



Speech to Civic Organization

Introduce the report as developed by citizens, with the objective of youth development.

I am so thrilled to be here representing the committed group of citizens that came together to develop recommendations for communities to provide opportunities for the positive development of young people.

Include youth development examples, preferably tied to the audiences' experiences.

Just the other day I was at a concert by the Washington High School Chorus, a chorus that this civic organization has actively supported. At the concert, I saw 120 young people give an amazing performance with precision, beauty, and confidence. You should be very proud of your support for the chorus. This is the kind of experience that builds a young person's self-esteem and proves to them that they can achieve wonderful things with hard work.

Introduce Brain Architecture model early. Explain why youth programs matter to youth development. Reinforce that this is a community responsibility.

These kinds of experiences are essential to a child's positive development. From birth, a child's brain architecture is growing and developing, and this process continues through adolescence. A host of structural changes occur in the architecture of the human brain during these critical years. Researchers tell us that the parts of the brain responsible for things like sensation seeking are getting turned on in big ways around the time of puberty, while the parts for exercising judgment are still maturing. So you've got this time gap between when things impel young people toward taking risks, and when things that allow people to think before they act come online. Those connections will happen eventually, but in the meantime, kids need guidance to make the right choices – and practice. The real value of programs such as chorus, 4H, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, intramural sports and others is that they provide consistent positive experiences and role models to guide their choices over time. As a community we need to pay attention to the unique needs that kids have at different ages, and provide the right opportunities and structures in our communities that help children develop well.

Explain the benefits to the community – communities give to kids who give back to communities now and later in adulthood.

This civic organization is committed to supporting the community, but what is it that makes a good, strong community? Look around this room. It's people

who share a sense of caring and who are competent and responsible in exercising that care. Who will take over the committees we work so hard to support, the fundraisers, the work of this organization? We need to be working alongside our young people now, to help them learn that organizations like ours make a difference in the community and bring enormous satisfaction to our lives.

How is a sense of community created and maintained? It doesn't happen accidentally. A strong community is based upon citizens who are involved and committed to the well-being of the community as a whole, and lifelong commitment begins early in life. Adolescence is the time when young people traditionally become part of the community and begin to try on their roles as adults-in-training. Relationships with neighbors, teachers, coaches, mentors and others, engage kids in the community in ways that help them to find out who they are, what they can become, and how and why they are important to other people. So the opportunities and experiences we offer kids in our communities not only strengthen our communities today, but they also create adults who give back to and sustain their communities in the future.

Include youth development examples, preferably tied to the audiences' experiences. Include parents.

Last year I had the good fortune to work with a youth group in restoring wetlands down by the river. These young volunteers worked with environmental scientists to determine what needed to be done and organized crews of volunteers to do the manual labor. In the process, not only did they create a wonderful landscape, but they forged relationships, developed self-confidence, and became more vested in and committed to the community. These are the experiences that all parents want for their children – opportunities to try on adult responsibilities while in the protected domain of the community.

Explain the problem – programs are being cut, costs to parents are increasing, fewer youth can participate, etc.

Right now we are not doing what we need to for young people. \$4 million dollars that had been dedicated to after school programs alone was not allotted. As a result of this precipitous reversal, a sample of programs showed 1 in 4 no longer in existence and 2/3 significantly reduced. What industry would expect a reliable outcome from unreliable investments? This is a mistake we cannot afford to make about our own future. Youth development is not just an afternoon a week with random staffing and program. Youth development happens when positive experiences are sustained over time. This is what creates competence and meaning and builds a foundation for establishing adult behaviors.

In fact, the program I just mentioned has no funding for this year. You may not know this if you don't have young people at home but today, in our state, it is not unusual for a family to pay hundreds of dollars a year for their child to participate in sports, music, or other activities. Furthermore, the opportunities offered by faith organizations, parks and recreation departments, community organizations and others, are not equally accessible. Several factors limit the availability of opportunities for approximately half the nearly 950,000 young people aged 5-18

years old in our state, including geographic isolation, high costs, and transportation.

We all know the difference that involvement makes. Kids who are involved in clubs, teams or volunteer work, are active, have friends, trust their parents more and feel good about themselves and their community. Research confirms what we have all seen in our own lives. Studies indicate that those who participate in youth programs have better school attendance, better grades, more positive attitudes toward school, and more aspirations for higher education. And the effects are long-term. Adults who participated in activities as youth became more likely to become active citizens as adults, settled in stable relationships, employed and happy with their lives compared to those who did not participate. Relationships and experiences in childhood and adolescence lay the foundation for a wide range of developmental outcomes that really matter -- self-confidence and sound mental-health, motivation to learn, achievement in school and later in life, knowing the difference between right and wrong, having the capacity to sustain friendships and to be a successful parent.

Reinforce that these programs are a necessity for positive youth development.

Explain the report's recommendations as being about planning what is needed in each community. Include parents, but expand responsibility to all citizens.

This report makes specific recommendations for how all citizens can work together to map the opportunities that are already available, create the developmental opportunities that are missing in some communities, and find ways to engage all youth in beneficial activities. We all have a role to play. Parents coach, mentor, and encourage their own children and others. Senior citizens, who have raised their own children, have invaluable experiences to provide. Civic organizations, like this one, provide the structure for citizens to come together to address these issues. And we all need to have a say in how our state invests in our future.

All citizens, all members of every community, have a stake in making sure that Minnesota is the kind of place where all children grow up to be solid, decent citizens. I leave you with the wise words of Franklin D. Roosevelt, "We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future."