exit surveys, and family-written interviews. The feedback helps OCO to improve existing programs and create new ones.

❖ **Ideas, Good and Bad:** Youth in OCO's transitional living program live in scattered-site apartments rented by the organization in a community setting. When the transitional living residents faced neighbor complaints about loud music and young people going in and out of the building, the youth decided to speak with neighbors directly, Irland says. Once neighbors got to know the young people, they became more patient and complained less often, Irland says. And youth gained insight into being good neighbors. It worked, she says, because youth came up with the idea themselves. Not every youth-generated idea flies, but many do. Irland says the young people learn "you win some and you lose some, which is part of life."

❖ **Mentors to New Youth:** Youth are mentors to young people new to OCO's programs, teaching them the rules of the transitional living apartments, introducing them to the community center where afterschool programs are held, or schooling them on the ins and outs of a particular program.

❖ **Activity Leaders:** Veteran youth often lead recreational activities, like board games or charades. Staff help them plan the activities. Youth also cofacilitate discussion groups, usually with a staff member or another young person, on a topic of interest to them. Recently, OCO youth organized an anti-tobacco campaign, complete with discussion groups and posters.

❖ **Board Service:** Within OCO's board of directors, each agency has a program committee. The organization's bylaws require that youth make up at least 20 percent of membership on the Youth Services Program Committee. That means 4 to 6 youth, usually former OCO clients,

serve on the 20-person committee. The bylaws also state that a quorum cannot be reached unless youth are present—no exceptions, not even for a blizzard, Irland says, adding: "It sends a really strong message that young people have a place and a voice here." Adult members of the committee learn to trust the ability of youth to exercise judgment and confidentiality.

❖ **Drop-in Advice:** OCO's two rural drop-in centers have community advisory boards, with membership evenly divided between youth who use the centers and adult community members.

❖ **Peer Employees:** For the past 5 or 6 years, OCO has employed young people, about 10 at a time for 10 hours a week, in its afterschool and street outreach programs, its drop-in centers, and its youth emergency services. One former peer, now 23, moved up the ladder to become a supervisor.

Oasis Center

Nashville, Tennessee
www.oasiscenter.org

Michael McSurdy, associate executive director of Oasis Center in Nashville, Tennessee, believes Positive Youth Development does more than give youth a leg up on a healthy, happy adulthood. It makes communities better, too. "If families and young people are functioning well and feeling positive, greater change is possible," McSurdy says.

A youth-, family-, and community-serving agency, Oasis puts youth of all backgrounds in charge of everything from community service and fundraising to radio, television, and the Web.

"We're a fairly small agency, but we are able to do so much because young people are doing so much of the work,"



Oasis Center youth make their voices heard.

McSurdy says. And that includes young people in crisis, bucking what McSurdy sees as a commonly held belief that only "high-achieving" young people have the capacity for community service work. That's not true, he says: "You can be at the shelter and give back."

Keeping a positive focus takes a lot of staff development and "challenging people when things just don't seem to be going in that direction," he says. "It's much easier to be about being youth-driven when the fear of young people being in control isn't there," he adds. The more adults interact with youth, the more they lose that fear, he says, and the more they realize that "young people will create more structure for themselves than adults sometimes will. They aren't asking for unilateral independence; they're asking to be at the table."

McSurdy believes that *all* young people need to have that chance to be heard. He'd like to see more emphasis on Positive Youth Development for populations in crisis—something that Oasis is trying to accomplish. "If you have a gang problem in your city," he says, "then your gang leaders have to be part of the solution."

Programs

❖ Emergency shelter for runaway and homeless youth

- ❖ Transitional living program
- ❖ Street outreach program
- ❖ Youth leadership and service programs
- ❖ Community-based counseling and prevention services

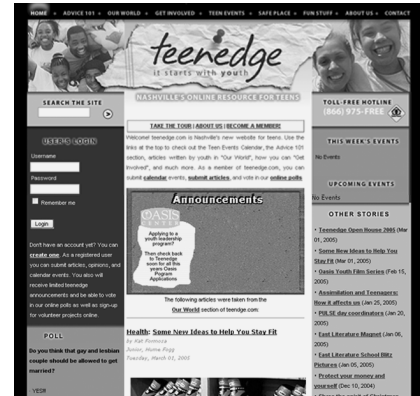
How Oasis Center Promotes Positive Youth Development

- ❖ **Activities Planning:** Youth in the transitional living program help organize their own activities. “They don’t do anything at [transitional living] that the young people aren’t involved in the planning of,” McSurdy says. Activities evolve according to the needs of youth in the program.
- ❖ **Hiring Decisions:** Youth in particular programs interview prospective staff members who would work with them directly. For instance, youth in Oasis Center’s Youth Innovations Board helped pick the staff member hired to mentor them.
- ❖ **Street Outreach:** Youth in the transitional living program assist the center’s outreach program by talking to youth on the street about their options for help.
- ❖ **Book Buddies:** Youth in the residential programs learn alongside preschoolers at a large center run by Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools. Noticing the younger children were bored, the youth started a Book Buddies program and began reading to them.
- ❖ **Institutional Youth Council:** The Oasis Youth Council advises Oasis Center on its service to teens and advocates for youth in the Nashville community. Council members are young people who have used Oasis Center’s services or participated in its programs.

