

Utilization of Positive Youth Development Framework by Youth-Facing Organizations in Baltimore City

Selvi Rajagopal

Johns Hopkins University
srajago7@jhu.edu

Kaitlyn Harper

Johns Hopkins University
kharpe14@jhu.edu

Katherine Holzhauer

Johns Hopkins University
kholzha1@jhu.edu

Tina Kumra

Johns Hopkins University
tkumra1@jhmi.edu

Abstract

Positive youth development (PYD) is a strengths-based approach to youth programming which has been tested with success in largely higher income settings with mostly White youth. This study aims to identify the extent to which organizations who work in an urban context serving predominately African American youth incorporate PYD principles into their work. Organizations located in Baltimore, Maryland working with youth ages 14–24 were recruited for participation. In-depth interviews were conducted with organization leaders in this qualitative study. Thematic analysis using a deductive approach identified common themes and activities across organizations that aligned with PYD elements. All 17 youth-facing organizations interviewed described organic use of PYD principles through program activities regardless of prior knowledge of the PYD framework. Organizations prioritized activities to create an empowering environment for youth, build on youth assets and agency. The PYD principle of contribution was less explicitly incorporated into program activities, however organization leaders reported behavioral observations of youth exemplifying contribution. This real-world study demonstrates widespread utilization of PYD principles across a range of youth engagement activities in Baltimore. The results of this study provide insight on how organizations working with youth of color may naturally infuse elements of PYD into their programs. Formal training and evaluation support for these organizations may help achieve positive youth outcomes through application of PYD frameworks.

Key words: positive youth development, qualitative methods, youth programs, resilience, African Americans

Introduction

Positive youth development (PYD) is a prosocial approach to working with youth that aims to help youth become healthy, productive, and engaged individuals in their communities (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.). Since its inception over 2 decades ago, PYD has been incorporated and measured in both school and community contexts (Catalano et al., 2002; Lerner et al., 2005). PYD interventions in the United States and internationally have shown both reduction in high-risk behaviors (Rinaldi & Farr, 2018; Gavin et al., 2010; Shek & Yu, 2011) and development of positive behaviors (Catalano et al., 2004) among youth participants.

Several frameworks have been described to guide youth programs toward achievement of PYD outcomes (Arnold & Silliman, 2017; Benson et al., 2011; Lerner et al., 2005). The Five Cs model (Lerner et al., 2013) encourages programs to prioritize positive youth–adult relationships, meaningful leadership opportunities, and skill-building activities to achieve the Five Cs – confidence, competence, character, connection and caring. The 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development by Lerner and colleagues (2005) demonstrated how youth outcomes could be meaningfully measured using the Five Cs model. This study, along with subsequent research (Hershberg et al., 2014; Worker et al., 2018) suggests that youth who develop the five Cs will be more likely to espouse a sixth component of contribution. The Community Action Framework for Youth Development (Connell et al., 2001) emphasizes the importance of recognizing and strengthening the community context to support economically self-sufficient, healthy, and engaged young adults. Connell and colleagues posited that youth development work will be less successful if operated in isolation of the social context in which youth live. The Developmental Assets Framework (Benson et al., 2011) identified 40 internal (social–emotional, values, and commitments) and external (relationships and opportunities) assets needed to help youth develop positively.

Despite these characterizations of successful PYD program implementation, research is limited on how organizations working with youth may spontaneously utilize PYD principles in their work without formal adaptation of these frameworks and how this translates to desired outcomes among youth. This question is important to answer because many youth-facing organizations, defined as organizations working with youth, may operate outside of research interventions and may not have prior training in PYD. Given the literature supporting PYD frameworks as effective tools for youth engagement, it would be useful to know if youth-facing organizations outside of formal PYD interventions are naturally applying principles of PYD. Moreover, research on PYD interventions has more frequently been conducted using quantitative measures (Jelicic et al., 2007) and has largely been focused on White youth in higher income contexts (Travis & Leech,

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

2014; Worker et al., 2018). The present qualitative study was completed with the intention of gaining insights on real-world utilization of PYD from leaders of organizations in an urban context working predominately with youth of color and lower socioeconomic status.

Baltimore is an ideal location for PYD interventions given the prevalence of high school drop-out, substance abuse, violence, and mental health concerns among adolescent youth, which is higher than the rest of Maryland and the majority of states across the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). Two thirds of youth in Baltimore City live in single-parent households with a substantial burden of food insecurity and poverty (Baltimore City Health Department, 2017). Efforts are underway by city officials, the school district, academic institutions, and community organizations to support youth through out-of-school time and employment opportunities. However, to date, no studies have assessed if and how organizations in Baltimore City incorporate PYD in their activities and if organization leaders self-report positive outcomes based on their methods of youth engagement. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the extent to which organizations working with youth-facing organizations in Baltimore City utilize PYD principles.

