4-H Program Quality and Accountability Task Force

PYD Framework Committee Final Report

April 11, 2016

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Introduction
The Positive Youth Development (PYD) Framework group is charged with reviewing existing PYD frameworks and making recommendations regarding the use of the framework in the 4-H Youth Development program. The end goal is not to arrive at a recommendation of one particular framework, but rather to determine which frameworks are recommended for use in 4-H based on the committee’s review, and to provide guidelines for appropriate use.

What is Positive Youth Development?
Positive youth development emerged a way to describe and promote healthy youth development distinct from previous approaches that dominated the research field (Small & Memmo, 2004). These earlier approaches included a focus on prevention, risk and protective factors, and resiliency. The prevention approach emphasizes that it is less costly and more efficient to prevent youth problems from occurring in the first place, than to address them once they have happened (Durlak, 1997). The focus on risk and protective factors highlighted that the context in which a young person is developing plays a key role in his or her development, particularly when there is a high degree of risk involved (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Garbarino, 1995; Rutter, 1979). The resiliency approach grew out of the recognition that not all youth who are exposed to significant risk factors develop problems. Resiliency researchers worked to understand the factors that helped young people adapt well, despite the presence of contextual risk (Garmezy, 1993).

The positive youth development (PYD) approach emphasizes the promotion of positive youth development and the situations and processes that facilitate healthy development (Small & Memmo, 2004). In their summary of the PYD approach Small & Memmo (2004) clarify that PYD is used to describe three distinct ideas: 1) A description of the natural process of development in children and adolescents; 2) The focus of programs and organizations that provide activities to promote positive development; and 3) A philosophy based on the belief that a positive asset-building approach that focuses on building youth strengths (Hamilton, S. F, 1999).

Small and Memmo (2004) further outline four assumptions of the PYD approach gleaned from the nascent, but building scholarly PYD field. First, is the idea that helping youth reach their full potential is the best way to prevent problems (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998). Second, that youth need support and opportunities to succeed (Gambone, Klem, & Connell, 2003). Third, building community capacity to support youth development is critical (Benson, 1997; Connell, Gambone, & Smith, 1998, Eccles & Gootman, 2002). And fourth, youth should be
viewed as assets to be developed, not problems to be fixed (Pittman & Irby, 1996; Pittman & Zeldin, 1995).

The 4-H Youth Development program is a positive youth development program because of its emphasis on providing intentional structured activities to promote healthy development in youth. Through these activities, and the additional support and opportunities of the larger 4-H program, youth are encouraged to reach their full potential.

Given that the 4-H program the definition of a PYD program, it is incumbent upon the program to articulate a clear theoretical framework for the program.

**Defining a Framework**
Youth development frameworks articulate the internal and external factors, and their interactions, that support optimal development in youth (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009).

Frameworks have four purposes (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009):

1. To give direction and purpose to a program
2. To guide program activities toward outcome achievement
3. To identify logical and clear program outcomes
4. To guide program evaluation

In addition, frameworks are built on sound theory that underscores the processes through which a program can achieve its stated outcomes (Chen, 2004). Program theory contains two critical aspects: 1) the program **theory of change**, which articulates the way in which a change is to come about; and 2) the program **theory of action**, which refers specifically to what actions need to happen, at what level of success, for the program outcomes to be achieved (Arnold, 2015; Funnell & Rogers, 2011).

**The Plan**
A monograph published by the 4-H Center for Youth Development at the University of California (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009) reviewed five of the more prominent frameworks used in 4-H at that time: 1) Targeting Life Skills (Hendricks, 1996); 2) Developmental Assets (Search Institute, 1997; 2007); 3) The Essential Elements (Kress, 2003); 4) The Five C’s (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg 2000); and 5) the Community Action Framework for Youth Development (Gambone, Klem, & Connell, 2002).

The authors used three criteria for their critical review of the frameworks:
• **Validity** of the framework- this criteria focused on the science behind the framework that supports the efficacy of its use for PYD, and evidence from research literature that demonstrates the framework leads to positive youth outcomes.

• **Utility** of the framework – this criteria focused on the extent to which the framework was used in youth development research and evaluation as well as the specificity and measurability of the constructs.

• **Universality** – this criteria considered the applicability of the framework for varying populations.

Heck and Subramaniam’s (2009) monograph is straightforward, easy to understand and a useful model for our current framework review. As such we propose creating a similar document, with a similar format, that builds on the work already done. We will add to the monograph by reviewing additional frameworks that have been developed since the monograph’s publication, and add additional review criteria.

**Review Criteria and Instructions to Reviewers**

1. **Overall Description of the Framework**
   *Provide a brief description of the framework and why it is proposed as useful for youth development*

2. **Validity and Scientific Evidence Supporting the Framework**
   *Describe the science behind the framework*

3. **Program Theory of Change**
   *Is there an explicit or implicit theory of change? Describe.*

4. **Program Theory of Action**
   *Is there an explicit or implicit theory of action? Describe.*

5. **Utility of Framework for 4-H**
   *Describe the strengths and weaknesses of the framework for 4-H Youth Development*

6. **Recommendations for Use in 4-H**
   *Provide recommendations for adoption and use within the 4-H program considering the criterion of validity, theory of change and action, and utility.*

**References**


**Apples and Oranges: Grouping the Frameworks**

As our team began its review of positive youth development frameworks, it became immediately clear that even though they appeared to meet the definition of a framework put forth by Heck and Subramanian (2009), they were not all the same. In order to provide clarity regarding the frameworks, we grouped them into four categories:

1. **Research-Driven Frameworks**
   Frameworks in this category were developed through rigorous *confirmatory* analysis and derived from data collected from youth. These frameworks include:
   - The Community Action Framework for Youth Development
   - Developmental Assets Framework
   - Developmental Systems Theory: The 5 C’s of Youth Development

2. **Research-Based Frameworks**
   Frameworks in this category emerged from a systematic *secondary* review of child and adolescence development literature. Research-based frameworks include:
   - Character Counts ®
   - The Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development
   - Soft Skills that Foster Youth Workforce Development
   - Targeting Life Skills

3. **Research-Adapted Frameworks**
   The third group represented frameworks that were adapted from one or more lines of youth development research for use in specific program contexts. These include:
   - California 4-H Youth Development Framework
   - Oregon 4-H Youth Development Framework
   - Positive Youth Justice Framework
   - Step-it-Up-2-Thrive Framework

This initial grouping of the frameworks allowed us to review the frameworks in the context in which they were developed. For example, empirically-tested frameworks met the “validity” criteria in different ways than other frameworks. But all the frameworks able to be reviewed based on the proposed theory of change and theory of action. And all were reviewed based on the match of the framework with all of the review criteria.
Overall Description of the Framework
The Community Action Framework for Youth Development (CAFYD)\(^1\) is based on an extensive review and analysis of extant research on factors that reduce negative and increase positive developmental outcomes in adolescence and young adulthood (Gambone, Klem, & Connell, 2002). In addition, the framework identifies gaps between short- and long-term frameworks, theory or research and practice, discipline-specific and holistic approaches, diverse types of outcomes and paths-to-outcomes. The research navigated diverse findings to provide an integrative, yet not simplistic, framework for programming, research, and policy.

The CAFYD attempts to: 1) understand pathways that lead youth to positive outcomes; and 2) describe critical issues at each step on the pathway. The model focuses on developmental supports and opportunities that guide programs to directly influence youth in learning to be productive, connecting with adults and institutions, and navigating challenges. These supports and opportunities, in turn, influence long-term self-sufficiency, healthy relationships, and community engagement.

Validity and Scientific Evidence Supporting the Framework
With funding from the W.T. Grant Foundation, YDS conducted an extensive (although not exhaustive) meta-analysis of research linking specific outcomes of the CAFYD model with each other and with short- and long-term developmental outcomes. In addition, they examined high-quality, practical measures of youth development. YDS found that “The youth development research literature is not a unified or even cross-referenced set of articles and reports” (p. 9).

YDS researchers examined several national data sets, then selected two (Michigan Study of Adult Life Transitions [MSALT] and Maryland Adolescent Development in Context [MADICS] databases, conducting in-depth analysis on 1) face validity (item content or indicator consistent with framework elements); 2) adequate variation (breadth of items and answer options); 3) internal coherence and consistency (between scale items and by respondent); 4) associations with criterion measures (concurrent and predictive relationships). In addition, the YDS team gave careful attention to the strength of elements as reflected by their baseline and conditional probability for predicting risk or optimal outcomes (e.g., “what matters”).

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\(^1\) See Appendix 1, Figure 1 on Page 55, for a graphic of this framework
In these samples, the percentage of youth thriving was about double those at risk. Risk and optimal classification criteria were distinguished by only one indicator (e.g., 2/3 areas thriving vs. 2/3 areas at risk). Subsequent analysis showed this distinction effectively discriminated risk (20-30%) and optimal (20-30%; 40% for navigating) status for long-term outcomes. Analyses of selected datasets confirmed that supports and opportunities influence risk and thriving and that effects are cumulative through adolescence and young adulthood.

Specific supports and opportunities (e.g., supportive relationships, challenging and engaging learning experiences, meaningful involvement and safety) were related to all adolescent outcomes (being productive and navigating researched most often). Parents with high interests, expectations, and monitoring contributed most to increasing assets and decreasing risks, with positive peers and other adults exerting similar, but weaker influence. Engaging learning experiences and meaningful involvement appeared to increase assets and reduce risks, although the diversity of experiences precludes generalizations about specific program effects.

YDS also conducted an extensive literature review of journal articles, books, and other reports to determine 1) relevance to framework elements; 2) quality of study methods; and 3) strength of findings related to the framework and to obtain samples of good measures for specific indicators. Together, the literature review and detailed analysis of longitudinal studies represents one of the most rigorous meta-analyses of youth development research to date.

YDS concluded that “What Matters” for young adult outcomes is learning to be productive (e.g., school engagement and performance, use of free time, life skills, work), connecting (e.g., with adults, peers, organizations), and navigating (e.g., social settings, self- and other-care, risk taking, coping). Availability of supports (esp. emotionally-engaged and practically-supportive adults) and opportunities (esp. activities that are challenging, engaging, and relevant) and often improves prospects for thriving and reduces likelihood of risk in young adulthood.

**Program Theory of Change**

Primary influences for change in youth are related to program quality/qualities (health, safety, support, opportunities), consistent with Eccles and Gootman (2002). CAFYD also recognizes the importance of working with stakeholders and communities as prerequisites to program effectiveness.

Focusing on individual performance (vs. group averages), the YDS team found:

1) The number of supportive adult relationships was related to thresholds for risk and optimal outcomes;
2) That resources and liabilities (experiences and outcomes) early in development have cumulative, even exponential effects in adolescence and adulthood.

These factors influence target outcomes, strategies, and contexts for change, thus must be incorporated in a program theory of change. In addition, links were identified between learning to be productive and later self-sufficiency and relationships and between learning to navigate and later self-sufficiency and community involvement. Such linkages may allow youth leaders to make a case that short-term programs contribute to long term outcomes.

**Program Theory of Action**

CAFYD presents an explicit, although condensed theory of action integrating prior research and practice in the following sequence:

A) Improving Long-term Outcomes in Adulthood (economic self-sufficiency, healthy family and social relationships, and community involvement) depends upon...

B) Improving (Short-term) Developmental Outcomes (learning to be productive, to connect, and to navigate), that depends upon...

C) Increasing Supports and Opportunities for Youth (Adequate nutrition, health, and shelter, Multiple supportive relationships with adults and peers, Meaningful opportunities for involvement and membership, Challenging and engaging activities and learning experiences, and Safety), that depends upon...

D) Implementing Community Strategies to Enhance Supports and Opportunities for Youth (strengthening community adults’ and families’ capacity to support youth, Reform and coordination of public institutions and services to support youth development, Increasing the number and quality of developmental activities for youth, and creating policies and realigning resources in public and private sectors to support community strategies), that depends upon...

E) Building Community Capacity and Conditions for Change (Building stakeholders’ awareness, knowledge, and engagement and commitment, Conveying urgency, possibility, equity and inevitability of change).

YDS researchers note (p. 21) that “Moving to action at a community level requires also understanding how well young people need to be doing in developmental areas (how good is good enough?) and how much difference these outcomes make (how much can young people’s lives expect to be changed by improving these outcomes?).” Several exemplary evaluations are cited as corroborative evidence of their community-based, collaborative approach.
Utility of Framework for 4-H

Like Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Model, Hawkins and Catalano’s (1992) Social Development Model, and Search Institute’s 40 Assets Model (Benson, 1993), CAFYD views risk and thriving conditions and outcomes in the context of community and program settings. This broader time-space perspective is consistent with long-term involvement in challenging 4-H youth programming coordinated by caring adults. The CAFYD model emphasizes development and utilization of youth capacities at an individual (not just group) level, with sensitivity to conditions and effects of risks. However, this broader perspective also validates the importance of targeting community- or organization-level indicators (e.g., not just youth-level indicators) as a means to improve conditions for positive youth development.

The CAFYD model is not only theoretically sound and evidence-based, but battle-tested. Youth Development Strategies (YDS) implemented the CAFYD in several (esp. urban) locations in collaboration with several prominent youth and community organizations. These experiences generated processes and resources (e.g., common language and strategies, consensus and model-building and program selection, assessment and accountability strategies) shown as understandable and practically usable by diverse community partners. YDS reports that stakeholders are most interested in evidence connecting developmental supports to long-term outcomes for youth that the CAFYD approach was designed to address.

