



## Talking Points for Youth Development Programs

- **Youth development is community development.** Repeated studies have established that young people who participate in quality youth development programs are more likely to be active voting citizens, settled in stable personal relationships, employed and economically self-sufficient, and happy with their lives as young adults, compared to those who did not participate in programs. They also have greater trust in their parents. These are important, measurable benefits to the community. Investment in youth is investment in healthy communities.
- Moving into the community is a critical part of growing up and becoming an adult. Learning how to make that transition is a big part of what adolescence is all about. **Youth development programs are about making this transition more productive, focused and successful for all parts of the community.** We want and need young people to grow into their adult roles and assume citizenship. Good, well-planned youth programs make the process more productive for Minnesota as a whole – for the youth as well as the community that needs them.
- Parents help their children make choices about how to use their time, and how to nourish and pursue their interests. As young people grow and can participate in a wider range of activities, parents want to make sure their children can form positive relationships with a range of adults – such as pastors, coaches, co-workers, seniors, professionals who lead youth programs and community volunteers who can serve as mentors and role models. **Quality youth programs support parents** in guiding their children toward their roles as adults in the community.
- Quality youth development programs help young people understand their relationships to peers and to people older and younger than themselves. By giving them **a chance to put into practice the values they learn at home** -- values of persistence, of helping others, taking responsibility for their actions, and working as part of a team -- youth programs help young people develop positive self-esteem and become solid, well-rounded individuals. Consistent practice over time in a variety of settings is optimal. Parents want what's best for kids, which

includes the kinds of experiences they can only get through interactions and connections with those around them in the community.

- **Scientists tell us that adolescence is one of the critical building moments in the development of the brain's architecture.** As adolescents grow, their brains, like their bodies, are developing. The physical changes are obvious. The developing architecture of their brains, while less apparent, is just as important. Recent research reveals that during adolescence, different parts of the brain are actually being formed and used for the first time. When adolescents sometimes seem unable to recognize the consequences of their actions, it can be because their brains literally are not yet developed enough to do so. Part of this brain development is shaped by experience. The experiences young people have contribute to their brain structure and development. The opportunity to lead a discussion, plan a food drive, perform in a play, commit and carry out a community assignment – these experiences literally build a foundation in a young person's brain that transforms that person into a mature and engaged member of the community. Each experience builds on the others. That's why it's so important that youth have the opportunity for sustained and meaningful interaction with adults through quality developmental experiences.
- **Minnesota has lost substantial ground on youth development since 2003.** \$4 million dollars that had been dedicated to after school programs 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. We urge every Minnesotan in every community to talk to local education officials and youth leaders to learn what has been lost in their communities and how to get it back.
- Parents know that for young people to participate in school-related programs such as sports and music, families must shoulder a larger share of the cost every year, because of cut-backs in school budgets. But those of us who are not parents may be entirely unaware of what's happening to young people in our communities. **We need to pay attention, as this affects all of us.** Community based programs, such as (INSERT SPECIFICS) have been forced to reduce both the range of activities available, and the number of young people who can participate. Rural areas have been especially hard hit, but for most Minnesota youth, the result is **not enough opportunity for positive developmental experiences** guided by qualified adults.
- **Solutions are available.** A recent report from a panel of experts and citizens estimates that it would take about \$3 per Minnesotan to ensure that professionally trained people are available to communities to help structure and operate quality

youth development programs. That's modest when you consider that virtually every Minnesotan in every corner of the state stands to benefit from the better preparation of the next generation of young adults to contribute and participate to our economy and to community life. How we raise the money will probably be a combination of private and public funding. But let's stop arguing over what amounts to very little money compared to the alternative, and focus on how we get the job done.

- Let's be clear about what's at stake. This is about the future of our communities. Young people learn and develop at home, in school, and within the community. As their brains and bodies develop, the quality of their interactions with adults and with other young people shapes their ability to see themselves in relation to others. By making sure that positive experiences are available to young people in community centers, parks and libraries, Boys and Girls Clubs, arts and athletics programs, and community volunteering, we help guide them in their journey to adulthood. High quality youth programs, such as the Leadership Development programs of the YWCA, help young people realize that they have important contributions to make to their communities, by helping them recognize and develop their abilities and gifts. These experiences also build self-esteem and good judgment, which further inoculates them against risky behaviors which are costly to the community. **The community invests** in its young people so that they will be able to contribute to community life as engaged adult citizens. **The community needs to do its homework now**, investigating how to reverse this situation in which more and more programs are being eliminated or becoming too costly for even middle class parents.