Methods

Study Design

This cross-sectional qualitative study consisted of semi-structured, in-depth interviews of individuals leading organizations that engaged adolescents and emerging adults ages 14–24 in Baltimore, Maryland. Interviews were conducted during January and February 2020.

Participants and Recruitment

Individuals were eligible for recruitment if they directed programming or led organizations engaging youth ages 14–24 years in Baltimore with a focus on nutrition, mental health, physical health, or social-emotional development. Organization leaders were purposively sampled using eligibility criteria and identified through recommendations from relevant stakeholders, including school community program coordinators, community organization leaders, and faculty at Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health. In addition, a search of the literature and online databases (Baltimore City Public School District website, University of Maryland website, Johns Hopkins University website, Towson University website) was conducted to identify Baltimore-based programs serving adolescent youth. Exclusion criteria included organizations who work only with youth younger than 14 years old, only with youth older than 18 years old, or with youth outside of Baltimore.

Of the 28 potential interviewees contacted for participation, 17 responded. This number was adequate to reach information saturation, as determined by homogeneity of the population and content of the interviews (non-sensitive, non-complex; (Fusch & Ness, 2015)). Potential interviewees were recruited by email using a common recruitment script describing the project goals and interview requirements. Following initial email contact, organizations were provided additional information about the study through phone communication prior to consent. Oral consent was obtained in person or over the phone on the day of the interview. This study was considered exempt by the Johns Hopkins University Institutional Review Board. All organizations included in the study consented to be included by name in this paper.

Data Collection

All interviews were completed by the lead author using an in-person, telephone, or video conference platform, and were audio recorded. The interview guide (Appendix A) focused on six main themes: (a) organization and interviewee background information, (b) organization structure and activities, (c) evaluation of programs, (d) knowledge and utilization of positive youth development principles, (e) learning opportunities and best practices, and (f) barriers and facilitators to successful program implementation.

Data Analysis

Audio recordings were manually transcribed by the lead author. Interview transcripts were coded in Atlas.ti 8 (2019). Thematic analysis was conducted by the study team using deductive methods to identify emerging themes across organization interviews (Castleberry & Nolan, 2018). The study team used four parent codes which represent elements of PYD common across PYD frameworks: assets, agency, empowering environment, and contribution.

Assets captured activities which allowed youth to build on their existing skills and knowledge. Agency referred to opportunities provided for youth to develop self-efficacy and confidence to carry out new skills or behaviors. An empowering environment referred to mutually respectful, supportive relationships and a safe space that encourage youth to flourish despite potential lived experience with psychological or physical trauma. Contribution encompassed behaviors and activities demonstrating youth engagement in their communities. These elements were specifically explored for their utilization by organizations either implicitly or explicitly to help address the research question. Three members of the research team performed independent coding of two transcripts to ensure consistency of each parent code. All discrepancies were resolved through group discussion and consensus. The remaining transcripts were double coded

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

using the four parent codes. Two of the study investigators were affiliated with two of the organizations included and therefore these study investigators did not independently code the interviews corresponding with their affiliated organizations.

Data Credibility

Credibility of data was established through prolonged engagement with organization interviewees and group member checking. The lead investigator communicated with interviewees by email to share progress on data analysis every 6 months for the duration of the analysis. Long-term engagement allowed the researcher to build trust with these organization stakeholders and gain additional context about each organization. In February 2021, after the completion of analysis, all organizations were invited to participate in a virtual presentation and group discussion of the study results (all contact was virtual due to COVID-19 safety restrictions). The goal of this virtual discussion was to ensure that all organizations felt that the results accurately represented their perspectives and to improve trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tobin & Begley, 2004). Organizations were encouraged to provide positive and critical feedback, verbal or written, at the time of or following the discussion. Feedback from organization leaders confirmed the data as representative of their expressed views during the interviews. Organization leaders voiced interest in learning more about PYD and how this research may support their work in the future.

Results

Description of Organizations

A summary of the seventeen organizations included in this study is provided in Appendix B. Sixteen (94%) programs were community-based or a hybrid model with a community–school partnership. The number of adolescent attendees for each organization varied from five to 1500 participants. Half of the programs recruited participants through schools, and additional recruitment methods included social media marketing, hosting of social events, and word-of-mouth referrals. Program duration varied from single-day events to year-round programs, with 40% of programs operating year-round. Sixty percent of organizations offered employment opportunities to youth through a city government-sponsored youth employment program called YouthWorks. The remaining organizations offering youth employment paid youth directly from organization funds.