Although the CAFYD model is based on sound theory and practice, it is now more than a decade old, so that types and effects of specific supports and opportunities, risks and assets may be configured differently today. Although CAFYD is relatively easy to grasp, translating it to multi-level, multi-dimensional, long-term programming is a complex and challenging task. In particular, youth leaders must recognize factors they can and cannot influence (or may influence only indirectly or longitudinally), then target and talk about their program’s effects more realistically (e.g., relative to ongoing assets and risks vs. exclusively as program effects). The CAFYD model should enable youth leaders to show how diverse programs and audiences fit within a broader 4-H mission, yet acknowledge that “one size does not fit all.” Within communities, 4-H staff will need to integrate the model’s insights into their own contexts and resources, imagining specific actions and outcomes appropriate to local, state, or national programs. This will be especially challenging for short-term programs and episodic participation and points to a need for greater attention to program “dosage” and precision in measurement for all practitioners.

Recommendations for Use in 4-H

CAFYD provides an “umbrella theory” based on rigorous review and testing of key concepts and practices in positive youth development. This broader evidence base must be refined and...
integrated with research and practice insights on specific programs, strategies, outcomes, and audiences. In other words, the general theory of change and action must be applied to real-time settings and circumstances. For instance, any program theory of change must take into account what can and cannot be influenced, and in what ways, in particular settings and what “active ingredients” a program adds to the social ecology for individuals and communities. For instance, a developmentally-appropriate, hands-on STEM learning experiences may be difficult to implement in contexts where youth think of science as “too hard” or irrelevant or where volunteer leaders (if available) lack specialized teaching skills. However, the community-action emphasis of the CAFYD model provides a strategy for “right-sizing” programming and training opportunities and ongoing supports to the community, collaborating organizations, and families. A community-driven process resulting in consensus, commitments, and continuous improvement is most likely to promote positive short- and long-term outcomes. Investing in youth opportunities early and often holds the greatest promise for positive outcomes, especially in higher-risk communities.

This long-term, multi-faceted strategy can be challenging in an era when individual and community commitments (within Extension, and with stakeholders) are often contingent and transient. Clearly, systems must adapt long-term strategies and impact plans to match resources and liabilities of their communities. For instance, Blyth (2011) suggests that where resources are limited communities might target availability of an accessible, quality program as an achievable community-level outcome. As resources increase, increasing numbers of participants and measuring individual behavioral outcomes may be more feasible. The concept of risk and optimal thresholds provides valuable perspective on program outcomes, serving as a baseline for “good enough” programming (e.g., doing what you can) and incentive to pursue “optimal” results (e.g., “making the best better”).

Validity of evaluation instruments rests on their appropriateness to specific settings and uses. Similarly, the validity of CAFYD or other theories rests on the consistency of assumptions, practices, and results with specific settings or purposes in which they are applied. Perhaps the best use of CAFYD involves engagement of community stakeholders as supports for specific youth and in promoting broader youth development opportunities. This more holistic model of community youth development is consistent with the traditions of 4-H and Extension, providing intuitive validation to the empirical evidence.

References


Developmental Assets
Ben Silliman, North Carolina State University

Overall Description of the Framework
“The Contribution of the Developmental Assets Framework” offers a detailed overview of the premises and evidence for the Developmental Assets framework and its evolution and application in research, practice, and policy. Search Institute developers focused on research emphasizing “developmental nutrients demonstrated to prevent high-risk behavior (vs. avoiding or treating risks), enhance thriving, or strengthen resilience” across diverse locations, including factors from individual to ecological contexts. The “40 Assets Model” (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998) identifies 20 external assets (“environmental, contextual, and relational features of socializing systems”) comprising (a) support, (b) empowerment, (c) boundaries and expectations, and (d) constructive use of time and 20 internal assets (“skills, competencies, and values”) including (a) commitment to learning, (b) positive values, (c) social competencies, and (d) positive identity. Initially targeting adolescents, the current lifespan model asserts that assets reflect parallel developmental processes from infancy through young adulthood. Development and dissemination emphasized practical utility for youth and communities as well as contributions to theory and research.

The “40 Assets Model” is a widely-used “umbrella” model, providing a research-based framework incorporating a broad range of influences on positive youth development and risk prevention. The Attitudes and Behavior (A&B) survey, completed by over 2 million youth, enables communities to map internal and external assets and plan positive youth development (PYD) activities to build assets. A Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) was developed to survey eight categories of assets in program or clinical settings, including tracking change over time. In addition, the Assets model provides a broader context for more in-depth program strategies and outcomes. Search Institute developed a broad range of interpretative, training, curriculum, programming, and policy material to facilitate awareness and implementation of PYD in communities.

Validity and Scientific Evidence Supporting the Framework
The Assets framework grew from several extensive reviews of prevention, program evaluation, and resilience studies on adolescent well-being in 1990. In the mid-1990s the model was refined with insights of community-level partners and review of more than 1400 rigorous research studies on child and adolescent development to provide support for construct,

2 See Appendix 1, Figure 2 on Page 56, for a graphic of this framework
convergent, and predictive validity. Subsequent studies of broad populations and with specific clients (esp. schools) confirmed three hypotheses regarding assets in adolescence:

1) The Accumulation Hypothesis confirmed that assets are additive or cumulative, contrary to risk-focused research indicating that as risks increase, health and well-being of teens declines. Reduction of risk factors and promotion of assets are regarded as complementary approaches to promoting adolescent health (Scales, 1999). Positive outcomes were found to increase additively or exponentially (depending on the study) as developmental assets increased (see Benson, 2006).

Search Institute research with over 3 million 4th-12 graders from diverse communities supports the Accumulation Hypothesis. Assets were scored on a binary basis (youth has or does not have asset), with total assets divided into quartiles and compared on 10 risk behavior patterns and 8 indicators of thriving. Two decades of vastly different samples found that for nearly every outcome, every increase in quartile level of assets there was a significant increase in positive (or decrease in negative) outcome scores. Comparisons of effect sizes (indexing group differences across varying samples) for asset-rich and asset-poor youth are equal to or greater than 1.0 (traditionally a large effect) and between asset-rich and next-level quartiles yielded .25 and above effect sizes (a small, but important effect).

2) The Diversity Hypothesis was confirmed with evidence that the framework showed comparable validity across gender, race/ethnicity, geographic residence, and socioeconomic background (with small effect-size differences), with greater assets associated with lower levels of risk and higher levels of thriving. Girls generally have higher average assets, but the pattern is consistent for both boys and girls. Poor students who engaged in community service showed school success scores equivalent to affluent students (illustrating potential effects of one asset).

3) The Differentiation Hypothesis recognizes that every outcome is not affected in the same way by a given set of assets. Complex statistical analyses (stepwise and logistic regression) found “…that particular clusters of assets are especially influential predictors of various outcomes, both concurrently and longitudinally.” For instance, middle school youth involved in afterschool programs, religious community programs, service to others, creative activities, and reading for pleasure were three times more likely to hold a B+ average 3 years later than those without such involvement.
Note: Unclear from article whether Hypotheses are drawn from the Attitudes and Behavior survey (A&B) of Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) or both.

The (160-item) **Attitudes and Behavior** survey generated about 80% of evidence for the Assets Model demonstrated construct and convergent validity and inter-item reliability and serves as a practical tool to assess and mobilize community initiatives, but is not well suited for diagnostic or evaluation work. Thus a (58-item) **Developmental Assets Profile** (DAP) was developed to measure eight categories of assets (e.g., support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, time use, commitment to learning, positive values, and self-perception) in several contexts (e.g., personal, social, family, school, community) to track change-over-time and program effects in community and clinical settings. DAP was validated in several settings with many audiences and contexts world-wide. In addition, specific measures of assets and outcomes were developed with school-based clients (e.g., Benson, et al., 2011: 208, 211).

More recently, Search Institute began testing measures of assets for younger (**Me and My World**, middle childhood) and older (young adult) groups, norm-referenced to that stage of developmental experience (vs. anticipating a later stage). Accumulation of multiple assets in 4th-6th grade was strongly related to positive concurrent and future (6th-12th grade) outcomes, indicating good construct and predictive validity. In addition, a majority of measures of the MMW had good internal consistency reliability.

Search Institute also performed Latent Class analysis on adolescent data (6th-12th graders) to discover asset combinations of youth and explore their implications for formal and informal opportunities. These results revealed significantly different profiles for youth with different levels of assets and outcomes, pointing to the need to individualize programming and measurement of change.

**Program Theory of Change**

The Assets ecological framework balances attention to external and internal factors and emphasizes on positive developmental experiences as opposed to risk-avoidance or treatment. Research reviews and tests of the model generally support the hypotheses that (a) asset accumulation predicts positive and negative outcomes; (b) asset-outcome patterns are consistent across diverse groups; and (c) particular asset clusters more effectively predict specific outcomes. Reduction of risk factors and promotion of assets are regarded as complementary approaches to promoting adolescent health (Scales, 1999), although specific asset clusters are more effective in addressing specific outcomes.
The Assets model does not ignore risks (e.g., preventing risks is viewed as an asset) but emphasizes risks less than earlier approaches, perhaps because the developers focused on a broader audience (e.g., not primarily high-risk-prevention or intervention audience) and learned from prevention efforts that over-emphasized “avoiding the negative.” The Accumulation Hypothesis underlines two critical realities of Positive Youth Development: significant investments in asset-building are critical to positive outcomes and those investments cannot be just external or internal. Significantly, increasing assets seems to make a difference, regardless of prior risk or asset status.

Community change. Search Institute facilitated community change (e.g., mobilization to promote youth assets) through the Attitudes and Behavior survey in over 3,000 communities. This initial mobilizing and transforming outcome may be counted as a significant change for communities that previously showed little interest in young people.

Youth assets. International studies (e.g., Bangladesh, Philippines) showed significant growth in DAP assets for groups of youth who participated in PYD programs for 6-9 months. PYD initiatives targeting specific assets such as school success or violence documented increases in specific outcomes as well as in overall assets.

Individual asset growth. More in-depth Latent Class analysis suggests that variable-centered descriptions of typical (or average) asset and outcome patterns vary considerably from person-centered descriptions of asset patterns and consequences for individuals. Patterns of support, competence, confidence, and engagement were consistent across gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, although girls were somewhat more likely to be supported and engaged than boys. Developmental differences were evident, with younger adolescents more likely to describe themselves as supported-competent-confident, while older peers were unsupported-unengaged-unconfident. These results suggest the need for different approaches and activities with individuals (or groups with similar asset patterns). Variations in asset pattern groups were related to thriving or of risk, parallel to variable-centered analysis. Differences in support, engagement, and confidence seemed especially critical for both thriving and risk outcomes. Thus perhaps even in the same program, some youth may require a greater amount of or time-in-support to experience positive outcomes.

Program Theory of Action
The 40 Assets Model proposes to change current and future outcomes for youth by enhancing individual (internal) or family, organizational, or community (external) “nutrients” (attitudes, skills, contexts) that foster a range of positive outcomes or specific clusters of assets that influence specific outcomes. The model departed from earlier intuitive, risk-focused, expert-
directed approaches by generating a research-based, asset-oriented framework adapted to local needs and capacities.

40 Assets or 10-20 outcomes (individual, let alone organizational or community outcomes that enhance assets) makes for a complex set of choices for education or intervention. A broad-based strategy focused on building specific assets can (over an unspecified time), according to the model, enhance positive outcomes in general. More specific outcomes might be targeted through application of specific research findings. However, the Assets Model is not clear on exactly how much of what types of intervention results in a significant change. Moreover, these strategies must be adapted to local conditions and capacities by informed and engaged leaders. Search Institute’s engagement of Getting-to-Outcomes to implement training and evaluation illustrates a management enhancement in this regard.

Benson, et al. (2011:226) note that a comprehensive PYD (vs. prevention-oriented) model has not been developed or tested, although “episodic and sporadic efforts” have been evaluated. Further, they note the importance of working with families and general public, before and beyond schools and out-of-school organizations, as a critical strategy in asset-building and of government and organizations promoting asset-building (vs. more risk-avoidance) policy and funding. They close with a reminder that “…truly adaptive development enhances both the individual and the context.”

Consistent with other models (Gambone, Klem, & Connell, 2002; Hawkins & Catalano, 1992) the 40 Assets Model recognizes the importance of working with stakeholders and communities as prerequisites to program effectiveness. Search Institute initiated an intentional training and support relationship with communities (from state governments to local organizations), thus provides a process for adapting and implementing the model to fit specific contexts, as directed by local leaders.

**Utility of Framework for 4-H**

Search Institute studies, as well as other models based broadly on the external-internal assets framework, consistently cite quality out-of-school programs and community service (e.g., traditional 4-H activities) as significant factors in reducing negative outcomes and/or increasing positive outcomes (especially school success, a critical factor in long-term positive outcomes). Like Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Model, Hawkins and Catalano’s (1992) Social Development Model, and Gambone, Klem, and Connell’s (2002) Community Action Model, the 40 Assets Model views risk and thriving conditions and outcomes in the context of community and program settings. However, Search Institute’s review of literature, validation of measures,
and programming experience has been tested across more stages (e.g., early childhood through young adulthood) and settings (e.g., U.S. and international) than any comparable model.

