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MessageBRIEF
Youth Community Connections
Minnesota's Statewide Afterschool Alliance

Youth Development is Community Development

Every Minnesotan has a stake in making sure young people grow into productive adults.

We talk about “community development” in terms of new businesses and houses. But the backbone of every community is human beings—solid, caring people who understand the common good and who want to contribute.

Today's children and youth are the adults we'll depend on tomorrow—as workers, leaders, voters, friends, and neighbors. We'll need them to help solve problems, make important decisions, and care for us as we age.

GIVE THEM THE RIGHT KINDS OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Right now, we should be giving our youth the right kinds of experiences, so they grow into responsible citizens, workers, and family members. One way to do that is to offer them community-based youth development programs.

Studies show that adolescents who join youth programs are more likely to grow into people their families and their communities can be proud of—active, engaged voters who are employed, economically self-sufficient, settled in stable personal relationships, and happy with their lives.

Here's an example of how community-based youth development works. When young volunteers join scientists in a youth program to help restore Minnesota wetlands, they're not just recreating a valuable landscape. They're forging relationships, developing self-confidence, and becoming more vested in and committed to the community.

When young people have consistent opportunities to make community connections like this, their brains develop in positive ways, making it easier for them to cooperate, make sound judgments, and respect others.

These are the experiences that all parents want for their children—opportunities to practice adult responsibilities and to “test their wings,” while in the protected domain of the community.

There are all kinds of quality youth development

programs. They take place in community centers, nonprofit organizations, schools, places of worship, and other settings and involve structured programs and the support of caring adults.

Each program helps young people recognize their own strengths and limitations, and understand their relationships and responsibilities to others. Each offers ways for youth to make more independent choices, putting into practice values they've learned at home and school.

BENEFITS FOR YOUTH ... AND FOR COMMUNITIES

Youth development participants have better school attendance, better grades, more positive attitudes toward school, and higher aspirations for post-secondary education. Typically, they're active, have friends, trust their parents, and feel good about themselves and their community.

What few Minnesotans understand is that in many places across the state, quality youth programs are missing or declining.

Large state budget cuts, increased fees for families, and the rising cost of gas has put these opportunities out of reach for too many young people, their families, and their communities.

There's enormous interest right now in restoring lost public resources to ensure that youth are involved in safe, developmentally appropriate activities. Join us in asking for a stronger commitment to our next generation

Minnesotans are beginning to see that turning our backs on young people means abandoning our own future, and the future of our communities.