Structurally, 15 of 17 (88%) organizations had an executive director with program instructors carrying out program activities with youth. Two organizations had a smaller leadership team

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

consisting of the organization founder and fewer than five additional leadership staff. Five organizations also had a board of directors for assistance with oversight of organizational funding, staffing and overall vision. All 17 organizations relied on grant funding for program operations. Some organizations had additional sources of funding derived from donations, fundraisers, and self-funding mechanisms (e.g., paid partnerships with schools and private enterprises to sell services and products). Baltimore City has 32 zip code areas, of which 11 (34%) had one or more organizations serving adolescents.

Utilization of PYD Principles

Of the 17 interviewed organizations, only one was both familiar with PYD and specifically cited PYD in their program development. Regardless of PYD familiarity before the interview, all organizations described how PYD principles were implemented organically into their programming.

Assets

All 17 organizations described activities that provide adolescents with new opportunities, experiences, and skills to empower adolescents to create positive change in their own lives. Many organizations included activities such as field trips to different neighborhoods of the city and exposure to new tastes, focusing on healthy foods. Approximately two thirds of the organizations placed a primary or secondary focus on nutrition and healthy eating through culinary skills training, dedicated nutrition lessons, and exposure to gardening or food production. Organizations emphasized the goal of exposing adolescents to unique experiences to spark interests that youth may be feel encouraged to pursue in the future. As one interviewee explained:

The main objective is to help young people formulate this mindset that they are not trapped and that they are able to do anything that they put their minds to, and then really putting them right at the intersection of access and opportunity. So, finding out what they're passionate about, finding out what they like to do, and helping them to make the connections to be able to get those things done.

Additionally, some organizations provided a space for adolescents to receive one-on-one academic assistance through adult and peer tutoring and job training. Other organizations emphasized activities promoting development of a wide range of skills, such as environmental stewardship and business entrepreneurship. Finally, many organizations provided physical and mental health enrichment, through sports activities such as squash, boxing, and weightlifting; food and nutrition education; and yoga and mindfulness activities.

Agency

Each organization provided opportunities for adolescents to build agency. For example, a few organizations allowed adolescents to make administrative-level decisions within the organizations, from staff recruitment to how assessments are structured. Other organizations included peer-to-peer youth leadership roles within the organization or the community. Youth participants were encouraged to plan and lead activities, such as mentoring, games, and group lessons. Organizations emphasized that these leadership opportunities were most successful when they leveraged the youths' existing skills, as exemplified by this comment:

So, you know, we have a young person who's very much into dance, so she leads the dance class. One young man we have, he's into basketball so he leads the basketball session. So, it's more about making sure that they're doing things that they're naturally talented at. And then we had our teens this summer responsible for, you know, bringing in different types of vegetables or fruits that normally children did not see at a salad bar. And then they did sessions on how to fix your plate.

Forty percent of organizations provided compensation to youth for work within the organization. For example, participants at The Food Project ran a social enterprise creating "Seedy Nutty," a healthy nut snack, and sold packages of the snacks at local coffee shops and grocery stores. Youth involved in this project were paid hourly to make, package, and deliver the product to various locations around the city.

Organizations who could not provide direct compensation provided other opportunities for youth to obtain employment outside the organization. For example, organizations described helping youth directly connect with or apply for internships at for-profit, nonprofit, and governmental organizations. Organizations commonly expressed a desire to provide opportunities that would encourage youth autonomy, noting that they wanted to get to the point where the youth "don't need [them] anymore." One interviewee expressed a long-term goal for the organization, which has a focus on food sovereignty:

So my big vision is . . . for the youth is to have a corner store in the middle of the hood somewhere with all youth products in there, from youth-based snacks, to beverages to lemonade, to snacks, to cookies to cake, whatever it is, healthy or unhealthy that they create. You know what I'm saying? Like that they can own.

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

Empowering Environment

All organizations described the importance of building strong relationships with youth, encouraging respectful peer relationships among youth participants, and accounting for the youths' contexts outside the organization. Interviewees noted that frequently youth had little social support outside of the organization and described how the organizations prioritized creating a safe space and familial culture for all youth to feel comfortable and valued. Organizations aimed to establish strong adult and peer relationships, making sure every participant felt connected to at least one other person. One interviewee described the organization's strategy for building relationships with youth through authenticity:

We don't ask people to be nothing different than what they are . . . I think it's just raw and real. It's where we come from, that's who we are . . . [and] it doesn't matter the context, I can be whatever you need me to be in that moment.