This broader time-space perspective is consistent with multi-level Extension outcome targets (e.g., community-based youth development) as sequential and/or complementary approaches to improving youth outcomes. Key Assets hypotheses reinforce traditional 4-H emphasis on long-term involvement (accumulation) of diverse individuals in a diverse range of activities (diversity) including particular asset-building and/or risk-prevention activities that address targeted needs (differentiation).

The 40 Assets approach is consistent with an ecological model of development and PYD philosophy of practice that characterizes 4-H work. It is research-based and includes user-friendly tools, training, and communication strategies with the general public. Many Extension staff are already familiar with Search Institute materials. The broad Assets model can likely be implemented and articulated by 4-H staff with minimal additional costs or training. A wide variety of enrichment or prevention materials (including 4-H curricula) can be integrated into asset-building efforts. However, system-wide implementation of a common model might significantly enhance programming, collaboration, and impact reporting. Subsequent use of data for public and policy education, program planning and improvement, and innovation could dramatically improve Extension effectiveness.

More substantial investments in training, consulting, and evaluation would be needed for programs with large-scale or specialized, as suggested in Benson, et al.,’s (2011) discussion of their work with school districts and state governments.

low-asset audiences or settings and/or higher outcome programs (e.g., moving youth from lowest to highest asset quartiles). Search Institute’s shared commitment (with Extension) on community engagement and adaptation to local needs.

Some PYD challenges are likely to remain even after adoption of a new framework. As the Search Institute research suggests, individuals, families, and communities are hard-pressed to build assets in today’s high-paced, high-change environment. These challenges are more daunting in low-asset communities. To the extent that Extension and other partners remain stabilizing and innovative influences in these communities, 4-H has greater potential to address these profound challenges than non-profits with short-term lifespans or agencies (e.g., schools, hospitals, welfare offices) with other agendas. Extension connections to involved parents, volunteers, and encouraging teachers or public officials are engaged in youth development (as is most typical in high-asset communities), youth tend to thrive and to avoid risks. Where such
external assets are most needed (low-asset communities or with lower-asset youth), cultivating a supportive network will be an important first step in building a sustainable program.

**Recommendations for Use in 4-H**

The 40 Assets model has been used by 4-H/Extension staff and community partners for a generation now and reflects a theory and practice base quite compatible with historic and emerging models of positive youth development. Search Institute is probably the most widely known and respected research and community youth development, as well as long history of partnership with youth organizations, communities, and governments world-wide. Theory, measurement, curriculum, and interpretative material developed in the past two decades makes the 40 Assets “package” one of the best-supported, continuously-updated frameworks for community youth development (from early childhood through early adulthood) that is available.

Programs focused on more precise or in-depth outcomes will require additional measures and curricula but can be embedded in the broader asset-building mission. Programs focused on building a broad range or specific set of assets should give appropriate attention to risk-prevention and resilience/recovery (e.g., they are complementary, not mutually exclusive). Different clusters of assets may be appropriate to different audiences, settings, or outcomes, and the same cluster may be addressed differently at different developmental stages or settings. Significantly, the “package” needs to be thoughtfully engaged and integrated with existing insights and skills of adults and youth to maximize its effectiveness. As in any program or curriculum screening process, 4-H staff and partners should clarify or build consensus on shared understandings of asset concepts and strategies. For instance, “Positive School Climate” (a key external asset) may be understood differently by school officials, teachers, parents, homeschoolers, 4-H agents...and youth! A climate of support (another asset) across social environments can facilitate communication (yet another asset) needed to build assets even during the needs assessment and program planning process.

The Benson, et al. (2011) article did not specify strategies for youth asset building at the community (or state) action level, but suggests that the Search Institute has nearly 30 years of experience in working with decision-makers, local partners, and youth workers.

**References**


Overall Description of the Framework

The Five C’s Model of Positive Youth Development is the model that was tested in the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development (Lerner & Lerner, 2013) and as such, is one of the main ways the impact of 4-H programs is described today. This model highlights a “4-H Formula for Success,” proposing that: 1) youth participation in 4-H programs that offer meaningful leadership opportunities, 2) positive and sustained relationships between youth and adults, and activities that build critical life skills lead to; 2) developmental outcomes that are marked by the 5 “C’s” of youth development: caring, character, connection, confidence and competence, that ultimately lead to long term outcomes of civic contribution and the reduction of risk behavior.

The model builds on earlier work that identified four “Cs” that described the key developmental needs of youth (Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2000): Competence, connection, character, and confidence, each marked by distinct indicators. For example, confidence was indicated by self-esteem and hope, and competence by marketable skills, literacy, and the ability to contribute to others. Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg (2000) added a fifth “C” reflecting the need for youth to be part of caring communities, an addition that underscored the importance of supportive contexts. The 5C model reflected the growing field of applied developmental science that sought a better integration of basic and applied research in child development to enhance the future of American civil society (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000). Applied developmental sciences emphasizes the reciprocal interaction between a growing young person and his or her contexts, and seeks to inform public policies that support healthy youth and family development. Later, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) provided additional definitions of the 5 C’s, thus clarifying the constructs and setting the stage for operationalizing, measuring, and subsequently testing the model. Today, the model describes PYD as a developmental process that reflects “adaptive developmental relations” between the strengths of young people and the developmental assets in their lives (Lerner, Lerner, von Eye, Bowers, & Lewin- Bizan (2011; p. 1109)

The original model focused on how a civil society is ensured by strong families and positive youth socialization. The model listed the essential functions required for families to promote positive development in their children. The list of policies matches the eight indicators of positive youth development programs established by Eccles and Gootman (2002). These policies were followed by programs for youth that give them the resources for health, safety,
education, marketable skills, freedom from prejudice and discrimination, and opportunities to give back to the community. Through participating in these programs, and with a strong foundation of family support, the outcomes of caring, competence, character, connection, and confidence are achieved, which in turn leads to the development of healthy young adults who, in turn, contribute to a civil society.

**Validity and Scientific Evidence Supporting the Framework**
The 5Cs model is without a doubt the most rigorously tested of all the PYD frameworks we identified for this review. In fact, it is the only framework that rightfully should be called a model because of its well-tested and psychometrically supported structure (Bowers, Li, Brittian, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010; Jelecic, Bobek, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2007). Furthermore, the model grew out of previous early research on child and adolescent development, including developmental assets (Benson, Scales, & Syverten, 2011), and thriving (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). The testing of this model has resulted in over 15 doctoral dissertations, and numerous scholarly articles, book chapters and monographs, written largely for a methodologically advanced audience (Lerner & Lerner, 2013).

**Program Theory of Change**
The 5C model presents a clear theory of change, from program inputs leading to positive youth development outcomes (the 5Cs) to program impacts of increased contribution and reduced youth risk behavior. This theory of change has been well tested (Lerner & Lerner, 2013).

**Program Theory of Action**
The 5C model also presents a theory of action, in that it highlights particular activities that are critical to developing PYD. These activities include skill building, positive relationships between youth and adults, and opportunities for youth to use the skills they learn through leadership and active contributions to community. Although consistent with other models, these broad categories of action do not provide enough with specificity in terms of actions, intensity, and context for the 5C’s model to be replicated easily.

**Utility of Framework for 4-H**
One of the key strengths of the 5C model is that it was developed and tested on a large, diverse sample of youth that included youth who were in 4-H as well as youth who were not, and the results showed that “4-H youth excel beyond their peers” (Lerner & Lerner, 2013, P. i) As such, the model is an excellent “fit” with the 4-H program. In addition the model was tested longitudinally over eight waves of data, and has been analyzed using advanced and rigorous statistical methods. The model is widespread throughout the 4-H system, and forms the backbone of how 4-H is described nationally. The results of the 4-H Study of Positive Youth
Development (Lerner & Lerner, 2013) are published on the National 4-H Council Website, and at least casually, it appears that the 5C model is how 4-H is described by 4-H professionals in the field (see for example: Bottomley, 2013).

Despite the extensive research and dissemination of the study in top academic journals, and despite the fact that the 5C model is the prominent way of operationalizing PYD in the scholarly literature on youth development, there has been little translation of the results into on-the-ground practice, nor integration of the model into professional development resources for 4-H professionals.

As noted by Heck and Subramaniam (2009) in their review of PYD frameworks, the model lacks specificity of youth program elements, and activities that lead to PYD beyond the three general categories of leadership, adult relationships and skill building. As such, there is little specificity of what exactly needs to happen in 4-H youth development programs to promote the development of the 5Cs. In addition, although the model emphasizes relational developmental systems, and underscores the principal interactions of youth and their context as critical for PYD, the model does not provide enough information on how these processes take place. The extensive research on the 5 C model, and its usefulness in describing PYD notwithstanding, its utility is unrealized with front-line educators who may talk about the model, but are left without a complete understanding of how to develop and implement programs that promote PYD.

A second difficulty with the 5 C model, as also noted by Heck and Subramaniam (2009), is that the measurement of model elements are complex, and the analysis of the model complicated and advanced, which limits the practical program evaluation possibilities using the 5 C model as tested. Although others have attempted to provide a way to measure PYD using the 5C structure (Arnold, Nott, & Meinhold, 2012), the lack of ability to measure PYD is secondary to understanding how to create and implement programs with fidelity to the 5 C model in the first place.

**Recommendations for Use in 4-H**

Given how much has been invested in the research of the 5C model by the 4-H program, the model remains underutilized throughout the 4-H program. As noted above, this is driven by three primary sources: 1) lack of a clear understanding of the model structure and the research behind it; 2) lack of translation of the model into practice; and 3) usefulness of the model for program evaluation.

In order for the 5C model to be fully useful to the 4-H program emphasis must be placed on translating the model into consistent practice across the 4-H system. To do this a national
emphasis needs to be placed on professional development efforts that are consistent in describing the model. The goal would be that every 4-H professional knows and understands the structure of the 5C model and why 4-H uses it to describe its work. Second, the model needs to be translated into effective practice for 4-H professionals. For example, exactly what does a 4-H program need to do in order to provide leadership experiences that lead to the development of the 5Cs? While 4-H has, and will continue, to provide leadership opportunities for youth, few 4-H professionals have a clear understanding of the fidelity to practice that they must follow in order to ensure that the leadership experiences lead to enhanced PYD.

Finally, evaluation instruments that are parsimonious and useful to 4-H professionals need to be developed to measure not just the 5Cs themselves, but other areas of the model as well. For example, if leadership experience is key to PYD development, there should be a clear description of the leadership program, and an operationalization of how it is measured. This will provide the ability to evaluate the program context and processes that support the development of PYD in youth, rather than measuring PYD as an outcome alone. Evaluation designs that include measuring the whole program and its underlying theory, increase the chances of meaningful evaluation results that can, in turn, be used for program improvement (Arnold, 2015).

References


Arnold, M. E., Nott, B. D., & Meinhold, J. L. (2012). *The Positive Youth Development Inventory (PYDI)*. Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University 4-H Youth Development Program. Available at: [http://oregon.4h.oregonstate.edu/research-and-evaluation-instruments](http://oregon.4h.oregonstate.edu/research-and-evaluation-instruments)


Overall Description of the Framework

CHARACTER COUNTS!® is a character development framework developed and administered by the Josephson Institute of Ethics based in Los Angeles, California. The origin of the program was the Aspen Summit, a collaboration of ethics and youth development professionals who recognized the need to create a formalized framework for character education to address a growing need for moral development in youth. The Aspen Summit identified eight (8) key concepts that are the cornerstone of CHARACTER COUNTS!®: (a) the next generation will be stewards of the world in a critical time, (b) the well-being of society requires individuals to practice positive moral character, (c) intentional efforts must support the development of good moral character and the process of character development is not automatic or innate (d) core ethical values are paramount to effective character education, (e) core ethical values must transcend cultural, religious, and socioeconomic differences, (f) the primary responsibility of character education is with family and faith communities, but formal institutions of education and youth development organizations also have the responsibility of character education, (g) to achieve high impact character education results, efforts must include organized collaboration across families, faith communities, schools and youth organizations, (h) every adult has the responsibility to model and teach youth core ethical values (Josephson Institute, 2009).

Based on the principles of the Aspen Summit, the “Six Pillars of Character” were developed and identified the core universal values of character development. The “Six Pillars of Character” are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. The Josephson Institute formed a national coalition of organizations in 1993 that created learning activities and developed a program delivery model for effective character education implementation. Character Development Seminars (CDS) are offered by the Josephson Institute to teach strategies and practices of CHARACTER COUNTS!® programs (2007). In addition to formalized training, curriculum and activity resources are available for purchase directly from the Josephson Institute.

The CHARACTER COUNTS!® model utilizes activities and learning experiences that claim to be aligned with several formalized education and human development theories including Common Core, 21st Century Outcomes, anti-bullying and social-emotional learning. According to the Character Counts! website, the latest versions of the program, CHARACTER COUNTS!® 4.0 and

4 See Appendix 1, Figure 4 on Page 58, for a graphic of this framework
5.0 supports academic, social-emotional, character development, and positive school climate growth among program participants (Character Counts!, 2016). Specifically, academic competency growth is reported to be aligned with the Common Core standards for both cognitive and intellectual development. The aligned objectives for academic competency within the CHARACTER COUNTS!® program framework, include college and career readiness, improvement on standardized test score, commitment to lifelong learning, and the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The delivery of CHARACTER COUNTS!® programming is organized in the “T.E.A.M” approach in which educators and youth participants teach, enforce, advocate, and model the attributes of good character. The first step in the approach, Teaching (T), is providing on-going educational instruction through experiential activities that teach the following key concepts: the nature and importance of character, the definitions of the six pillars of character, and decision-making strategies. Step two, Enforce (E), is clearly identifying standards of conduct and behavioral expectations of the program environment. Within the organizational structure of the program environment, whether formal or non-formal, fair and consistent enforcement of rules and behavioral expectations must be embedded through the program delivery. Step three of the approach, Advocate (A), is providing clear communication, both inside and outside of the programming environment, of the importance of character development and the organization’s commitment to using the six pillars of character to create a positive organizational culture. Finally, Model (M), reinforces the importance of the program provider, inclusive of all teachers, administrators, and youth-development professionals within the organization, to remain cognizant of their personal conduct and to ensure the messages they send are aligned with the six pillars of character.

