

## TIP SHEET

# Positive Youth Development Approach in SRAE Programs

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## Introduction to Developmental Assets

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a framework implemented at the community level creating opportunities for youth to thrive. A working definition of this approach is:

Positive Youth Development is an intentional, pro-social approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive. It recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths. ([Youth.Gov, n.d.](#))

Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) programs can partner with school district officials to create a community-wide PYD network of systems to support the youth they serve. The goal of these networks should be creating safety nets intended to help youth achieve optimal health. Planning begins with curriculum review committees that are charged with selecting the sex education curriculum used throughout the school district. These committees review curriculum according to a review cycle adopted by each school district, and your organization should be a part of the next curriculum review cycle. You can encourage principals and curriculum directors

by saying something such as: "Sex education requires more than a one-day all school assembly. Ideally it should be standardized to occur as part of the regular health education curriculum. We would like to participate with the sex education curriculum review committee and implement this component into a broader framework of positive youth development." This establishes the vision and expectation of a broader support network.

Strong implementation of SRAE programs requires a broad context of community. A community-wide safety net approach provides opportunities to engage and inspire young people to discover their full potential.

This tip sheet provides practical application for SRAE programs to turn PYD research into practice. First, we review tips for building community-wide safety nets for young people, including ways to support youth commitment to goal setting, building resiliency, and focusing on personal assets. Finally, a list of resources allows programs to begin building a supportive framework for SRAE programs to effectively serve the young people in their communities.



## A Community Approach to PYD

SRAE program staff and directors are busy, and building a community safety net takes planning and time. Program directors who engage their board members in networking

opportunities on behalf of the SRAE program are proactively working smarter rather than harder. Organizations that do not have active board members should designate directors and other leaders in the organization to leverage relationships and engage community partners and youth by:

- **Initiating** partnerships for presentations about the PYD/SRAE program model whereby youth from the program are co-presenters to chambers of commerce, rotary clubs, interfaith councils, and other similar service organizations
- **Establishing** partnerships that connect youth to job shadowing opportunities to spark passion in areas for career exploration
- **Developing** community connections that include mentoring partnerships that support youth toward setting academic goals; include homework support and coaching on developing timelines to maximize scholarship opportunities
- **Connecting** SRAE program participants with conference planning and community preparedness activities (e.g., if the community lives in an area prone to flooding, youth can support work that prepares for anticipated flooding during the rainy season)

Whether your team includes an active board or one program director, leveraging community relationships ensures that all youth have the opportunity to maximize their assets during critical developmental years.

## Developing Authentic Partnerships

Once your program staff, board member, or trustee has opened the door to a community partner, it's important to lay the foundation

for an authentic and long-term relationship. Community partnerships are strengthened when community partners are engaged at the beginning. One way to encourage successful partnerships is by including partners in the planning of a kick-off event. Some of the most effective launch events are scheduled at times where most community leaders can attend, such as breakfast or lunch clubs. Assessing for developmental and supportive assets should be completed early in the partnership. SRAE directors and staff have access to multiple [assessment tools](#) as they lay the foundation for long-term PYD wrap-around resources for youth. Partners can adapt these assessments or only use portions of these tools. For example, these assessment tools by [youth.gov](#) were developed to assess services between government agencies, therefore some aspects may not apply to a public/private partnership.

## Building Foundational Support Systems

Foundational support systems are those agencies and partners that provide basic needs services in the communities served by SRAE programs. We know from [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#) that young people must have their basic needs met before they are ready to learn and move forward in the developmental process. SRAE program staff may learn about a program participant who is experiencing food insecurity. Living with food insecurity results in increased anxiety for the participant, and increased anxiety creates a barrier to learning and academic achievement. Therefore, by using a PYD approach, SRAE programs connect youth to services, ensuring that all young people get what they need to thrive. Program directors should provide all staff who work directly with youth a list of community resources so that a youth's family/parents or adult caregiver(s) can immediately be referred

to community-based agencies for support. Networking with these local agencies regularly keeps staff updated as to available services in the community. Representatives from these agencies are likely to accept invitations to present at staff meetings, parent education workshops, and virtual parent meetings, and engage via social media posts.

