

The Youth Policy and Action Strategic Planning Forum

On August 3 and 4, 2000, a group of 54 young people and 54 adults from across the state came together to develop a platform that would move New Mexico and its communities to promoting positive youth development.

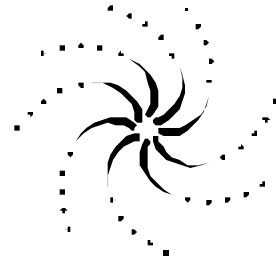
Participants gathered in focus groups for the two days, using the eight well-established categories of developmental assets. They discussed the status of young people today and the many things that could be done to promote positive youth development.

Positive youth development means purposefully seeking to meet youth needs and build youth competencies so that they can become successful adults. Rather than seeing young people as problems to be "fixed," a positive developmental approach views them instead as resources and builds upon their strengths and capabilities.

The course of action called for by forum participants has three parts:

- **First, we need to look at our attitudes and beliefs and how we talk about young people.**
- **Second, we need to get better informed about the positive youth development movement.**
- **Third, we need to get involved.**

Here is what they said ...

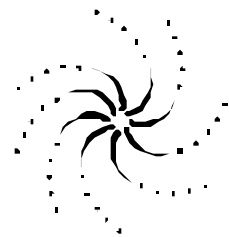


Young People Are Not Viewed Positively

Currently, there are major differences between the levels of caring and commitment to youth in families, schools, and communities.

- The general public and many communities are relatively uninformed and uninvolved in any meaningful positive youth development. Youth are not taken seriously and are often viewed in the negative. Media attention to youth is typically more negative than positive.
- Schools are either too overwhelmed or otherwise resistant to getting involved in positive youth development. There is little focus on fostering positive identity, promoting social competencies, and developing programs and supports. Counseling services are hard to access and programs such as music and art are being eliminated. Teachers are described as overworked, underpaid, disillusioned, and worn out. Classes are too large and interactions too impersonal.
- Many parents only minimally participate in the school or other aspects of their children's lives. Many youth are not consistently supported with trust and guidance, nor are they taught basic values. Often there is little family life and parents lack the basic skills and competencies to foster positive development.
- Public officials tend to give lip service to the needs of youth. In general they do not promote policy or funding that supports positive youth development.

So what do we do about this? Read on ...



How Will We Know If We Are Getting Anywhere?

We will know we are getting somewhere when we start to see:

- More positive attitudes and values about youth
- More positive media attention to young people
- More community involvement in the lives of young people
- More positive relations between youth and adults
- More youth organizations with positive youth development frameworks
- Increase in the number of community schools
- Decreased class sizes
- At least one pilot charter school developed on positive youth development principles
- Funding of the Next Generation Fund
- Increased number of boards with youth members
- More funding for positive youth development
- More retention programs for good teachers and administrators
- More Community Youth Centers
- More Comprehensive Family Service Centers
- Increased parental involvement in the schools
- Increase in exchange programs and participation rates
- Increase in number of cross-cultural activities
- Increase in volunteers and mentors
- A legislative session devoted to youth
- Improvements in academic performance
- Lower rates of violence, substance abuse, dropout, and other harmful behaviors