Validity and Scientific Evidence Supporting the Framework
The Josephson Institute provides outcome data on CHARACTER COUNTS!® programming results. Data published by the Josephson Institute claim that programming efforts increase academic performance and decrease occurrences of negative behavior. Most evidence provided by the Josephson Institute is based on survey questionnaires (character educators and students), case studies and existing datasets that capture academic assessments and behavioral/conduct occurrences. There are very limited empirical studies that provide evidence of effectiveness of CHARACTER COUNTS!® programming. The most widely recognized evaluation was conducted by South Dakota Cooperative Extension/4-H that captured nearly 8,500 survey evaluation between 1998 - 2004. Survey results indicated that CHARACTER COUNTS!® program participants decreased youth crime and substance (alcohol and other illicit drugs) use. At the time of this framework review, no peer-reviewed research articles were found that identified a controlled study testing the effectiveness of CHARACTER COUNTS!®.
Program Theory of Change
The CHARACTER COUNTS!® theory of change posits that character development is paramount to the sustainability of culture and society. Moral and ethical values within character development must be taught and practiced both by youth and adults to develop a society with good moral character. The Josephson Institute provides strategies to effect change through mindset and behavior medication that is based on a common language of behavioral expectations that develop academic, social-emotional skills, and character traits.

Program Theory of Action
The universal principles of CHARACTER COUNTS!®, uses a common language organized around the “Six Pillars of Character” as a theory of action. The theory of action uses the “T.E.A.M” approach in which both youth and adults continually and conscientiously teach, enforce, advocate, and model the practice of positive character development using the “Six Pillars of Character.” The Josephson Institute identifies the need for CHARACTER COUNTS!® programming to be embedded in existing programmatic structures and that the framework is not a standalone curriculum or programming effort.

The Josephson Institute provides several suggested strategies for successful program implementation. Effective character development programs must focus on instilling positive habits, inspire moral obligation, impose positive and negative consequences based on defined expectations that are aligned with the six pillars, develop critical thinking through thoughtful discussion and meaning experiential exercises, model appropriate conduct, and provide a comprehensive ongoing efforts. Specific strategies include gathering student input on methods to integrate ethics into the program design, establishment of a cooperative learning environment through the use of program “buddies,” creating an inclusive environment that promotes family and community involvement through service learning events. The CHARACTER COUNTS!® implementation formula includes content, instruction on the six pillars or character, plus decision-making strategies, multiplied by the “TEAM” approach and defined objectives equals results. The implementation formula image below defines this process graphically.

Utility of Framework for 4-H
The primary strength of the CHARACTER COUNTS!® is that the practices, ideals, and common language used to conduct character education programming is universal. The overall practice and ideology used to develop the common language and six pillars of character transcend cultural, religious, and socioeconomic differences. Further, the CHARACTER COUNTS!® program has no ideological or political agenda other than to strengthen the moral integrity of world. The ideals are not grounded in a particular religious or political belief system. These ideals serve as
structure to develop behavioral and conduct expectations that can be reinforced with the diverse audience served by 4-H. A secondary strength of the framework is the ability to effectively and efficiently incorporate and implement CHARACTER COUNTS!® activities within existing 4-H positive youth development programming. The principles and practices of CHARACTER COUNTS!® can be used in a variety of subject-matter projects and across all 4-H delivery modes. In addition, the framework is particularly useful in identifying behavioral expectations for both 4-H youth participants and adult volunteers. The limitations of the CHARACTER COUNTS!® framework include a lack of published empirical evidence of program outcomes through a controlled study and the cost associated with national training through the Character Development Seminars (CDS) offered by the Josephson Institute. Additional limitations include the need for ongoing training at all levels of the 4-H programming process including 4-H professionals, volunteers, and program participants. National certification is required by the Josephson Institute to conduct the necessary training. Finally, it is important to note that while the concepts addressed by CHARACTER COUNTS!® are universal to the expectations of a civil society, notions of personal character and social values are deeply grounded in a personal and cultural belief system. The diversity of backgrounds and cultures among 4-H participants will affect the meaning of character development, and thus the relevancy of any particular character development program.

**Recommendations for Use in 4-H**

There are as many as nine Cooperative Extension systems and 4-H programs that have been identified as successfully implementing CHARACTER COUNTS!® programming (Donaldson, 2004). The Targeting Life Skills model (Hendricks, 1996) identifies character as a life skill learned through 4-H youth development programming within the context of health and being. Several activities and resources are available from the Josephson Institute that support the existing project activities and mission mandates of 4-H. These objectives include strategies to improve personal lives by promoting self-respect and confidence, increased effective communication through collaboration and teamwork, increased self-confidence through the practice of self-discipline and management of emotions. The need for more formalized studies of CHARACTER COUNTS!® effectiveness can be addressed through partnerships and research resources of the land-grant universities, Cooperative Extension systems, and 4-H.

**References**


In 1997, the 4-H Critical Elements committee of the *National 4-H Impact Assessment Project* identified eight critical elements that were most important to developing positive youth outcomes in 4-H youth development programming (Ivy, 2005; Peterson, Gerhard, Hunter, Marek, Phillips, & Titcomb, 2001). These eight elements were determined through a review of existing research literature on positive youth development. Later the critical elements were tested in a survey of over 2,400 4-H youth (Kress, 2005). Kress, who was the national 4-H program leader at the time, then distilled the eight elements, into the four elements put forth by Bendtro, Brockenleg, & Van Bokern (1990) in the *Circle of Courage*: Belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity (Kress, 2003). In doing so, the *Essential Elements of Positive Youth Development*, now commonly used across the 4-H system was born.

The Essential Elements for 4-H were defined by Kress (2003) to be:

1. Belonging – which includes having relationships with caring adults as well as a safe and inclusive environment.
2. Mastery – which includes opportunities for skill development and mastery as well as opportunities for engagement in learning.
3. Independence – including opportunities for self-determination, and an active participant in the future.
4. Generosity – which includes opportunities to value and practice service to others.

Over the years, there has been some confusion as to whether the *Essential Elements* are program outcomes (e.g. youth become more generous) or elements of 4-H program quality (e.g. effective programs provide opportunities for youth to develop generosity). According to the literature that framed the *Essential Elements* in the beginning, it is clear that the focus of the *Essential Elements* is a program’s context, and not the content or outcomes of the program.

Since its inception, little further conceptual, let alone empirical, work has been conducted on the Essential Elements. One exception was the development of the *Essential Elements: Key Ingredients for Program Success* that is designed to help youth workers and leaders understand the elements and how to incorporate the elements into ongoing 4-H programs (National 4-H Council, 2009). With the addition of the curriculum that provided instruction on implementing the *Essential Elements* in youth programs, use of the elements grew more prevalent, as more 4-H educators and volunteers understood and utilized the easy-to-use training curriculum.

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5 See Appendix 1, Figure 5 on Page 59, for a graphic of this framework
Additionally, as Heck and Subramanian (2009) point out, the *Essential Elements* framework is concise and more easily applied to youth program settings than the *Developmental Assets* (Search Institute, 1997, 2007) or *Targeting Life Skills* models (Hendricks, 1996).

Furthermore, using the *Essential Elements* framework for developing effective 4-H programs meets the criteria for a program framework put forth by Heck and Subramanian (2009). The framework has provided direction and purpose to 4-H program development, and has helped 4-H professionals and volunteers understand and utilize specific components to guide their work, which in turn may lead to stronger youth outcomes. The premise is that if 4-H programs are built solidly around providing youth developmentally-appropriate opportunities to belong, build skills toward mastery, develop independence and practice generosity, then positive youth development will occur. As broad principles, accurately understood and implemented with fidelity, the goals and strategies embodied within the Essential Elements provide orienting principles that require more guidance in practice.

**Validity and Scientific Evidence Supporting the Framework**

As Heck and Subramanian (2009) point out, there has been little research validating the *Essential Elements*, which is a major weakness of using the *Essential Elements* framework with confidence. The major validity concerns rest with the construction of the framework: 1) relying on conceptualizations of elements from diverse sources and audiences, and 2) anchoring key elements in a model of youth development derived from Native American religious principles applied to at-risk/high-risk youth. Although there is some support in the broader literature for these emphases, the model itself was not derived from a systematic process. In addition, much of the limited research is dated, and based largely on small, self-report studies with youth, and no studies have assessed the validity of framework’s structure or the relative importance of the four elements on youth program quality.

Given the lack of empirical evidence, which indicates the *Essential Elements* framework, as proposed by Kress (2003) should be used with caution. There are, however, two streams of empirical evidence that support at least face validity of the framework. The first is the original study that identified the Eight Critical Elements from which the four Essential Elements were distilled (Peterson, et al., 2001). This study was the first comprehensive study of the 4-H program, and the eight critical elements the study revealed align fairly closely with the eight indicators of positive youth development settings put forth by Eccles and Gootman (2002) as the result of a rigorous and comprehensive systematic review of effective youth development programs.
Program Theory of Change
The *Essential Elements of Positive Youth Development* is an implicit example of the social learning theory of change (Bandura, 1977). Change is to come about because elements are present within the environment, and youth learn new information and behaviors by watching and participating with other people, even though participants may not be aware the program was planned to intentionally to induce change. Change is to occur as the participants work together over time and through opportunities for belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. Youth participate in 4-H in groups to form relationships with peers and adults, and they learn to make a difference by providing service to others.

Program Theory of Action
The *Essential Elements of Positive Youth Development* has a limited articulated theory of action, in that the framework itself provides little guidance on how to create program settings and activities that enhance the presence of the *Essential Elements*. The lone exception is the *Essential Elements* training curriculum (National 4-H Council, 2009), which provides training on putting the *Essential Elements* into action. However, there is no determination of what level of success all elements need to occur, the importance of all elements being present is stressed. While the elements provide insight consistent with developmental theory and broader PYD programming, and lend guidance to the environment activities are to be planned in, there is specific outcomes and levels of impact are not explicitly identified.

Utility of Framework for 4-H
The major strength of the *Essential Elements of Positive Youth Development* is it is easy to understand and useful as an introduction for laypeople who are in the field working with youth. It is laid out so that anyone, regardless of educational level, can gain an understanding of the environment they need to provide for youth to be able to have a positive youth development experience.

A weakness of the *Essential Elements of Positive Youth Development* is measurability. When the elements are not present, those working with youth know something is not right, but there is not a defined way to measure the impact of the elements on youth. The framework does not specify how the lack of or including all elements affects the overall quality of the program. The Essential Elements do not define the targeted outcomes, but practices such as those in the Essential Elements consistently correlate with other statements of quality positive youth development practice (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Smith & Hohmann, 2005).
Recommendations for Use in 4-H

The *Essential Elements of Positive Youth Development* is valuable for articulating best practices for 4-H staff and volunteers when planning the environment for a quality program. Furthermore, there is a training curriculum readily available to provide training for staff and volunteers (National 4-H Council, 2009). In addition, the Essential Elements Framework aligns well with other positive youth development program quality indicators that have been identified through extensive research. These frameworks include the eight program quality indicators put forth by Eccles & Gootman (2002) as well as the youth program quality work conducted by the Weikart Center (Smith & Hohmann, 2005). Other research has identified program aspects that are common to high quality positive youth development programs, including Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins (2002) and Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003). Given the availability of such extensive research on youth program quality, the 4-H program would be well served to situate the *Essential Elements* within stronger and better-tested program quality frameworks, in order to update and strengthen the original determination of the *Essential Elements* by Kress (2003).

Finally, there is no standard measurement for the *Essential Elements*, let alone a method for interpreting the results of program evaluation and research on the utilization of the *Essential Elements* in 4-H programs. Given how much emphasis is placed on the *Essential Elements* as a standard part of 4-H programming, more attention needs to be given to the area of measurement and program improvement.

References


Overall Description of the Framework

The University of Chicago Consortium *Foundations for Young Adult Success* is based on a concept paper, funded by the Wallace Foundation, engaging diverse scholars and consultants over 18 months, to address holistic youth development in the context of the Chicago Public School system, organizations, and families in a larger community. The framework views development in an ecological context, acknowledging experiences in home, school, and community groups as critical for building “components” (self-regulation, knowledge and skills, mindsets and values for relating and navigating) and “factors” (agency, competencies, integrated identity) resulting in success in young adulthood (e.g., healthy interaction and contribution to family, community, and work). At the core of intentional youth development experiences is a process of action and reflection with caring adults over time that challenges and supports young people—in different ways at each stage of development and capability—to describe, evaluate, connect, envision, integrate, encounter, tinker, choose, practice, and contribute to their own and others’ lives. The framework recognizes challenges for economically-, culturally-, and developmentally-disadvantaged youth to participate in a range of capacity-building experiences that lead to adolescent and young adult success. Some examples and recommendations for expanding on these opportunities are provided based on research, theory, and effective programming models.

