Growing up and becoming an adult can be more complicated for youth with a chronic illness or disability (CID). The demands made by medical care and therapies as well as physical, behavioral and cognitive limitations can interfere with progress along the typical pathways to adulthood.

We know that remarkable advances in medical care, social and education programs have dramatically enhanced the lives of children and youth with CID and their families. And with that progress new and previously unimagined goals are emerging – including full participation in the activities of adulthood. Yet our community still falls short in supporting young people with CID to meet this measure.

Increased/full participation in adulthood means broadening our perspective by expanding our traditional focus on problem identification and amelioration.

The field of healthy youth development researchers and practitioners have embraced this perspective and a body of evidence proves that young people whose developmental needs for connection and engagement have better life outcomes across the board.

MyPath, a research study of youth with mobility limitations, aims to explore the transferability of healthy youth development components and factors to young people with CID. Research questions include:

- Why is it that some young adults are fully engaged in the activities of adulthood while others seem to struggle?
- What impact does growing up with a mobility limitation have on the transition to adulthood?
- How does the need for medical and healthcare services foster or limit full participation?

"The youth development framework assumes that young people have fundamental, underlying needs for healthy development, some of which are unique to adolescence as a time of life."

Michael Resnick, Adolescent Medicine: State of the Art Reviews, 2000

"Problem free is not fully prepared."

"Fully prepared is not fully engaged."

Karen Pittman, 2003

Preliminary MyPath Finding

Life Satisfaction Impacted by Community Engagement

Community connection and engagement are healthy youth development measures that are consistently associated with positive health and educational outcomes.

Contact

Peter Scal, Primary Investigator
scal@umn.edu • 612.624-7141

This study was supported by a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Grant # CDC/1U48DP001939-01 SIP 09-023. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
Why healthy youth development?

Following is a list of five research-based (see references noted below) rationales for the use of healthy youth development programs and strategies.

Healthy Youth Development ...

...provides young people with increased opportunities for connections to caring, concerned adults.
Research consistently shows that a strong sense of connectedness to adults outside the family is a protective factor that has great potential for reducing adolescents’ participation in a number of risk-taking behaviors. Young people need to have ample exposure to adults within their communities that have high expectations for their behavior and convey those expectations to young people.

...provides youth with significant opportunities to make meaningful contributions to their communities.
A key element of effective youth development programs is providing young people with opportunities to participate in their communities. An opportunity for meaningful engagement in community is as essential to an adolescent’s developmental needs as a safe place to live and a healthy diet. These opportunities provide youth the arenas for testing out their emerging self-identity, a major developmental task of adolescence.

...addresses multiple risk factors to adolescent health and are effective among diverse populations of youth.
Threats to adolescent health do not occur in a vacuum, yet for years, programming for young people has been designed to target one “problem” at a time. Research shows that those at risk for one negative health outcome are at greater risk for a host of negative health outcomes. A youth development approach is one that views young people more holistically, as multi-dimensional people that live as members of families, schools and communities, and addresses strengths and weaknesses within these contexts.

...efforts are longer in duration and take a more holistic approach to working with adolescents.
Short-term programs that focus on a single risk factor in an adolescent’s life tend to have limited success. Consistent interaction with caring adults and long-term involvement with community service show much greater promise for sustainable changes in adolescents’ lives.

...helps ensure that adolescents develop and mature into productive, contributing adult members of the community and the economy.
Adolescents that engage in risky behaviors are less likely to attain academic and economic success as adults, therefore increasing the likelihood that they will cost the public more in public assistance dollars and forgone contributions to the economy.

Healthy Youth Development Resources

Assets Coming Together (ACT) for Youth Center of Excellence – www.actforyouth.net/?ydManual
Board on Children, Youth and Families (the National Academies) – www7.nationalacademies.org/bocyf/
Building Partnerships for Youth – ag.arizona.edu/fcs/bpy/
Child Trends – www.childtrends.org
Forum for Youth Investment – www.forumfyi.org
Future of Children – www.futureofchildren.org
Helping America’s Youth – www.helpingamericasyouth.gov
National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability – www.ncwd-youth.info/
National Clearinghouse of Families and Youth – www.ncfy.com
National Youth Development Information Center – www.nydic.org/nydic
Social Development Research Center – aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/PositiveYouthDev99

References