Organizations helped youth overcome barriers to participation by allowing for flexibility in meeting times, location, and program activities. Some interviewees mentioned adaptation of activities to match the learning style of their youth, such as hands-on and discussion-based activities. At the same time, interviewees talked about the importance of creating and holding youth to high expectations. Organization leaders viewed their space as one where youth were allowed and expected to make mistakes, with procedures in place for when they needed to have tough conversations. Most organizations avoided punitive measures for undesirable behavior, and instead encouraged youth to engage in self-reflection through one-on-one conversations and restorative justice circles. In some situations, youth participants would spontaneously remind their peers of expectations:

It's just worked out really well so far. And I think it starts with [young] people coming in and saying, 'You guys, this is the code, [you] know what the expectations are. And we're here to support you to be the best you can be.' And it just kind of filters through.

Interviewees also described how their organizations aimed to meet the resource needs of their youth beyond the program activities. For example, nearly all organizations served a meal or snacks to participants understanding that many of their youth experienced food insecurity. Organizations also helped connect youth and families to housing resources, social workers, therapists, and academic assistance (e.g., counselors, tutors).

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

Contribution

Compared with the first three elements of PYD—assets, agency, and empowering environment—fewer organizations explicitly encouraged contribution. Those organizations that did intentionally focus on contribution engaged youth in community service, peer mentorship and teaching activities. For example, one organization’s youth hosted monthly community dinners to serve free hot meals to community residents. Youth planned and executed the entire dinner, including food preparation, table service, and clean up. Other organizations had youth deliver produce to house-bound elders in the community, facilitate nutrition education classes for younger children, and participate in cooking classes with “grannies” from neighborhoods across the city. Two of the interviewed organizations held classes on civic engagement, policymaking, and environmental stewardship. These organization leaders explained their mission to leverage existing assets among youth to create long-term, sustainable change extending beyond the reach of the organization:

[We’re founded on the] idea that we are strengthening minds, bodies, and communities, to ensure that our people are well equipped, academically but also more than academically, just in terms of lifelong learning and critical thinking and exploring, [and] just overall wellness. Then actively engaging in your communities and being ambassadors for positivity.

When contribution was not explicitly embedded within program activities, it was often observed as an attribute among youth participants by organization leaders:

You know, they take on greater responsibilities. You know, one of our teens whose strong academically she noticed certain young people were not doing well. She was like, can we do a Saturday Academy? I’m like, definitely, to give them extra support. So it’s that level of involvement, they see that some of our young people are struggling, and it’s what can we do to help them out and that’s what we want.

Discussion

The qualitative analysis from this study demonstrates real-world utilization of PYD principles by youth-facing organizations in an urban context with largely African American youth and builds on existing research that describes PYD as an effective method of youth engagement towards positive outcomes (Gavin et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2017; Travis & Leech, 2014). All interviewed organization leaders in this study discussed activities and attributes of their programs that aligned with PYD principles regardless of prior knowledge of PYD frameworks. The results from this study illustrate widespread adaptation of PYD elements by organizations in

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

Baltimore with particular emphasis by organizations to provide opportunities for youth to cultivate assets and agency and to create an empowering environment for youth. Organizations reported relatively fewer activities explicitly engaging the PYD element of contribution compared to the other elements. However, the opportunities for youth leadership and peer mentoring within organizations implicitly encouraged contribution among youth. Furthermore, organizations observed youth spontaneously engaging in contribution over time, which was cited as a positive outcome by program leaders.

Findings from this study are consistent with research on PYD interventions documenting a similar focus of youth programs on building assets through education and skills training within a context of supportive adult and peer relationships, followed by leadership opportunities to encourage agency and social engagement (Woodgate & Sigurdson, 2015; Worker et al., 2018). Informal observations and formal evaluations by the organizations themselves suggest a positive association between their approaches and desired outcomes, such as improved social-emotional regulation, self-confidence, and positive health behaviors (Pierce et al, 2017). These youth were often noted to show concern for others, mentoring younger participants and trying to help their peers in need. These observed outcomes are consistent with aspects of the Five Cs model of PYD, where youth participants were both witnessed and self-reported to feel more confident, competent, and connected to their peers and community (Lerner et al., 2005). Youth were noted to perform better academically, readily take on employment and leadership opportunities and express feelings of optimism about their futures to organization leaders. The prioritization of providing an empowering environment and the development of a familial culture for youth participants across organizations is also consistent with the emphasis on connection in the empowerment-based model of PYD (Travis & Leech, 2014).