In-depth descriptions of the process and components of the framework as well as personal stories are used to illustrate key concepts and applications. Key findings from a broad range of research disciplines are summarized in an Executive Summary and in the introduction to chapters that address “The importance of developmental experiences and relationships” and “Developmental progression toward young adulthood.” A concluding chapter on “…Implications for practice, policy, and research” underlines the importance of “21st century competencies” and needs to address the widening gap between those with access and opportunity to develop such skills and those who do not acquire those skills. They point to both research insights and lessons from successful schools and programs as foundational for meeting these challenges, but caution that a “transformation of adult beliefs within institutions and structures” will be necessary to expand opportunity to all. For educators, youth practitioners, parents and families, they advocate a holistic approach, noting that “Adults will make little headway if they target only one particular component or sub-component in isolation.” Likewise, a more nuanced

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6 See Appendix 1, Figure 6 on Page 60, for a graphic of this framework
approach to “...helping youth thrive in a world as it is, and developing the skills and dispositions they need to challenge a profoundly unjust status quo” is recommended with low-income youth and youth of color. Efforts of caring adults or programs “...will require parallel efforts to rethink what policies and structures are needed to provide opportunities to children and youth...” with regard to organizational and social policies. Framework developers recommend teaching and testing for a broader range of functional competencies beyond current emphasis on content knowledge. Finally, authors note a critical need for “safe space” for programs and youth themselves to experiment with new solutions to chronic and current challenges and for new research to “fill the gap” in basic and applied knowledge.

Validity and Scientific Evidence Supporting the Framework
The Foundations framework draws on multiple streams of youth and community development and programming research and theory (evident in 14 pages of references, 4 pages of expert names). Diverse scholars and practitioners produced a coherent, parsimonious, and fairly well-articulated model of positive youth development leading to young adult success. Moreover, they recognize gaps in research, need for better measures, and evidence for effective programs and policy to improve the state of the art.

Program Theory of Change
Foundations employs a holistic, ecological, and egalitarian model for practice that commends a multi-faceted or comprehensive theory of change. Drawing largely from humanistic, developmental, and learning psychology, development is seen as genetic, self-directed, and benign apart from developmental disabilities or external threats and limits. In addition this epistemological lacuna (e.g., how to account for violence, addiction, or dishonesty), the conceptual breath of the framework points to “everything” and “nothing” as engines of change. For instance, a preponderance of evidence points to the profound influence of caring adults supporting action and reflection through structured and unstructured activities over an extended time. Family and community support and broader social and economic opportunities enhance effects of these microsystems. Foundations provides multiple examples of programs and personal stories of change. Concurrent advocacy for transforming adult attitudes and policies, while appropriate as part of a comprehensive approach, strongly implies that relatively little will change without social shifts or government intervention. In addition to ignoring resiliency and positive youth development evidence, this perspective gives insufficient attention to research on effective (and ineffective) investments (government and private) and acknowledgement of gaps in research and societal support necessary to guide such a comprehensive approach. Programs targeted to more specific (but holistic) indicators and audiences (including family and community supports) seem to offer a more practical, measurable theory of change.
**Program Theory of Action**

Although the Foundations framework advocates “movement on all fronts,” targeting components that can be learned, enhanced, and internalized to foster agency, identity, and long-term adaptation and contribution, provides a practical starting point for most youth organizations. Youth workers and advocates may or may not be able to change social conditions or community support, but they can offer more than isolated events and activities and seek to engage young people in long-term experiences of reflection/action and caring. In that context, focus on self-regulation, knowledge and skills, adaptive mindsets, and sustainable values has practical utility and theory-research foundation.

**Utility of Framework for 4-H**

The Foundations framework affirms many of the traditional values and practices of 4-H, efficiently “packaging” positive youth development and 21st competencies in a broad theoretical framework, documenting both its extensive research evidence and gaps in knowledge and social/policy support. 4-H organizations and local programs might find the framework helpful to guide, interpret, even improve a range of programming efforts, but much work would be required to 1) operationalize target concepts; 2) facilitate recruitment, training, and implementation fidelity to achieve targeted outcomes; and 3) generate the level of stakeholder support needed for 4-H to be a significant contributor to developing competencies and factors even for middle-class participants. As Foundation authors suggest, more substantial investments and changes would be necessary to impact lower-income youth and youth of color.

**Recommendations for Use in 4-H**

As suggested above, the Foundations framework provides a conceptual model that is highly compatible with traditional 4-H work, supports 21st century visions and aspirations, is research-based yet readable for non-experts. As with all such conceptual frameworks, gaps in assumptions, research evidence, and translation-to-practice represent the greatest threats to validity and practical utility. As with the Chicago Public Schools, 4-H would be faced with translating a commendable model into practical and effective programming in real-life environments in which adults do seem less interested or less able to make investments in young people, particularly the most vulnerable. Like exemplars and 4-H programs of excellence, those who engage youth to enrich what can be changed with holistic, experiential, and caring developmental experiences over time are most likely to achieve targeted components and factors identified in the model.
Overall Description of the Framework
Youth development programs share overarching goals to prepare youth to participate in adult worlds – including the current workplace. There is increasing evidence that the soft skills a young person possesses predict future employment and earnings (Kautz, Heckman, Diris, Ter Weel & Borghans, 2014). Yet there is no clear consensus on which soft skills are most critical to workforce success. At the same time, there is a gap between the increasing demand for soft skills in the workplace and employer report on the skills of current job candidates.

Lippman, Ryberg, Carney, & Moore (2015) conducted an extensive scan of the literature combined with stakeholder input toward the goal of bringing clarity to the field by recommending a research-based set of key soft skills that increase the chances that youth ages 15-29 will be successful in the workforce. Soft skills are defined here as “a broad set of skills, competencies, behaviors, attitudes and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals.” (p. 4).

Lippman et al., (2015) propose common terms for skills and workplace outcomes – drawing across diverse research disciplines. The authors do not consider other influential factors including contextual factors (family, school, community, training, policies, culture, etc.) and additional individual factors such as academic and technical skills.

Only skills that support three or more of the following outcomes associated with workplace success were selected:
1. Employment
2. Performance on the job
3. Wages
4. Entrepreneurial success

Moreover, skills were only selected that met the following criteria:
1) Quantity of research and stakeholder support
2) Breadth and quality of research support
3) Contextual diversity of the skills (applicable across sectors and diverse world regions)
4) Whether the skill is malleable (versus traits that are found to be more stable)

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7 See Appendix 1, Figure 7 on Page 61, for a graphic of this framework
5) Whether the skill is developmentally appropriate for youth age 15-29

As a result, the authors identified five critical skill domains that are most likely to increase the odds of success across all four outcomes, and that employers expect employees to have:

1. **Social skills** refer to a cluster of skills necessary to get along well with others. Social skills also include respecting others, using context-appropriate behavior, and resolving conflict.

2. **Communication** includes effective expression, transmission, understanding, and interpretation of knowledge and ideas. Communication skills in the context of this paper refer to the specific skills needed in the workplace, rather than general ability to communicate with others in other settings. Although communication is involved in one’s ability to work with others, it is in itself a discrete “skill”.

3. **Higher-order thinking skills** consists of problem solving, critical thinking and decision-making, which have necessarily been combined here because the research literature reviewed often measured them together as one construct. Each of these skills may reflect the same underlying skill set of identifying an issue and taking information from multiple sources to evaluate options in order to teach a reasonable conclusion (Stein, 2000).

4. **Self-control** refers to one’s ability to delay gratification, control impulses, direct and focus attention, manage emotions and regulate behaviors. Someone with a high proficiency in self-control is able to focus on tasks and manage his/her behavior despite distractions or incentives to do otherwise. Self-control is foundational to social skills, communication, being hardworking and dependable, teamwork, leadership, problem solving, critical thinking and decision-making.

5. **Positive self-concept** includes self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-awareness and beliefs, as well as self-esteem and a sense of well-being and pride. These skills are foundational to a healthy identity and awareness, self-confidence, and self-efficacy, rather than self-esteem which has been well-measured and studied, yet is mixed in its relationship to outcomes.

Validity and Scientific Evidence Supporting the Framework

Evidence supporting the skills outlined in this framework is the product careful research consisting of an extensive and systematic literature review combined with consultations and focus groups with stakeholders including researchers, program implementers, employers, and youth themselves. The methodology is outlined in the following four step process.
Consideration of findings from the literature review
Lippman et al., (2015) started with an extensive literature review of both academic and non-academic literature from around the world. The review included empirical evidence, employer surveys and studies, consensus projects, and less rigorous publications including public-audience reports and literature reviews. Over 380 studies were identified from across a wide variety of disciplines including psychology, workforce development, economics, education, sociology, youth development, and occupational psychology. Of the studies, 172 met the authors’ inclusion criteria and were ultimately included. Terms for soft skills and outcomes used by each study were categorized into groups and given a name recognizable to employers and youth.

Consideration of youth-specific literature
To ensure that the skills recommended by this report are relevant to youth ages 15-29, the research team next restricted analysis of the evidence to a sub-set of the literature review (58 studies) that focused on youth and entry-level workers. By doing so, the authors identified the top critical skills that youth need to possess toward accomplishment of the four outcomes of employment, performance, income, and entrepreneurial success.

Breadth, quality, and contextual diversity of research and stakeholder input
The third step involved exploring the breadth of ways the skill has been investigated using different methodologies and whether the skill was important across stakeholder groups, as well as the number of workforce outcomes with which the skill is positively associated in the literature. The quality of the support for a skill was determined by the level of rigor of the studies that identified the skill. And the contextual diversity included the number of world regions sampled and whether the studies included evidence from informal markets.

Malleability and developmental stage
Finally, malleability, which refers to whether a skill can be changed, and more specifically improved, during the ages of 15-29, was considered. Malleability of some skills has been demonstrated through experimental studies and program evaluations. Other skills do not have direct evidence of malleability, but development research and the foundations of these skills specifically, provide a theoretical basis for believing that the skill is malleable during certain stages of development.

The authors identify several challenges related to their methodology. These include:
  1. Integrating terminology and contributions across disciplines
  2. Finding empirical research across formal and informal economic contexts
3. Accounting for variation in regional contexts in how skills present and are observed within different cultural contexts
4. Accounting for gender considerations within different cultural contexts
5. Understanding the links between soft skills and workforce outcomes

Skills recommended in this report are important across contexts but may present themselves differently from region to region. “Even if common definitions for soft skills are agreed upon, variations in observable behaviors across contexts will affect the validity of measures” (Lippman et al., 2015, p. 17). It is also plausible that some soft skills may not be equally culturally appropriate for men and women in different workplace settings. The authors propose that the measures that are developed to assess these skills must be sensitive enough to assess the full range of variation in gender across cultures.

**Program Theory of Change**
This framework makes a distinction between traits and skills. Traits are considered relatively stable – although research demonstrates that there can be changes over the life course. In comparison, skills which are specific are considered teachable and malleable.

Despite findings that soft skills rival academic or technical skills in predicting employment and earnings (Kautz et al., 2014), the current literature provides little explanation for how soft skills actually lead to improved workforce outcomes (p. 18).

The following theory of change is hypothesized by the authors based on extrapolation from the evidence. They propose that soft skills directly contribute to an individuals’ success in the following stages of workforce engagement:

- **Looking for work:** Candidates with soft skills have an advantage even in the job-search process. It is likely that other skills such as persistence and self-efficacy lead to successful job searches because seekers with these strengths are likely to carry on with their searches even when the process is difficult or prolonged. In addition, candidates with communication skills and social skills are likely to have larger networks through which to learn about employment opportunities, especially in cases of informal employment. Candidates with strong communication and social skills are also likely to perform well in interview settings, increasing their changes of obtaining a job.
- **Landing the job:** Candidates with soft skills are more likely to be hired. For example, individuals possessing a positive attitude are more likely to enter the labor market and be hired (Mohanty, 2010). And in surveys, employers consistently indicate that they are
looking for candidates with not only academic and/or technical skills such as literacy and numeracy, but also soft skills (Burnett & Jayaram, 2012).

- **Excelling at work**: Once employment is obtained, soft skills are important for retaining a position. A certain level of self-confidence is necessary to perform well. Men with low levels of soft skills are both more likely to become unemployed and to spend a longer time unemployed than men with poor cognitive abilities (Brunello & Schlotter, 2011). Individuals who are confident in their abilities, have a strong sense of self-efficacy, and have an orientation to learn and improve are able to take advantage of supervisors’ feedback – both positive and negative. Employees are then able to adapt their performance accordingly, which in turn enhances the productivity of the company. Interpersonal skills such as communication and intrapersonal skills such as self-regulation, self-image, and self-efficacy enable this self-perpetuating learning process called ‘deep learning,” described in a National Academy of Sciences study (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012).

- **Earning more**: Directly, soft skills improve productivity that leads to increased earnings. Indirectly, soft skills work through a number of different mechanisms. First, the possession of soft skills indirectly affects outcomes by increasing one’s levels of educational attainment, which leads to higher earning potential (Mohanty, 2009). Soft skills also help employees select into positions that value their skills. In appropriate positions that fit well with their skill set, employees are rewarded with higher incomes. This indirect effect may take place later in career. In addition, it has been theorized that soft skills learned at entry-level positions enable employees to transition to more lucrative positions (Sherk, 2014).

