



Institute of Sathya Sai Education Australia

National Education Conference 2011

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

What is PYD?

There is no clear definition of Positive Youth Development (PYD). It can be best described as an approach promoting steps on how the community, parents and teachers together support the youth so that they can grow up competent, capable and healthy and develop to their full potential.

- Basically, Positive youth Development (PYD) is an approach that focuses on young people's strengths rather than their weaknesses.
- It is based on the concept of resiliency, it helps youth to overcome or deal with the negative things in their environments.
- Because it is an approach rather than a specific program, there is no single definition for PYD.
- Some organizations define it as individual characteristics that demonstrate healthy development. Some others refer to it as 'Protective factors' or 'developmental assets' or simply 'assets'.

Background/History of PYD

- The Positive Youth Development framework was developed in the early 1990's as a response to a single-issue prevention programs for adolescents that had been popular in the 80's.
- These issue prevention programs or deficit models generally focused on prevention or treatment of one risk factor, it could be substance abuse, violence, use of drugs, school failure etc.
- For example, program was developed for a particular risk factor, it could be substance abuse or use of drugs to prevent or treat that risk factor.
- These programs generally viewed youth as "problems to be fixed" and didn't attend to the long term developmental needs and the potential of the youth involved.

Then in the 1990's, based on research on the role of resiliency, researchers successfully argued for a change in the approach to these issues.

Rather than focusing on the negatives, the PYD approach focuses on the potential or the capabilities of the youth.

Basically, it is a real shift in thinking of how we provide services for youth.

From Traditional Youth Services to Positive Youth Development

Focus on Problems

Focus on positive outcomes

Instead of focusing on the problems and problem prevention, we move to nurturing positive outcomes; focus is on what youth need to thrive.

Reactive

Pro-active

Rather than reacting to problems and needs, we become proactive.

Targeted youth

All Youth

It is a move from targeting youth, could be at risk youth to planning and creating opportunities for all youth.

Youth as recipients

Youth as active participants

In single us prevention programs, we look at or consider youth as recipients of services or programs. IN PYD, we look at youth as resources, as partners who can make valuable contributions in planning and implementing activities.

Programs

Community Response

In PYD, we are moving from programs to a more community wide net of learning opportunities, interactions and activities. This also means creating activities outside of traditional youth programming.

Professional providers

Community members

Ultimately, this means that youth development is not just a group of professionals but all community members.

Most of the traditional youth service models are deficit models and PYD is a new approach in the area of youth development.

Key features of PYD approach

- Asset based - In PYD, we focus on assets and the strengths of the youth rather than problems and weaknesses.
- Collaborative - Youth are involved as collaborators in their own plans and development.
- Community oriented - All activities are community based with an emphasis on developing strong linkages to community institutions.
- Competence building - Activities are aimed at mastering a wide variety of skills and competencies.
- Connectedness - Social relationships and connections is an important aspect of PYD.
- Cultural membership - A key aspect of the activities is the understanding of cultural membership and its relationship to identity.
- Holistic - PYD emphasises all aspects of health personal growth, physical, social, moral, emotional and spiritual
- Long – range - Focus on long-term plans rather than short term solutions.
- Universal - PYD activities are not targeted to youth with problems, they are generally, universally available and desirable to all youth.

Developmental Assets

- In the late 1990's, Search Institute in USA, came up with a model for youth development called 'Developmental Assets' This approach emphasizes the talents, energies and strengths of every youth.
- It focuses on the positive strengths of youth and builds upon them.
- This approach identifies 40 assets, divided into two broad categories, namely, *internal* and *external*. And each category is further divided into four categories.

External assets are support and opportunities that are provided by family, friends, organizations and communities.

- The four categories of external assets are, **support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations and constructive use of time.**
- Support is to give love and acceptance not only by family members but also by the others in the community such as teachers, neighbours.
- Empowerment is for youth to be valued. Give them a greater sense of confidence or self-esteem.
- Boundaries refer to the need for youth to have clear boundaries in different settings.
- Constructive use of time (Time management)

Internal assets focus on capabilities, skills and values that youth need to internalize as part of developing their character and skills.

The four categories of internal assets are **commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity.**

Commitment to learning means not just learning at school but is engaged in life-long learning.

Positive Values are values that promote equality, truthfulness and standing up for one's beliefs.

Social competencies include skills required to plan ahead and make positive choices. It also includes the ability to resist negative peer pressure and resolve conflicts non-violently.

Positive identity means high self-esteem and strong sense of personal power.

Research by Search Institute has shown that having a greater number of these developmental assets reduces tendency of the youth towards alcohol use, gambling, school failure, violence and other anti-social behaviour. For example, youth with high asset levels (31 – 40) are 15 times less likely to use alcohol and those with 0 – 10 assets. Adolescents with more of the Search Institute's 40 assets do better in School, maintain better health and exhibit greater leadership. These assets also protect adolescents from risk factors such as use of alcohol, violence and so on.

Swami's expectations of the youth –

Bhagavan always gives a very positive approach. To quote a few;

In the Divine Discourse on His birthday in 1983, He Says what the world needs today are young people full of universal love, enthusiasm to serve and disciplined emotions. You should become citizens upon which society can depend in the future. You have to develop integrity, character and self- confidence. This is something Bhagavan always stresses on. Maintain purity of speech, of sight, of hearing and of action.

In His Divine Discourse on Guru Poornima day in 1976, Bhagavan says, Young people need to be shaped into ideal individuals who, by their way of living, speaking and acting can promote goodness, wisdom and a spirit of dedication in the world. Keep your vision clear and pure, your emotions sacred and constructive.

Bhagavan says to manifest our full potential, have courage, optimism and the imagination of the youth to be channeled in constructive areas (Divine Discourse 14/11/1975) Have self confidence, Bhagavan always talks about, and also an opportunity for self-audit.

PYD approach is something we could make use of when developing programs for Group 3 and 4 and beyond in the Organisation.

It is important to note that PYD approach supports but does not replace in any sense what Swami is advocating.

Also these principles should underlie any approaches to recover at risk youth.