This study included an adequate qualitative sample size of youth-facing organizations to provide meaningful insight into the scope of work around youth engagement in Baltimore City. A large representative body of youth organizations in Baltimore was invited to participate and multiple methods of recruitment were employed to help achieve the breadth of data collected for this study. The number of organizations represented by this study was large enough to offer a diversity of opinions and provide a landscape of youth engagement activities in Baltimore. Interview data from this study covered a wide range of youth program activities, community- and school-based organizations, and geographic representation of youth organizations. Credibility and confirmability were cited as requirements to achieve trustworthiness in qualitative research by Nowell et al. (2017). The presentation of data to stakeholder participants allowed for critical review of the investigators' interpretation of interview content.

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

Confirmation of the data by the stakeholders allowed for greater confidence in the dissemination of these qualitative research findings.

This study also had some limitations. Social desirability bias may have affected interview content as participants were aware of the study objectives. To limit bias from the affiliation of two investigators with organizations included in this study, the investigator affiliated with a particular organization did not complete individual coding for that organization. The study was also designed to be more explorative of youth engagement work around PYD and therefore the perceived impact on youth outcomes by organization leaders and youth themselves needs to be formally measured against existing PYD frameworks, such as the Five Cs and empowerment-based models of PYD (Lerner et al, 2005; Travis & Leech, 2014), to draw conclusions on specific PYD-related outcomes.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how youth-facing organizations in an urban setting such as Baltimore approach youth engagement within the context of PYD. Findings from this study demonstrate that although most organization leaders did not report familiarity with PYD frameworks, their methods of youth engagement align with a number of PYD principles. Previous research has studied formal PYD implementation efforts among mostly White higher-income youth (Catalano et al, 2004; Gavin et al, 2010), while this study provides evidence of real-world utilization of PYD principles by organizations working with predominately African American youth of lower socioeconomic status. Therefore, the present study adds to the body of research on PYD, illustrating that PYD frameworks may naturally be employed outside of formal interventions in this population. Additionally, the presentation of data from this study to organization leaders from Baltimore was met with their enthusiasm to learn more about PYD and how PYD frameworks can further their efforts. While this study focused on Baltimore alone, it is conceivable, based on the large and diverse sample represented here, that youth-facing organizations outside of Baltimore may similarly incorporate PYD elements and be interested in learning about PYD.

Formal training of youth-facing organizations on PYD frameworks and evaluation using established models of successful PYD implementation may be a next step for these organizations to achieve desired youth outcomes. Additionally, more research is needed to demonstrate the sustainability of positive effects using the PYD approach and their impact on the long-term health and lives of youth. Future studies should consider the barriers and facilitators to successful employment of PYD by youth programs. Understanding the perceptions

and experiences of community leaders who regularly work with adolescents is a crucial step in the process of enacting meaningful change at both programmatic and policy levels. Similarly, encouraging youth-facing organizations to think systematically about infusing PYD into their programs while designing them may help ensure success.

References

- Arnold, M., & Silliman, B. (2017). From theory to practice: A critical review of positive youth development program frameworks. *Journal of Youth Development*, 12(2), 1–20.
<https://doi.org/10.5195/jyd.2017.17>
- ATLAS.ti. (2019). The Qualitative Data Analysis & Research Software. <https://atlasti.com/>
- Baltimore City Health Department. (2017). *Neighborhood health profile for Baltimore City*.
[https://health.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/NHP%202017%20-%2000%20Baltimore%20City%20\(overall\)%20\(rev%206-22-17\).pdf](https://health.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/NHP%202017%20-%2000%20Baltimore%20City%20(overall)%20(rev%206-22-17).pdf)
- Benson, P. L., Scales, P.C., & Syertsen, A. K. (2011). The contribution of the developmental assets framework to positive youth development theory and practice. *Advances in Child Development and Behavior*, 41, 197–230. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-386492-5.00008-7>
- Castleberry, A., & Nolen, A. (2018). Thematic analysis of qualitative research data: Is it as easy as it sounds?. *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning*, 10(6), 807–815.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2018.03.019>
- Catalano, R. F., Berglund, J., Ryan, J., Lonczak, H., & Hawkins, J. D. (2004). Positive youth development in the United States: Research findings on evaluations of positive youth development programs. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591(1), 98–124.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716203260102>
- Catalano, R. P., Hawkins, J. D., Berglund, M. L., Pollard, J. A., & Arthur, M. W. (2002). Prevention science and positive youth development: Competitive or cooperative frameworks? *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 31, 230-239. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1054-139x\(02\)00496-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1054-139x(02)00496-2)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). *Youth online: High school YRBS - Baltimore, MD 2017 results*.
<https://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/app/Results.aspx?TT=C&SID=HS&QID=QNOBESE&LID=BA&LID2=SL&YID=2017&YID2=SY&SYID=&EYID=&HT=C07&LCT=LL&COL=S&ROW1=N&ROW2=N&TST=false&C1=&C2=&SC=DEFAULT&SO=ASC&VA=CI&CS=Y&DP=1&QP=G&FG=G1&FA=A1&FR=R1&FS=S1&FSC=P1&FSI=I1>
- Connell, J. P., Gambone, M. A., Smith, T. J. (2001). Youth development in community settings: Challenges to our field and our approach. In P. L. Benson & K. J. Pittman (Eds.), *Trends in youth development. Outreach scholarship*, Vol. 6. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-1459-6_10