- **Starting a business**: Entrepreneurs rely on interpersonal interactions with a diverse set of stakeholders for their livelihood, from customers to funders (Bonnestetter, 2012). Additional skills such as self-control and goal-orientation are especially important for entrepreneurs as they are accountable only to themselves (and potentially to investors) and do not necessarily have oversight from others.

**Program Theory of Action**
There is no theory of action provided in this framework.

**Utility of Framework for 4-H**
The strengths of this study are the following:

- It is anchored within research that is consistent with developmental appropriateness for the 4-H target audience.
• It focuses on outcomes that are aligned with the 4-H mission to help youth reach their fullest potential and prepare for future participation in adult worlds, including the workplace.
• The identified soft skills are well aligned to the context of non-formal learning within 4-H in which process experience is often foregrounded against the secondary goal to build specific academic or technical skills.

The weaknesses of this framework are the following:
• There is a limited theory of change and no theory of action to guide practices within 4-H aimed at helping youth develop and practice the targeted soft skills.
• The study does not provide insight into the processes of interaction between youth and social contexts and how those interactions are influenced by different inputs (e.g. program structures).
• Is not a holistic framework of development and does not provide insight into developmental pathways for youth associated with positive outcomes (the soft skills of this framework or others beyond those associated with workforce success)
• It focuses on the developmental stage of youth ages 15-29. The criteria of malleability does not consider developmental opportunities of youth ages 8-14 which is a key portion of our target audience. It is unknown whether different skills would have met the criteria of age appropriateness for this development stage.

**Recommendations for Use in 4-H**
The soft skills framework does not represent a youth development framework. Instead, it provides a compelling and rigorous research base for constructs we might use within 4-H to talk about target development outcomes related to the long-term goal of workplace success. The “soft skill” in this study parallel in many regards the life skills model used historically within 4-H. The benefit is that this framework has already done significant work in identifying a consensus of terms that helps provide clarity of constructs to guide future research, and communicate program impact that resonates/aligns with the expressed priorities of employers and other stakeholders.

The theory of change hypothesized here (based on extrapolation from the research evidence) provides an explanatory framework for how development skills (e.g. “soft skills”) are associated with the targeted long-term goal of workplace success. But the framework provides no insight into the program inputs and processes of interaction between youth and context that are associated with those developmental outcomes. For this framework to be useful, the outcomes of the framework need to be included within a more holistic developmental framework that articulates a related theory of change and theory of action for how they are developed by and in youth.
References


Targeting Life Skills Model
David J. White, Oregon State University

Overall Description of the Framework
The Targeting Life Skills Model (TLSM)\(^8\) was first published by Iowa State University in 1996 and subsequently updated two years later (Hendricks, 1998). The TLSM is designed to facilitate preparation of 4-H curriculum, planning of programs, development of measurement instruments, program assessment, and reporting of outcomes.

The Government Performance Results Act of 1993 (Office of Management & Budget, 1993) ushered in the era of program accountability. As a result, publically-funded programs affecting the social fabric of communities were required to find models of effectiveness to demonstrate that their programs were worthy of continued public support. The 4-H program was not immune to the Act as indicated by the 4-H Youth Development Base Program Status Report (Hendricks, 1998). These events in the early and mid-1990’s prompted Iowa State University to develop and disseminate the Targeting Life Skills Model as a way to improve 4-H programs and the evaluation of program impact. According to the author,

At the time of development, the focus was on program accountability in order to secure funding. We wanted to prove that the youth program was valuable in providing experiences and opportunities that were important in life.

The TLS Model began out of a need to define the concepts that were promoted as basic to the 4-H program better, and to evaluate their impact on youth development (Patricia A. Hendricks Smith, Personal Communication, December 17, 2015).

The Targeting Life Skills Model, represented as a wheel, aligns life skill development and the 4-H experience within the four quadrants of the 4-H Clover (HEAD, HEART, HANDS, and HEALTH). The eight broad life skills are divided into four categories of Managing and Thinking for HEAD, Relating and Caring for HEART, Giving and Working for HANDS, and Living and Being for HEALTH. Each of the four categories is situated under its respective leaf of the 4-H Clover. Thirty five specific life skills are positioned under the eight broader life skills categories.

The Targeting Life Skills Model led to the development of a guide with “The purpose of... provid[ing] a way to simplify the coordination of life skill development with ages and stages

\(^8\) See Appendix 1, Figure 8 on Page 62, for a graphic of this framework
tasks so programs will be developmentally appropriate and more effective in achieving identified outcomes” (Hendricks, 1998, p. 4).

Validity and Scientific Evidence Supporting the Framework

The Targeting Life Skills Model (TLSM) meets the four criteria of a framework identified by Heck and Subramanian (2009). The TLSM gives programs direction and purpose, guides programs toward outcomes, identifies programmatic outcomes, and guides the evaluation of programs. However, the challenges to the TLSM as a framework for positive youth development arise from a lack of evidence to support the identified life skills as the most critical to youth development, and its universal applicability across populations of youth.

The research and reported impacts of programs based on the Targeting Life Skills Model (TLSM) are accessible. Researchers, educators, and practitioners have used the TLSM to develop curriculum, plan programs, create instruments, assess programs, and identify outcomes. As Heck and Subramanian (2009) indicate, the TLSM was developed after the author reviewed the literature significant to youth development, resiliency, and program evaluation. Hendricks explained,

Because of the focus on evaluation, I spent time consulting with extension evaluation specialists, notably Kay Rockwell at the University of Nebraska who was doing extensive research on targeting outcomes of programs.

After 20 years I regret that, outside of the annotated bibliography presented, I cannot be more specific on research behind the model. I consulted with many youth development people, gaining from their insights and experiences. However, my job description at the time was program development, not research, and that was my focus (P. A. Hendricks Smith, personal communication, December 17, 2015).

The TLS author’s purpose and priorities, in part, account for the lack of an explicit trail of empirical evidence, and explains why database searches were unable to locate or identify the empirical evidence validating the 35 skills as being central to youths’ experience, or supporting whether they are indeed skills needed for thriving. The author notes,

I realized at the time that there was no hard science or research conducted. I talked with people at the research department at ISU and explained the limitations of the program and [its] focus on development of evaluation tools to gather data. The data, for the most part, was self-report, and the validity face value. It might have been beneficial to have had time and resources to track individual young people over time on their road to growth and achievement, but
what we could provide was an annual snapshot of self-report (P. A. Hendricks Smith, personal communication, December 17, 2015).

Although being used to define 4-H program outcomes for over 20 years, the model has not been empirically tested and thus lacks the tested validity found in other prominent PYD frameworks, such as the 40 Developmental Assets (Search Institute, 1997, 2006), the Five C’s (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000), and the Community Action Framework for Youth Development (Gambone, Klem, & Connell, 2002). Hendricks remarked

There is not complete agreement on the specific life skills needed by youth, or on a set of desired behaviors that ensure success in life.” Therefore, intentionally, there was no definitive list. As need be, new skills could be added. Several models were examined, and those skills selected were determined relevant for the time (P. A. Hendricks Smith, personal communication, December 17, 2015).

There is published evidence of the Targeting Life Skills Model’s standing and propagation within the field and practice of positive youth development as a framework for planning and assessment. Heck and Subramanian (2009) provide a partial summary of research dating back to 2003. These pieces make up some of the 25 articles published as early as 2000 in the Journal of Extension. Twelve articles, dating back to 2006, can also be found in the Journal of Youth Development. However, the published research described by Heck and Subramanian (2009) are all rooted in the 4-H or Extension experience. With the exception of two, all were published in the Journal of Extension. The same is true of 10 of the 12 articles found in the Journal of Youth Development published by the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents.

Though the Targeting Life Skills Model (TLSM) has a certain level of face validity, and has been used widely across the 4-H program, there is little evidence to support the use of the model beyond the descriptive level. Furthermore, because of the lack of empirical validation, there is no evidence to support the list of 35 skills as those that are most salient to youth development. Likewise, the literature supporting its applicability beyond the 4-H experience is not evident.

Program Theory of Change
While the lack of empirical evidence and universal applicability are concerns, the Targeting Life Skills Model (TLSM) does contain a clear theory of change. The TLSM links identified life skills development directly to the 4-H experience and Hendricks (1998) provides a logical path for practitioners to follow. First, the prospect of youth experiencing and learning life skills must be firmly situated in tasks that are developmentally appropriate; second, youth need to practice and use the skills continually; third, once the skills are learned, they become available and transferable for youth for in adult roles. Preparing youth to lead productive and satisfying lives
that conform to societal demands, then, depends on the degree to which youth, through their 4-H experiences, are able to internalize or learn the skills, actualize or use the skills, and generalize or transfer the skill to new challenges and opportunities.

**Program Theory of Action**
The guide accompanying the *Targeting Life Skills Model* (TSLM) is formatted to facilitate program planning. According to Hendricks (1998) the TSLM is used by practitioners to:

a) Assist youth in reaching their full potential by taking a positive approach to life skills development,

b) Delivering a 4-H experience that is at a developmentally appropriate level,

c) Write learning objectives that are measureable,

d) Complete lesson plans based on experiential learning theory,

e) Identify qualitative and quantitative indicators of change, and

f) Use the indicators as evidence of program impact.

Practitioners develop curriculum or plan programs by following nine steps that are logically organized and well scripted. They include identifying a topic, identifying components of life skills to be learned, noting the age and stage of the learner, defining the desired impact, specifying the delivery method, defining key subject matter content, stating content to be learned, defining the desired impact on youth, providing the activity or event the learner will experience, and defining measureable indicators of change.

**Utility of Framework for 4-H**
The overarching weaknesses of the *Targeting Life Skills Model* (TLSM) as a positive youth development framework resides in its inability to meet the tests of effectiveness through validity and universal applicability posed by Heck and Subramanian (2009). However, the strengths of the TLSM are evident in Heck and Subramanian’s third test of utility. There is evidence that the TLSM had significant impacts on 4-H and Extension’s ability to move away from formative levels of evaluation to more summative approaches (Bailey & Deen, 2002).

Practitioners were required to look beyond programmatic inputs, activities, and outputs and consider short and medium term outcomes as a guiding principle in the development of youth programs. According to Hendricks,

The value of the TLS model [is] its method of defining a skill by breaking each one down into its component parts, each of which could be incorporated into subject matter programming. The learning and practice of these component parts or steps could be evaluated, along with the learning and evaluation of subject matter (P. A. Hendricks Smith, personal communication, December 17, 2015).
Other researchers and practitioners, like Bailey and Deen (2002) suggest, started to draw upon the TLSM to plan and assess programs because the model was “familiar to Cooperative Extension” and could be easily incorporated with the 4-H brand.

**Recommendations for Use in 4-H**

Despite the concerns about the *Targeting Life Skills Model’s* (TLSM) lack of evidence to support the inclusion of the 35 life skills identified by the model as the most critical for youth development, and its lack of application and testing outside of 4-H and Extension, the TLSM is still useful in the 4-H program. The TLSM was never conceived as a framework for positive youth development. It was designed for program planning and assessment of positive youth development programs. The author provides the following explanation.

> The research consultant said that the importance of the model was that it was reaching thousands of youth across the state of Iowa and being used in the development of curriculum and programs across the country. What it lacked in hard science, it made up for by the numbers of members and leaders documenting the value of the 4-H program by their responses to specific questions on the evaluation instruments. The evaluation instruments were kept simple and focused on more specific concepts, especially reporting observations they made in the success of the programs (P. A. Hendricks Smith, personal communication, December 17, 2015).

This observation is supported by Heck and Subramanian (2009), and is at the heart of the effort to identify and use frameworks and speaks to the organization's priorities and stakeholders' demands for accountability. Unfortunately, a model such as TLS would not even be considered by federal agencies funding evidence-based programming or by higher-level youth development or program evaluation journals as reflecting high standards of practice in the field. Thus 4-H is challenged to consider whether this 20 year-old pragmatically-assembled cluster of potential outcomes reflects the best practice on which the organization's reputation should rest.

Nonetheless, practitioners and researches have used some or a majority of the 35 skills from the *Targeting Life Skills Model* (TLSM) to create rigorously tested and psychometrically supported instruments designed to assess outcomes related to a multitude of youth and adult experiences. One example is Bailey and Deen’s (2002) selection of eight of the 35 skills they hoped youth and adults were learning from their programs. These exemplary bodies of work coupled with a greater understanding of deeper learning and 21st Century Competencies (National Research Council [NRC], 2012) have, in effect, provided some of the TLSM’s much needed validation. Many of the 35 skills identified in the TLSM competencies are those among the 62 also described by the NRC. The value of the TLSM according to the author is in its
...simplicity and visual appeal to not only staff, but to volunteer leaders who could better understand youth development and programming because of its application. The model, itself, assembled the multiple skills incorporated in the program into groups, and those groups grounded by the concepts of the 4-H clover (P. A. Hendricks Smith, personal communication, December 17, 2015).

While the Targeting Life Skills Model remains a useful descriptive tool for curriculum development, and program planning, it needs to be updated and upgraded to be based on current research in youth development. Further development is also needed in order for the model to be useful for measuring program impact and outcomes.

References
Overall Description of the Framework
The University of California 4-H Program Framework\(^9\) is built on several prominent positive youth development frameworks, including Targeting Life Skills, Developmental Assets, Essential Elements, The Five C’s, and the Community Action Framework. The framework emphasizes the use of developmental theory and science to create intentional program processes that help youth reach their full potential. The framework outlines youth organizational practices, youth development practices, and educational practices that underscore the program processes that lead to the achievement of stated program outcomes.