- ❖ **Board Membership:** Three members of the Oasis Youth Council are selected to serve, with full voting rights, on the center’s board of directors. “When one of the members of our board lives in our [transitional living program], it lends credence to what she says,” McSurdy says.
- ❖ **Fundraising Leadership:** One of the youth members of the board of directors cochairs Oasis Center’s capital fundraising campaign with his mother.
- ❖ **Youth Alliance:** Members of the youth council also organized the Nashville Youth Alliance, which brings together youth councils and youth agencies from across Nashville.
- ❖ **Citywide Leadership:** Oasis runs Nashville Youth Leadership, a group of 40 local teenagers who learn leadership skills and design a service project. (Currently unfunded, the program should be revived within the next year, McSurdy says.)
- ❖ **Grantmaking:** The organization’s Youth Innovations Board makes grants to local youth-serving agencies. Youth on the board, all former clients of Oasis Center’s programs, request proposals for funding and decide who will get it. They learn about program evaluation, the request for proposals process, and how community organizations work, McSurdy says. If board members think an organization’s proposal is too adult driven, they meet with the group to advise them on developing youth leadership.
- ❖ **Youth Service:** Members of Nashville Youth PULSE (People United Leading and Serving Everywhere) volunteer at sites all over Nashville. They also plan, evaluate, and lead PULSE service projects,

with guidance from adult volunteers. PULSE volunteers organize PULSE Day, an annual, citywide day of service for teens; last year, youth donated 10,000 hours of service on that day.

- ❖ **Youth-Run Web Site:** Teenedge.com is a Web site by and for youth, with an editorial board made up entirely of young people.



- ❖ **AmeriCorps:** Oasis Center’s AmeriCorps program gives youth service-learning opportunities. AmeriCorps members and other youth volunteers work with children and youth from local community centers on community service, civic action, and recreational activities with an educational element (such as learning about team building, relationships, and fairness).
- ❖ **Peer Educators:** Oasis trains peer educators to provide preventative education about teen pregnancy to local public school students.
- ❖ **Youth TV:** At Youth Voice Television, or YVTV, a council of youth identifies issues young people care about, such as discipline and violence in schools, and creates videos that are distributed in the community.
- ❖ **Alumni Advisors:** A group of former Oasis Center residents advises the agency on its residential program. ■



Junk piles are transformed into rows of tomatoes at Latin American Youth Center.

SUCCESS STORY

Youth Make a Garden Grow in Washington, DC

The yard behind the transitional living house at Washington, DC's Latin American Youth Center was a disaster zone as recently as a year and a half ago. The house itself had undergone a renovation, but around it old tires piled up, a rusty chain link fence collapsed more every day, and rats scurried among piles of junk.

Staff at the center agreed they had to improve the yard, so they turned to the young people who lived in the house. What enhancements did they want to see?

The youth brainstormed. They wanted a vegetable garden, fruit trees, a basketball court, a barbecue, and places to sit and eat outside. They sent their wish list to the center's YouthBuild program, a local affiliate of a national organization that employs low-income youth to build low-cost housing while they earn their GEDs. Four teams, made up of YouthBuild members and architecture professors and graduate students from nearby Catholic University, presented concept proposals based on residents' requests.

The transitional living program youth liked elements of each concept—a patio in one, a fountain in another—and the final plans were a blending of elements from all

four proposals, says Patricia Bravo, the center's work skills director, who oversees the YouthBuild program.

In the fall of 2003, residents helped clean up and develop the area around the house and plant the garden. "Both staff and youth were out there digging dirt and making holes," says Steve Chaplain, former director of the transitional living program and now director of the center's new independent living program.

Youth benefited from the project in many ways, Chaplain says: They watched a plan go from design to implementation to final results, got involved in an ambitious project that improved an organization, developed stronger relationships with staff, saw staff get dirty, and witnessed people joining together to raise money for a shared cause.

Bravo adds that youth in the transitional living program aren't used to having someone care about what they want, so having their opinions "taken into consideration in a concrete way and put on paper" gave them a greater sense of their belonging to the community. And YouthBuild members had a chance to help their peers and feel useful.

Latin American Youth Center's team approach to developing ideas and working together is more time consuming than not involving youth, Chaplain says. But consulting them meant they would be more likely to approve of the results and more willing to preserve the physical space.

"Keeping youth involved as much as possible shows they have a stake" in the organization, Chaplain says. Plus, last summer, the transitional living program had "awesome tomatoes," he adds. ■

FYSB PROMOTES POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ON NATIONAL LEVEL

Research continues to show that adolescents have the greatest chance of health and success if they have strong school, family, and community support. Using Positive Youth Development strategies, Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) programs give young people the chance to transition to a successful adulthood by building skills, exercising leadership, and making positive contributions to their communities.

FYSB encourages Positive Youth Development in its grant programs, which include Basic Centers for runaway and homeless youth, Transitional Living Programs for older youth, Street Outreach, and Mentoring Children of Prisoners.