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

- Fusch, P., & Ness, L. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(9), 1408–1416. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2281>
- Gavin, L. E., Catalano, R. F., David-Ferdon, C., Gloppen, K., & Markham, C. (2010). A review of positive youth development programs that promote adolescent sexual and reproductive health. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 46(3 Suppl). <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.JADOHEALTH.2009.11.215>
- Hershberg, R. M., DeSouza, L. M., Warren, A. E. A., Lerner, J. V., & Lerner, R. M. (2014). Illuminating trajectories of adolescent thriving and contribution through the words of youth: Qualitative findings from the 4-H study of positive youth development. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43, 950–970. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-014-0102-2>
- Jelicic, H., Bobek, D. L., Phelps, E., Lerner, R. M., & Lerner, J. V. (2007). Using positive youth development to predict contribution and risk behaviors in early adolescence: Findings from the first two waves of the 4-H study of positive youth development. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 31(3), 263–273. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025407076439>
- Lerner, J. V., Bowers, E. P., Minor, K., Boyd, M. J., Mueller, M. K., Schmid, K. L., Napolitano, C., Lewin-Bizan, S., & Lerner, R. M. (2013). Positive youth development: Processes, philosophies, and programs. In R. M. Lerner, M. A. Easterbrooks, J. Mistry, & I. B. Weiner (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology: Developmental psychology* (pp. 365–392). John Wiley & Sons.
- Lerner, R. M., Lerner, J. V., Almerigi, J. B., Theokas, C., Phelps, E., Gestsdottir, S., Naudeau, S., Jelicic, H., Alberts, A., Lang, M., Smith, L. M., Bobek, D. L., Richman-Raphael, D., Simpson, I., Christiansen, E. D., & von Eye, A. (2005). Positive youth development, participation in community youth development programs, and community contributions of fifth-grade adolescents: Findings from the first wave of the 4-H study of positive youth development. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 25(1), 17–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431604272461>
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Pierce, B., Bowden, B., McCullagh, M., Diehl, A., Chissell, Z., Rodriguez, R., Berman, B. M., & D'Adamo, C. (2017) A summer health program for African American high school students in Baltimore, Maryland: Community Partnership for Integrative Health. *Explore*, 13(3), 186–197. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2017.02.002>
- Rinaldi, R. L., & Farr, A. C. (2018). Promoting positive youth development: A psychosocial intervention evaluation. *Psychosocial Interventions*, 27(1), 22–34. <https://doi.org/10.5093/PI2018A5>
- Shek, D. T., & Yu, L. (2011). Prevention of adolescent problem behavior: Longitudinal impact of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong. *Scientific World Journal*, 11, 546–567. <https://doi.org/10.1100/TSW.2011.33>

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

- Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development, 88*(4), 1156–1171. <https://doi.org/10.1111/CDEV.12864>
- Travis, R., Jr., & Leech, T. G. J. (2014). Empowerment-based positive youth development: A new understanding of healthy development for African American youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 24*(1), 93–116. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12062>
- Tobin, G. A., & Begley, C. M. (2004). Methodological rigour within a qualitative framework. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 48*(4), 388–396. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2004.03207.x>
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (n.d.). Positive youth development? <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-development/positive-youth-development/what-is-positive-youth-development/index.html>
- Woodgate, R. L., & Sigurdson, C. M. (2015). Building school-based cardiovascular health promotion capacity in youth: a mixed methods study. *BMC Public Health, 15*(421). <https://doi.org/10.1186/S12889-015-1759-5>
- Worker, S. M., Iaccopucci, A. M., Bird, M., & Horowitz, M. (2018). Promoting positive youth development through teenagers-as-teachers programs. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 34*(1), 30–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558418764089>

Appendix A

Youth Programs Interview Guide

DATE:

ORGANIZATION/CITY/STATE:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – *Please note: We will not be using all of the probes with every interviewee; probes will be selected based on interviewee’s expertise.*

SECTION 1. Interviewee Background Information

Aim: 1. This section identifies specific organizations and individuals involved with youth programming in Baltimore City.

