Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development (PYD) is an approach to working with young people that focuses on building the capacities, strengths, and assets needed to succeed in adulthood. RTI International offers expertise in the key topics, formats, and settings of PYD work. We support PYD efforts by developing interventions, evaluating programs, and providing training and technical assistance.

Overview

Programs and policies for young people often focus on the prevention of negative outcomes, such as substance use, risky sexual behavior, delinquency, and school dropout. However, the absence of problems is not enough to ensure a successful transition to adulthood. Young people also need to develop assets such as a sense of identity; career goals and preparation; physical health and safety; and skills related to emotional coping, critical thinking, and maintaining positive and productive relationships. As federal, state, and local agencies increase their recognition of the importance of PYD, there is a need to identify and develop effective PYD programs and support their implementation in communities.

RTI researchers have experience developing interventions to promote PYD, as well as with providing training and technical assistance to individuals and organizations that incorporate PYD into their work with young people. These efforts help to ensure that human service professionals have the tools and support that they need to help young people thrive. RTI has also conducted numerous PYD process, outcome, and cost evaluations, which has helped to improve best practice guidance in the field.

Areas of Expertise

RTI offers substantive expertise in numerous PYD topics, including adolescent development, physical health and wellness, healthy relationships, parent–child communication, free-time activities, education and career success, identity development, and financial literacy. RTI is also experienced in various forms of PYD intervention, including school-based programs, youth mentoring, workplace supports, and service provider capacity-building. This allows us to provide relevant services for a variety of funders, service providers, and target populations.

Our technical expertise includes literature reviews; needs and capacity assessment; intervention development; process, outcome, and economic evaluation; data collection and management; quantitative and qualitative data analysis; dissemination of research findings; training; and technical assistance. This enables RTI to assist PYD-focused organizations and agencies with a range of goals, including developing a plan for new PYD programming, determining whether existing programming is effective, and identifying and addressing program implementation challenges.
Project Highlights

Evaluation of the Collaborative Partnership for Excellence in Youth Development (United Way of the Greater Triangle, 2013–2015). RTI serves as the evaluator for Youth Thrive, an initiative focusing on increasing awareness of, access to, and usage of PYD opportunities, as well as building organizational capacity for PYD in Wake County, North Carolina.

Effects of Yoga on Physiological and Behavioral Precursors of Drug Abuse (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2009–2013). RTI received a grant to develop and test a yoga intervention for high-risk adolescents. In addition to examining substance use outcomes, RTI assessed program impact on PYD outcomes such as emotional, cognitive, and behavioral regulation; coping; mood; and stress reactivity and recovery. Results of the evaluation indicated that youth who were randomly assigned to a 20-session yoga intervention reduced monthly alcohol use, increased social skills, and increased attentional skills compared with similar youth randomly assigned to the control group.

Teen Pregnancy Prevention Training, Technical Assistance, and Annual Meeting Logistical Support (Family and Youth Services Bureau, 2011–2014). RTI leads this contract to support adolescent pregnancy prevention grantees, including 102 grantees of the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP). PREP grantees are required to address PYD topics such as adolescent development, educational and career success, financial literacy, healthy life skills, healthy relationships, and parent–child communication. RTI develops presentations, Webinars, tip sheets, online courses, electronic newsletters, and toolkits to support grantees in their PYD and prevention work.

Evaluation of the Foundations for Success Project (Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2009–2010). RTI collaborated on a project to test whether case manager-mediated access to academic support, career clarification, mentoring, and financial incentives increased the likelihood that students at risk for dropping out of college would successfully complete their studies. Data showed that students who used 12 or more hours of support services nearly doubled their chances of graduating.

Strengthening HIV Programming for Young Key Affected Populations (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2011). RTI provided oversight and evaluation of the NewGen mentoring program, which paired leaders from civil society, the United Nations, and government with young people with significant experience in the area of HIV. This project helped to support youth involvement, a central tenet of the PYD approach.

Random-Assignment Evaluation of Paid Mentoring: Process, Outcome, and Cost-Effectiveness (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2009–2014). RTI partnered with Big Brothers Big Sisters to describe how paying mentors impacts recruitment, retention, and mentor/mentee interactions and to test whether youth with paid mentors have different outcomes than youth with volunteer mentors.

Workplace Prevention and Early Intervention: Transitioning Youth into the Workplace (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2003–2011). RTI conducted a process, outcome, and cost evaluation of the Young Adults in the Workplace (YIW) initiative. YIW used the workplace as a setting to prevent substance abuse among young people aged 16 to 24. Programming was integrated into a variety of PYD-type intervention formats, including health promotion and life skills training.

More Information
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