The bureau also embraces youth initiative by including young people in many of its activities. Youth sit on Federal grant review panels for the four

programs mentioned above, which have collectively awarded about \$142.3 million to youth-serving institutions. Under a partnership between FYSB and the Head Start Bureau, youth have served as mentors to young children in 196 Head Start programs nationwide. And youth play a prominent role in planning, managing, and presenting at the annual National Youth Summit, organized by FYSB.



Deborah Hsieh gives the keynote address at the 2004 National Youth Summit.

The Summit highlights the strides the administration has taken to support youth development and to encourage additional national and local efforts to support youth leadership. Summit themes have included promoting Positive Youth Development, building on the strengths of America's youth, and youth leadership at the community level. ■



Making art is a group effort at the 2004 National Youth Summit.

Reports on the past two Summits are available at www.ncfy.com. Information about FYSB programs promoting Positive Youth Development is at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/.

RESOURCES ON POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Assets into Action: A Handbook for Making Communities Better Places to Grow Up. Author: Deborah Fisher. 2003. Available from the Search Institute, 615 First Ave. NE, Suite 125, Minneapolis, MN 55413; (800) 888-7828; www.search-institute.org

Community Programs to Promote Youth Development. Authors: The National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine. 2002. Available from National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, Box 285, Washington, DC 20055; (800) 624-6242; www.nap.edu.

Liberty: Thriving and Civic Engagement Among America's Youth. Author: R. Lerner. 2004. Available from Sage Publications, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320; (800) 818-7243; www.sagepub.com.

The Youth Development Handbook: Coming of Age in American Communities. Editors: M. Hamilton and S. Hamilton. 2004. Available from Sage Publications, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320; (800) 818-7243; www.sagepub.com.

Youth Development: Issues, Challenges and Directions. Author: Public/Private Ventures. 2000. Available from Public/Private Ventures, 2000 Market Street, Suite 600, Philadelphia, PA 19103; (215) 557-4411; www.ppv.org.

The list above is not exhaustive. For more information on Positive Youth Development, contact the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY) at (301) 608-8098 or info@ncfy.com, or go to www.ncfy.com, where you will find many of NCFY's publications and a searchable database containing abstracts of thousands of books and articles on youth development.

DO YOU PROMOTE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT?

The following questions will help you think about how well your organization encourages Positive Youth Development and what more you could be doing. Don't worry! You don't need to answer "yes" to every question to conclude that you're on the right path.

Do youth have opportunities for personal leadership?

- Do youth create their own treatment plans, in collaboration with staff?
- Do youth have a formal mechanism for making decisions about their living arrangements? For instance, do your residential programs hold a regular "youth council meeting" in which youth have decisionmaking power (after staff review)?
- Do residential youth have a say in what they eat? For instance, do they help plan meals, shop, and budget for groceries?
- Do youth lead their own discharge planning team, made up of people they choose, to put together a plan for their life after leaving the residential program? For instance, what will their relationships, employment, housing, and finances look like?
- Do youth create a personal file or portfolio of documents and items relating to their past, present, and future? Items could include report cards, school records, photos, artwork, personal documents, and other things chosen by the youth.
- When youth make mistakes, do staff help them figure out how to make things right?
- Does your organization have a process through which youth, moderated by staff, can adjudicate personal disputes with each other?

Do youth have opportunities for organizational leadership?

- Do youth sit on your board or on board subcommittees? Do youth board members truly have a say in your organization's decisionmaking? Are they voting members? (Whether they can be may depend on your State's laws for board membership.) If not, do they have a forum to influence voting members? Do you train them as you would train other board members?
- Do youth interview new staff or sit on hiring committees? Do you train them beforehand?
- Do youth give input into new programs, from planning to writing grant proposals to implementing?
- Do youth raise funds, either for the overall organization or for new programming and activities they want?
- Do youth in your programs volunteer within the organization, for instance by mentoring or tutoring other youth?
- Do youth have opportunities for employment within the organization?
- Do youth help enhance the physical space of your organization by participating in discussions about what improvements are needed, planning how to make changes, and implementing them?
- Does your organization ask alumni of its programs for feedback or advice?

Do youth have opportunities for community leadership?

- Do youth in your programs serve as peer educators in local schools or community organizations?
- Does your program collaborate with schools or local and State government to give youth a voice through service on youth councils or boards or on adult-run committees?
- Do youth act as spokespeople for your organization and for youth issues in your community?
- Do youth in your program have ways to make their voices heard in the community and in the media? These might include youth summits or forums or a youth-run newspaper, Web site, or radio station.
- Does your staff encourage youth to volunteer at other community organizations?
- Does your community have a youth court?
- Does your organization help youth use and display their talents, such as art, writing, and athletics, in your community?

Got something to add? Send it to info@ncfy.com, and we'll consider adding it to a future update of this checklist.

What's Inside

- Do **you** promote positive youth development?
Find out
- How the Family and Youth Services Bureau and its grantees promote the youth development approach
 - How positive experiences made a difference for three young people
 - What you can do to help youth achieve their full potential

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