1. Describe the role of the stakeholder in their organization and the organization’s background.

Probe: What is your role within the organization?

Probe: How long as have you been involved with the organization?

Probe: Where is the organization located and what part of the city is targeted through its work?

2. Describe the organization.

Probe: What is the mission of your organization?

Probe: Are there specific program objectives for your organization’s work?

Probe: How is health, nutrition and/or wellness addressed through your program if at all?

Probe: How does the culture surrounding adolescent participants in your program influence the teaching methods in your program?

Probe: Is your program school-based or community-based?

Probe: What support does your organization have (i.e., school district, non-profit status, grants)?

SECTION 2: Organization structure and activities

Aim: In this section, the specific details of each organization is explored to identify similarities and differences among the various programs and organizations within the city.

1. Describe the organization’s structure.

Probe: How are decisions made within the organization?

Probe: How many people are in your organization?

2. Describe the participants in the program.

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

Probe: How many youth attend your program?

Probe: How do you recruit youth for your program?

Probe: How old are the program participants?

Probe: How many girls and boys are in the program respectively?

Probe: Are all youth in attendance also enrolled in school?

Probe: How many youth in your program are employed?

Probe: Are there youth in your program who deal with food insecurity? Or housing insecurity?

Probe: How do you come to know about the resource (i.e., nutrition, housing) needs of your participants?

Probe: How involved are parents/guardians in the program?

3. Describe how your organization achieves its mission and/or objectives.

Probe: What specific activities take place at your organization?

Probe: Are there any best practices or models you look to for guidance on program implementation?

SECTION 3: Evaluation of Programs

Aim: Explore how youth programs are currently being evaluated and what these evaluations show in terms of process and outcome measures (specifically participant recruitment, retention, and behavioral impact).

1. How do you evaluate your program to know if you are achieving your objectives?

Probe: Describe the specific evaluation measures your organization uses.

Probe: What findings do you have from evaluation?

2. How successful has your organization been in retaining and engaging participants?

Probe: From year to year, how has your participant group changed?

Probe: Do you have the same participants at each program session?

Probe: What challenges have you encountered in retaining participants and/or engaging them?

Probe: How would you rate the engagement level among program participants?

3. What if any behavioral changes have been observed among program participants through the program?

Probe: What types of behavior change you have witnessed among participants?

Probe: Are there program specific factors you have identified as influential in achieving behavior change?

Probe: Are there participant specific factors you have identified as influential in promoting behavior change?

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

Probe: How sustained are the behavior changes?

SECTION 4: Positive Youth Development

Aim: In this section, we want to understand the extent to which organizations incorporate elements of positive youth development frameworks (assets, agency, contribution, empowering environment) within their program objectives and activities and how this impacts their success.

1. Describe the organization's familiarity with positive youth development frameworks.

Probe: What elements of these frameworks are employed by your organization?

Probe: How intentional is the incorporation of these elements?

Probe: How has utilization of PYD concepts influenced the success of your program?

SECTION 5: Learning Opportunities and Best Practices

Aim: Identify best practices or gaps in knowledge of how youth programs can effectively incorporate positive youth development into their program objectives to achieve sustainable positive community impact.

1. What big picture questions regarding adolescent programs come to mind from your work thus far?
2. What would you say are the keys to success for your organization's work?

Probe: Are there best practices you have identified for engaging adolescent youth toward desired outcomes?

Probe: Are there practices or methods that you have found to be ineffective in engaging youth?

SECTION 6: Barriers and facilitators to adolescent focused programs

Aim: In this section we would like to understand the challenges your organization faces in carrying out youth programs.

1. Describe the barriers or challenges your organization faces in program implementation.

Probe: What factors within or outside of your control serve as challenges to program implementation?

Probe: What factors serve as challenges to program/organization's sustainability?

2. Describe how your organization deals with these challenges or barriers.

Probe: How has your organization overcome the described challenges?

Probe: Are there specific allies within the city, state, or country that you have looked to for assistance?