Community partners may extend resources to SRAE programs by providing guest speakers for youth events. The most robust learning connections for youth are made through storytelling, rich with metaphorical language (Jensen, 2005; Modell, 2005). SRAE programs can implement strategic PYD designs when they plan regular guest speaker presentations. Developing a list of guest speakers who have a history of success and strong character is helpful. These people typically love to tell their stories so that others can benefit from their life lessons. Good motivational speakers inspire youth when they share the barriers they faced and methods they used to overcome adversity. They help youth avoid getting stuck in a victim mindset and instead inspire youth to develop resilience skills, so they become victors.

Weaving the opportunity for youth to engage in community service projects throughout the year builds assets. The scientific literature suggests the benefits of community involvement on increasing the likelihood of youth delaying sexual activity (Kirby, 2007; Roehlkepartain & Scale, 2007; Vesely et al., 2004). Service-learning also fosters connections with positive adults and peers. Volunteering is rich with skill building for effective communication, conflict resolution, and increasing the number of positive role models for youth.



## A Community Approach to Help Youth Build Leadership Skills

SRAE directors and program staff can build a community approach by sharing a vision with other community leaders that builds leadership skills in youth. The vision should include providing the opportunity for youth to develop their voices to foster leadership skills and build self-efficacy. Once youth have graduated or completed an SRAE program, youth voices are critical for:

- Sex education curriculum selection committees
- Health and sexuality policy committees
- PYD conference planning and presentations, including developing youth-friendly themes for marketing and social media development
- Designing, planning, and presenting breakout sessions at conferences

## Preparing Youth for Successful PYD Partnerships

Once youth have completed an SRAE program, provide them with a list of community partnerships where they can continue building their assets. For example, giving youth a list of businesses in the community that offer job shadowing experiences over the summer is a good resource to have available. Individual and group workshops conducted by program staff can coach youth in building intentionality toward their goals and dreams. These coaching sessions teach young leaders how to appropriately share their stories during community engagement projects. [The Youth](#)

[Leadership Tool Kit](#) from [youth.gov](#) provides a framework for coaching youth, ensuring increased success with trusted partnerships.

Strengths assessments help motivate youth by identifying their strengths and assets and assist with short- and long-term goal setting. [PositivePsychology.com](#) provides many tools that programs can use to identify youth strengths and assets (Celestine, 2021). Select one that works best for your program. Next, ask each participant to make a [Sparks Map](#). Sparks are the “interests and passions” which motivate youth to make good choices about their future (Search Institute, 2010). Use a cool design for map components and include:

- Issues they care about deeply
- Their core motivations
- Strengths and interests identified through the strengths inventory
- A timeline with benchmarks highlighting the Success Sequence, which includes graduating from high school, getting a full-time job, and if they desire to have children, waiting to have them until after they get married

Ultimately, this map should lead to a final destination where youth can verbally express and visualize what they want their life to be like as an adult.

## Summary

This tip sheet presents SRAE program directors and staff with innovative strategies to build community partnerships and networks that empower youth. We highlighted information related to developmental assets to assist youth in building personal leadership skills. We reviewed strategies for fostering internal motivation and commitment to goals. Ultimately, these innovative strategies develop resilient youth who can make healthy choices and reach their full potential.

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## Additional Resources

[Collaborative Support for Developmental Practices Asset Mapping Toolkit](#) – This Youth.Gov toolkit developed by the Forum for Youth Investment can be completed through a combination of questionnaires, group facilitation, interviews, and a document review.

[The Development and Experiences of Character Development Learning Institute Implementation Teams](#) – This brief from Child Trends provides examples of how to develop policies and teams that provide community-based wrap-around services supporting positive youth development.

[Key Principles for Positive Youth Development](#) – This resource from youth.gov defines the purpose for Positive Youth Development (PYD) community strategies. These environments include systems of support, such as peer or social networks, school, family, and community. The contexts are all a part of an ecological framework that PYD programs incorporate into their programming and with which adolescents continually interact.

[Igniting Sparks and Thriving](#) – This Search Institute resource provides multiple articles and ideas that programs can use to ignite sparks (strengths) that motivate and empower the youth they are serving.

[Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#) – This resource describes the theory of how youth develop and thrive. The foundation posits that youth must have their basic needs met before they can learn, develop, and grow to their full potential.

[Strength Finding Tests and Assessments](#) – This resource from PositivePsychology.com provides a list of assessment tools that SRAE programs can use to identify the strengths of the participants they serve.

[Youth Leadership Tool Kit](#) – The National Resource Center for Youth Development works with the philosophy that youth engagement is a powerful way for organizations to include young people in moving their work forward. The Youth Leadership Tool Kit provides the fundamentals of meaningful youth engagement strategies.

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