The organizational practices are a combination of program quality standards, such as inclusion, safety, standards (Eccles & Goodman, 2002), program values (e.g. collaboration, culturally competent, flexible, and youth as resources), and youth program principles (e.g. youth engagement, low staff/volunteer to youth ratio). These practices describe the intentional strategies upon which a high quality youth program is built.

The youth development practices are reflective of youth program quality indicators (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Smith & Akiva, 2008; Smith, et al., 2012). These include safety, relationship building, youth engagement, community involvement, and skill building. Further practices are based on the *Step-it-up-2-Thrive* theory of change developed by the Thrive Foundation for Youth. These practices include a focus on helping youth identify and nurture their “spark” (Benson, 2008), enhancing growth mindsets (Dweck, 2006), goal setting and management (Gestsdottir, Lewin-Bizan, von Eye, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009), and self-reflection on personal growth around indicators of thriving (Heck, Subramanian, & Carlos, 2010).

The educational practices outline the program content (built particularly around the national 4-H Mission Mandates of Science (STEM), Healthy Living, & Citizenship as well as Leadership), teaching methods (e.g. experiential, inquiry-based, and service learning), and extended learning opportunities (e.g. public speaking, exhibits, record keeping).

The UC 4-H model states that these program elements form the basis of high quality 4-H programs and lead to the achievement of:

- Youth development outcomes, defined as the 5 C’s (Lerner, 2004).

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\(^9\) See Appendix 1, Figure 9 on Page 61, for a graphic of this framework
• Youth educational outcomes (e.g. Improved academic performance and STEM, health, and cultural literacy,
• Early adult outcomes- as indicated by workforce readiness, economic self-sufficiency, healthy lifestyles, and contribution to community.

Validity and Scientific Evidence Supporting the Framework
The California 4-H Program Framework is derived from several of the most prominent and current strands of adolescent research that inform and determine high quality program practices, at both the organizational and service levels. Research supports the connection of these program quality practices to youth development outcomes, which in this model are defined as the 5 C’s of youth development: Confidence, Competence, Character, Caring, and Connection (Lerner, 2004). The validity and structure of the 5 C’s model has been well established (Lerner & Lerner, 2013). The youth educational outcomes identified in the model are a combination of youth development outcomes (e.g. improved academic importance) and program content outcomes (e.g. science literacy) all of which are supported through varying strands of research and youth program evaluations. The ultimate program outcomes, which focus on indicators of success in early adulthood, are drawn from research, most notably the Community Action Framework for Youth Development (Gambone, Klem, & Connell, 2002).

As such, the California 4-H Program model represents a thoughtful, research-based framework for 4-H programs. The model itself, and its key theoretical links, however, has not been tested or psychometrically supported. Although the overall accuracy of the model is unknown at this time, the California 4-H program is currently collecting data through club program surveys for youth and volunteers. In addition, afterschool youth in selected counties are participating in a RCT study related to the model.

Program Theory of Change
The program theory of change is clear, beginning with careful attention to organizational and service-level program practices that establish high-quality program contexts, followed by educational content and strategies to facilitate learning. Although not articulated fully, the model mentions the importance of key youth contexts, such as families, schools, & communities, recognizing an ecological approach to youth development. As a result, youth development outcomes are enhanced, leading to increased competence and learning, which in turn leads to successful developmental markers in young adulthood.

Although the theory of change is well articulated, the order of the youth development and youth educational outcomes as presented in the model graphic do not follow a logical progression. As presented, the youth development outcomes (5 C’s) are placed before the
youth educational outcomes of learning and academic success. It is not clear from the model that the order describes a progression of change, but one can argue that youth development programs engage youth in learning and skill development first, and from that engagement, youth development outcomes (e.g. the 5 C’s) emerge. Furthermore, the mixture of specific knowledge and skill development (e.g. scientific literacy) and higher order outcomes (e.g. academic success) make the theoretical links somewhat unclear at times.

Further inquiry, however, provided clarity about the model presentation (G. Miner, personal communication, February 11, 2016):

Yes, I see where this is confusing—we still have yet to write the narrative that explains our thinking. Essentially, Youth Development Practices lead to Youth Development Outcomes and Educational Practices lead to Educational Outcomes. We know the two cannot be essentially separated and isolated that way. (Research shows that) skill development actually comes after safety, relationship building, youth engagement and community engagement, so that’s why the Youth Development Practices come before the Educational practices. Although not explicit in the framework, we wanted to demonstrate that youth have agency over their own understanding and growth around the concepts of PYD, they are not just recipients of those concepts.

Program Theory of Action
While the California 4-H Framework does not provide specifics about program activities that facilitate the program’s theory of change, it does focus on key educational strategies and practices. These strategies are based on well-established methods, such as experiential learning, science inquiry, and service-learning, the effectiveness of which have been well-established in educational literature. A particularly appealing part of the framework is the articulation of traditional 4-H “extended learning” methods, such a record keeping, presentations, and youth leadership. The inclusion and articulation of the 4-H learning methods helps connect the traditions of 4-H practice with the larger theory of positive youth development.

Utility of Framework for 4-H
The California 4-H Youth Development framework provides a clear program model that weaves together prominent strands of current youth development research and practice. The inclusion of traditional 4-H approaches, extended learning methods, and content knowledge that is consistent with the three 4-H Mission Mandates, as well as the newly emerging 4-H emphasis
on youth leadership makes the model particularly useful for 4-H programs. The model is specific and clear, yet at the same time universal enough to describe many, if not all 4-H programs. As such, the utility of this model for 4-H is very high.

**Recommendations for Use in 4-H**
The California 4-H Youth Development model is based on sound research, with a clear program theory of change and action. The model presents a universal framework for 4-H that can serve as a strong framework for most, if not all, 4-H programs.

**References**


Overall Description of the Framework
The Oregon 4-H Youth Development Program Model\(^{10}\) was developed to provide a clear articulation of the research and program theory upon which 4-H Youth Development programs are based. While 4-H has always claimed to be “research-based” in its approach to youth development, there has not been a comprehensive program model that articulates how the 4-H program and approaches work to achieve the youth development outcomes the program has long-claimed. The Oregon 4-H program model reframes some of the nomenclature.

For example, youth often come to the 4-H program with a specific interest or passion, which is often found in the topic of a young person’s 4-H project. In the Oregon model, this interest is aligned with the idea of “sparks” (Benson & Scales, 2011). A second aspect of the model highlights program quality as defined by Eccles and Gootman (2002), and a third aspect highlights the importance of developmental relationships as instrumental for youth growth (Search Institute, 2014b). These three aspects, along with adequate program intensity and duration, set the stage for developmental outcomes to occur.

The Oregon model describes developmental outcomes in terms of youth thriving (Larson, & Tran, 2014; Lerner, Lerner, von Eye, Bowers, & Lewin-Bizan, 2011; Geldof, Bowers, & Lerner, 2013; Silberstein & Lerner, 2007), and specifically in terms of the six thriving indicators proposed by Search Institute (2014a). These indicators are: 1) Openness to challenge and discovery; 2) a hopeful purpose; 3) transcendent awareness; 4) a pro-social orientation; 5) positive emotionality; and 6) intentional self-regulation. The thriving indicators are drawn from major bodies of research on adolescent development, and are conceptually consistent with other ways positive development has been described. For example, “intentional self-regulation” describes the individual level characteristics that link a young person to their context, and build the means through which youth contribute to their own development, and is characterized by goal-directed behavior (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2008) Intentional self-regulation is identified as one of the key processes of adolescent development (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2007). 4-H has always encouraged youth to set goals and monitor their progress toward them, as well as encouraging youth to revise goals as warranted, and handle set-backs in a positive manner, but rarely have these hallmark 4-H program activities been connected directly to best developmental practices defined in the research literature. The Oregon 4-H model articulates

\(^{10}\) See Appendix 1, Figure 10 on Page 64, for a graphic of this framework
the connections between traditional 4-H activities and strategies and the research that supports the developmental impact of them.

The Oregon model goes on to identify additional developmental outcomes that are connected to adolescent thriving; outcomes that are salient to multiple stakeholders. These include: 1) Academic motivation and success (Chase, Warren, & Lerner, 2015), 2) reduction in risk behaviors (Sanders, Munford, Thimasarn, Liebenberg, & Ungar, 2015); healthful choices (Arbeit, Baldi, Rubin, Harris, & Lerner, 2015); social competence, high personal standards, connection to others and contribution to others (Hersberg, Johnson, DeSouza, Hunter, & Zaff (2015).

Validity and Scientific Evidence Supporting the Framework
The Oregon 4-H model draws on years of extensive research in the field of youth development, particularly in the area of youth program quality (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), developmental assets and thriving (Search Institute, 2014a) as well as the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development (Lerner & Lerner, 2013). As such, the individual constructs of the model are constructed from the latest and most comprehensive understanding of positive youth development. The Oregon model in its entirety, however, has not been psychometrically tested or established, thus the accuracy of the model is unknown at this time, although testing on the model is scheduled to begin in 2016.

Program Theory of Change
The program theory of change is clear in the Oregon 4-H program model. The theory begins with engaging a young person in a 4-H topic that interests them. Youth explore that topic in a high-quality program context that is built on the program quality principles established by Eccles and Gootman (2002), with an emphasis on developmental relationships (Search Institute, 2014b) and with sufficient program engagement. From this solid program setting a delivery, youth are proposed to show increases on a thriving trajectory as marked by the six indicators of thriving (Search Institute, 2014a). Thriving youth, in turn, present strong developmental outcomes as outlined earlier, and ultimately transition to adulthood marked by health and wellbeing, economic stability, and civic engagement.

Program Theory of Action
The heart of the program theory of action in the Oregon 4-H model is found in the emphasis on what happens in the 4-H program context. Actions that put the program theory into motion include helping youth discover and grow their interests in a topic, providing a high quality youth program experience, promoting and facilitating developmental relationships between youth and adults and between peers, and ensuring that youth participate in 4-H at a depth sufficient to promote adolescent thriving. What is not explicitly outlined in the brief presentation of the
model (Arnold, 2014) is how specific 4-H activities, such as record keeping, participating in a county fair, or leadership opportunities operate to promote thriving. A more detailed presentation of the theory of action in terms of the more common 4-H activities would be useful to understanding the relative contribution of the activities to the overall program theory.

Utility of Framework for 4-H
One of the key strengths of the Oregon 4-H program model is that it situates the traditional 4-H program in current research in child and adolescent development, particularly in terms of connecting more traditional aspects of 4-H to current developmental theory (Arnold, 2015). For example, goal setting has long been a part of 4-H programs, and the Oregon model helps to situate this activity in current research related to intentional self-regulation. The model combines several strands of research, such as developmental assets, thriving, sparks, and the 5C’s, using elements from each strand to form a model that “fits” the 4-H program more precisely than any one specific model of youth development can alone. Additionally, the developmental outcomes are articulated in concrete and measureable ways that are salient to multiple stakeholders. While measurement of the model is just getting underway, the model also presents an opportunity for useful operationalization and measurement that can test both program outcomes as well as program theory. Finally, while fairly specific, the model is also general enough to accommodate a wide variety of 4-H program activities and strategies, and can be used as an “umbrella” or master model for planning local 4-H programs (Arnold, 2015).

Recommendations for Use in 4-H
The Oregon 4-H Program model could be a useful way for many 4-H programs to articulate, plan, and implement focused and intention programs. The model matches the traditional 4-H program and can accommodate more innovative program designs. The model has clear implications for professional and volunteer development to enhance program quality and delivery, and provides the opportunity for robust measurement of program processes and outcomes.

References
Arnold, M. E. (2014). The Oregon 4-H Program Model. Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University 4-H Youth Development Program. Available at: http://oregon.4h.oregonstate.edu/oregon-4h-program-model-0


Positive Youth Justice Framework
Lisa Lauxman, National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Overall Description of the Framework
The Positive Youth Justice Model\(^{11}\) (Butts, Bazemore, & Meroe (2010) includes 12 key components depicted as a two by six matrix. Each cell in the matrix represents the interaction of two key assets needed by all youth: (1) Learning/Doing, and (2) Attaching/Belonging. Each asset then is to be developed within six contexts of life domains: work, education, relationships, community health and creativity.

The framework is constructed for youth justice professionals with the intent to join the operational realities of youth justice with the ideas linked with PYD.

Validity and Scientific Evidence Supporting the Framework
The authors for the Positive Youth Justice Model condense to two basic building blocks, Learning/Doing and Attaching/Belonging. They take the approach that justice practitioners need clear guidance on how to focus their efforts and suggest a definition of competency from Polk and Kobrin (1972) -of competency, “the capacity to do something well that others value” and that “whatever skills youth develop, they must have something of value to offer to their communities.” The authors then contend that PYD’s emphasis on promoting active new roles for youth, the “helper principle” (Pearl & Reissman, 1966; Saleebey, 2002) essentially is framed as the youth “do good (i.e. help others) in order to be good” (Toch, 2000; Maruna, 2001: Bazemore & Stinchcomb. 2004). These experiences in pro-social roles and relationships transforms thinking and behavior (Trice & Roman, 1970, Maruna, 2001; Uggen, 2000).