Appendix B**Table B1. Summary of Organizations and Characteristics of Youth-Facing Organizations in Baltimore City Included in The In-Depth Interviews**

Organization	Activities	Activity duration/frequency	Number of participants 14+ years old	Age range of youth participants
Baltimore City Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services Farm to School Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Culinary skills • Farming/gardening • Leadership/empowerment 	1-day workshops (school-based, single-day events) Summer, 5 weeks (YouthWorks, Monday–Friday)	100–120 per year (1-day workshops) + 10 per year (YouthWorks)	5–18 years
Black Yield Institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Culinary skills • Farming/gardening • Social enterprise • Leadership/empowerment • Mentoring • Academics/education 	Year-round (community-based, varied from single-day events to Monday–Friday youth employment)	10 per year	14–24 years
Boys and Girls Club of Baltimore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Sports/physical activity • Leadership/empowerment • SEL/mindfulness • Mentoring • Academics/education 	Year-round (school- and community-based, weekly)	25–30 per year	5–18 years

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

Organization	Activities	Activity duration/frequency	Number of participants 14+ years old	Age range of youth participants
City Weeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Culinary skills • Farming/gardening • Sports/physical activity • Social Enterprise • Leadership/empowerment • SEL/mindfulness • STEM • Mentoring • Academics/education 	Year-round (community-based, weekly) Academic year (school-based, Monday–Friday)	80 per year (community-based) + 40 per year (school-based)	5–18 years
Corner Team, Inc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Farming/gardening • Sports/physical activity • Leadership/empowerment • SEL/mindfulness • STEM • Mentoring • Academics/education 	Year-round (community-based, Monday–Friday)	25–30 per year	12–18 years
Greenmount West Community Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Culinary skills • Sports/physical activity • Leadership/empowerment • SEL/mindfulness • Mentoring • Academics/education 	Year-round (community-based, Monday–Sunday)	9 per year	5–24 years

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

Organization	Activities	Activity duration/frequency	Number of participants 14+ years old	Age range of youth participants
Healthy People Juice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Culinary skills • Social Enterprise • Leadership/empowerment • STEM • Mentoring 	1-day events to 8-week programs (school-based) Year-round (community-based, weekly)	15–60 per event/workshop (school-based) + 20–30 per year (community-based)	5–24 years
HeartSmiles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurship • Leadership/empowerment • Mentoring • Academics/education 	Year-round (community-based, twice weekly)	60–100 per year	14–24 years
Holistic Life Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Farming/gardening • Sports/physical activity • Leadership/empowerment • SEL/mindfulness • Mentoring 	Academic year (school-based, 4x/week) Year-round (community-based, weekly)	1450 per year (school-based) + 12 per year (community-based)	5–24 years
Mission Fit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Sports/physical activity • Leadership/empowerment • SEL/mindfulness • Mentoring 	Year-round (community and school-based, 6–10 weeks, Monday–Friday)	50–70 per year	12–18 years
Mission Thrive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Culinary skills • Farming/gardening • Leadership/empowerment • SEL/mindfulness • STEM • Academics/education 	Summer (community-based, 5 weeks, Monday–Friday)	30 per year	14–18 years

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

Organization	Activities	Activity duration/frequency	Number of participants 14+ years old	Age range of youth participants
So What Else	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Culinary skills • Farming/gardening • Leadership/empowerment • Academics/education 	Year-round (community-based, twice weekly during school year and Monday–Friday during summer)	25–30 per year	12–18 years
SquashWise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Culinary skills • Sports/physical activity • Leadership/empowerment • SEL/mindfulness • STEM • Academics/education 	Year-round (school- and community-based daily)	50–0 per year	14–18 years
The Be. Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Culinary skills • Farming/gardening • Leadership/empowerment • SEL/mindfulness • Mentoring • Academics/education 	Year-round (community-based, weekly)	5–10 per year	10–14 years
The Food Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Culinary skills • Social Enterprise • Leadership/empowerment • STEM • Mentoring 	Year-round (community-based, Monday–Friday)	20 per year	5–24 years

Utilization of Positive Youth Development

Organization	Activities	Activity duration/frequency	Number of participants 14+ years old	Age range of youth participants
UMD Extension 4-H Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition lessons • Farming/gardening • Leadership/empowerment • STEM • Mentoring 	6–8 weeks (school- and community-based, Monday–Friday)	46 per year (school-based) + 63 per year (summer)	5–18 years
Village Learning Place/Margaret Brent Youth Cooking Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culinary skills • Nutrition lessons 	30 weeks (school- and community-based, academic year, Monday–Friday)	5 per year	5–18 year