The second core element in the model is “Attaching/Belonging” as social support and one’s connections to others are important in other PYD models, Search Insitutes “40 Developmental Assets” (Scales & Leffert, 1999) and the “5 C’s Model” (Learner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). “The integration of youth into multiple social environments is a key component of the PYD framework.” (Butts, Bazemore, & Meroe, 2010).

The authors proposed six key practice areas for the Positive Youth Justice Model: (1) work; (2) education; (3) relationships; (4) community; (5) health; and (6) creativity. They then relay best practices based upon research for youth offenders as practical strategies for implementation and delivery.

\(^{11}\) See Appendix 1, Figure 11 on Page 65, for a graphic of this framework
Program Theory of Change
The Positive Youth Justice Model is based upon the Positive Youth Development framework concentrating on two key components of Learning/Doing and Attaching/Belonging within six contextual practice areas.

Program Theory of Action
The Positive Youth Justice Model emphasizes the concepts of PYD and is a means to focus community efforts on a “finite set of activities and outcomes for individual youth.” The PYJ Model is then to be used as a framing device, as a guide for the efforts of youth justice practitioners and is referenced much like the “food pyramid” to orient an appropriate balance offering a diverse menu of services, opportunities and supports (Butts, Bazemore, & Meroe, 2010). The authors propose that the model encourages strategies from measurement, program evaluation and performance monitoring.

Utility of Framework for 4-H
The Positive Youth Justice Model offers an effective tool for framing PYD learning experiences for general and targeted populations. The model’s intent is to simplify PYD theory for practice use within the six domains. The model highlights two areas, work and school and relationships that simplify the contexts and contacts youth might have. They have included additionally health and creativity as domains for action and expression for youth. The creativity domain as defined offers 4-H an opportunity to engage these activities/opportunities with juvenile justice audiences. The health domain maps with the “Health” aspect of the four H’s. The strength of the Positive Youth Justice Model is its close ties to Positive Youth Development. There is little to differentiate it as a model for use as a theoretical framework for 4-H Youth Development. Though the authors insist that it is geared toward youth offender practitioners, there is much similarity for 4-H professionals and others who practice positive youth development. The model shows how interventions map onto the programmatic efforts with juvenile justice audiences for implementing positive youth justice program efforts. It provides an example then for 4-H professionals to consider when working with youth offenders and targeting programmatic efforts within the community.

Recommendations for Use in 4-H
The Positive Youth Justice Model maps well onto other PYD models so there is little to differentiate for the 4-H program. As such, the model is an excellent resource and though proposed for use with youth offenders is definitely a model to consider for 4-H programming use, particularly for programs working with at-risk youth.
References


Step-It-Up-2-Thrive Theory of Change
Gemma Miner, University of California

Overall Description of the Framework
The Step-It-Up-2-Thrive Theory of Change\textsuperscript{12} was developed by the Thrive Foundation for Youth of Menlo Park, California. The framework is built on the work of a vast array of developmental researchers; most notably, Richard Lerner of the Tufts Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development, Peter Benson of the Search Institute and Carol Dweck of Stanford University. The model focuses on the definition of thriving as 1) forward, purposeful movement toward reaching one’s full potential, and 2) an orientation toward life that is marked by balance, meaning and learning through which one contributes to the common good.

The model describes four components that if continuously developed and integrated as skills are learned, lead youth toward reaching their full potential. The four components include helping youth identify and nurture their “spark” and “spark champions” (Benson, 2008), enhancing growth mindsets and understanding adolescent brain development (Dweck, 2006), self-reflection on personal growth around indicators of thriving (Heck, Subramanian, & Carlos, 2010) and building GPS (Goal selection, Pursuit of strategies, Shifting gears in the face of blocked goals) goal management skills (Gestsdottir, Lewin-Bizan, von Eye, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009).

In the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive model, Sparks are seen as the catalyst—the first step—to help young people work on long-term goals and reaching their full potential. Sparks are the inner passions, motivations, interests, talents, or the things that give meaning and joy to one’s life. Additionally, in order for something to be a true spark, it must be something that one can use to make a positive difference in the world (Benson & Scales, 2009). Spark champions are the adults who support a young person to identify and develop their sparks. While Peter Benson of the Search Institute conceptualized the term “spark”, it is important to note that William Damon (2008), of the Stanford Center on Adolescence, has contributed significant research on “purpose” in the lives of young people, which further supports the notion of passion and sparks.

The second component advances the research of Carol Dweck of Stanford University, on growth mindset. Dweck’s work grew from the research of the late 1980’s on entity theory of intelligence and incremental theory of intelligence (Dweck, 1986). Young people who believe

\textsuperscript{12} See Appendix 1, Figure 12 on Page 66, for a graphic of this framework
that they are born with a certain amount of intelligence, personality traits, talents and skills are said to operate in the world with a “fixed mindset”.

Conversely, youth who believe that they can grow and change, who understand that success comes from effort, persistence, seeking help, and changing strategies operate with a “growth mindset” (Dweck, 2006). Additionally, youth learn the relationship between how the brain thinks thoughts and developing a growth mindset. Youth who understand the plasticity of the brain and how neural pathways are formed, more easily understand that everyone can change their brain, and thus, their intelligence, personality, abilities, skills and character (Blackwell, Trezsniweski & Dweck, 2007).

The third component in the model involves self-reflection as the method to develop and/or improve one’s indicators of thriving. The 12 indicators of thriving are based on the research of many and fall within the categories of the six Cs of positive youth development. The indicators of thriving include: healthy habits, life skills, love of learning, emotional competence, social skills (competence), positive relationships, spiritual growth (connection), character (character), caring (caring), confidence, persistent resourcefulness (confidence) and purpose (contribution) (Heck, Subramanian, & Carlos, 2010). Self-reflection skills help young people to recreate and make sense about their experiences through thoughts and feelings. It is an important component in self-regulation which helps youth to adjust their goals and motivations in productive ways (Zimmerman, 2002).

The fourth component of the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change intentionally helps young people build goal management skills—which is more complex than goal setting. In this model, the GPS language helps youth to operationalize goal management skills. G is for “goal selection” or the ability to identify a goal; P is for “pursuit of strategies” or the ability to make a plan to meet goals; and S is for “shifting gears” or the ability to change strategies or goals when obstacles arise. (Gestsdóttir & Lerner, 2008; Lerner & Lerner, Lewin-Bizan, Bowers, Boyd, Mueller et al., 2011).

The model makes contextualizing statements (attributed to Lerner, 2010) that if adult guides support youth to continuously develop and integrate new skills around sparks, growth mindset, the indicators of thriving and GPS goal management, then they will be on the road to a hopeful future and working toward their full potential where one builds attributes along the way that include building positive youth adult partnerships, high quality experiences that lead to the development of life skills. These statements indicate that the four components have a synergistic relationship and together they lead toward thriving (Thrive Foundation for Youth, 2010).
For the most comprehensive review of the model, see the monograph, *The Step-It-Up-2-Thrive Theory of Change* by Heck, Subramaniam and Carlos (2010).

**Validity and Scientific Evidence Supporting the Framework**

The *Step-It-Up-2-Thrive* theory of change was derived from several prominent, current or well-established strands of research that inform positive youth development principles and practices. *The Step-It-Up-2-Thrive* model represents a thoughtful, research-based framework for youth development programs, however, the overall accuracy of the model is unknown at this time. There are some tested links between dichotomous components: sparks to goal management; growth mindset to goal management; and a wide variety of connections between individual indicators of thriving and another component. There are no peer-reviewed research articles to support that it has been psychometrically tested as a synergistic model, although there is promise that these research efforts will inform positive youth development in the future.

In addition to the work of Benson and Scales (2009), the concept of sparks is related to the psychological concept of intrinsic motivation which is an important quality for academics and success (Davidson, et al., 2007). Benson also describes the critical role of significant adults in the lives of young people—spark champions—which is also supported in the research and linked to caring and supportive adults as the most important factor in youth success (Gambone, M.A., Klem, A.M. & Connell, J.P., 2002). The Thrive Foundation for Youth also links sparks to the work of William Damon (2008) around the notion of purpose—the intention to accomplish something with one’s life that is both meaningful to self and has positive consequences to the world. Interestingly, purpose is also an indicator of thriving under the concept of Contribution—the 6th C. This is an example of links that are made between two concepts in the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive model and there are a number of these links between concepts.

The research on incremental and entity theories of intelligence shows that young people who focus on effort and persistence tend to be excited by challenges. Failure is not seen as a deficit, but rather as an opportunity to learn. Conversely, youth who judge themselves based on current abilities, do not challenge themselves for fear of failure. When faced with difficult situations, these youth believe that they are not smart and thus do not try again (Heyman & Dweck, 1992). Dweck’s research on mindsets is well documented and while the original works are more than 20 years old, the theory has garnered continued research. Using an incremental theory approach, high school students show less negative reactions to social adversity and eight months after the intervention reported lower stress and physical illness than the general community of students transitioning to high school when social adversity is high (Yeager, et al., 2014). Growth mindset has been linked to learning goals—an indicator of thriving. Youth who
believe that their intelligence is malleable want to increase their competence and therefore seek out opportunities to learn (Dweck 1986).

The validity and structure of the 5 C’s model has been well established (Lerner & Lerner, 2013). The Thrive Foundation model incorporates Contribution as the 6th C and seems to garner some support from Lerner to include it as they did. There are many research factors associated with the indicators of thriving and positive youth development (Heck, Subramanian, & Carlos, 2010).

The GPS theory of goal management is based on the SOC model: S is for Selection of goals; O is for Optimization; and C is for Compensation. The SOC theory is well established and studied although young adolescents may not be able to fully conceptualize the different components, while older youth start to differentiate between the constructs (Gestsdottir et al., 2009).

At the time of this review, the University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources 4-H Youth Development Program (UC 4-H YDP) is conducting a five-year randomized controlled study of the model. The assumption that California is testing is that the development of sparks, growth mindset, self-reflection and goal management skills will lead to growth in the 6 Cs. Additionally, Dr. David DuBois of the University of Illinois at Chicago and Dr. Tom Keller of Portland State University, are conducting a randomized controlled study of the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive impact on the mentor-mentee relationship within Big Brothers, Big Sisters. The assumption is that the intervention will enhance skills of both mentor and mentee as well as reduce youth delinquency rates.

**Program Theory of Change**
The program theory of change is clear: that if adult guides support youth to continuously develop and integrate new skills around sparks, growth mindset, the indicators of thriving and GPS goal management, then they will be on the road to a hopeful future and working toward their full potential where one builds attributes along the way that include building positive youth adult partnerships, high quality experiences that lead to the development of life skills.

Although the theory of change is well articulated, the ordering of 1) sparks to 2) growth mindset to 3) self-reflection on the indicators of thriving to 4) goal management skills seems arbitrary. While there are theoretical links between the components, it is unclear why it is important to build a progression from sparks to goal management. The validity and importance of these theoretical steps are unknown as the model has not been tested, and without such information, complete accuracy of the model cannot be determined.
Program Theory of Action

The *Step-It-Up-2-Thrive* model does not provide specifics about program activities that facilitate the program’s theory of change; it does focus on key components around which educational materials can be developed. The Thrive Foundation for Youth did develop a set of curriculum for high school youth, designed for delivery in school, although it was not rigorously tested. The UC 4-H YDP have developed and are currently testing curricula in 4-H clubs and with afterschool partners for two age groups: 9-11 year olds and 12-18 year olds. Big Brothers/Big Sisters have developed thriving strategies for their mentor/mentee pairs that are currently being tested.

The model’s statement “…support youth to continuously develop and integrate..” implies a long-term approach to building the skills related to each concept. However, questions arise around developmental appropriateness at early ages and raises questions about scaffolding and the assumed progression of learning dictated by the model.

Utility of Framework for 4-H

The potential of the *Step-It-Up-2-Thrive* model for 4-H are:

- The individual components are anchored in positive youth development research and to some degree align with 4-H program practices.
- It focuses on outcomes that are aligned with the 4-H mission to help youth reach their full potential.
- The identified skills development could be well aligned to existing 4-H program models provided that they include and articulate 4-H learning methods that connect the traditions of 4-H practice with the larger theory of positive youth development.
- The research questions that are provoked by the model could lead to interesting and informative research that could add to the body of work around positive youth development.

The challenges of this framework for 4-H are:

- The limited theory of action will take considerable effort to 1) operationalize target concepts and make practical links between them; 2) facilitate recruitment, training, and implementation fidelity to achieve outcomes; and 3) generate stakeholder support.
- It focuses on adolescent youth and does not consider developmental opportunities of youth ages 5-10, which is a significant portion of 4-H clientele. It is unknown if there are different foundational skills for younger youth that would scaffold onto the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive model.
- Lack of empirical evidence to support the synergy described by the model.
Recommendations for Use in 4-H

The Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change provides a conceptual model that is highly compatible with traditional 4-H work, supports 21st century visions and aspirations and the individual components are research-based. There are gaps in assumptions, research evidence, and translation-to-practice that create greatest threats to validity and practical utility. The Thrive Foundation for Youth has honed their strategic emphasis to focus on the relationship between caring adults and youth. While they claim to use their earlier work on their theory of change, it is not evident that they are applying resources to test their model further. It will be interesting to see the results of the studies currently being conducted, especially the work of the UC 4-H YDP. The application of the model in California across 4-H program modes, socioeconomic populations and ages could greatly inform the work of 4-H and the use of these components, either independently or collectively, in the future.

References


Appendix 1 Framework Graphics

The Community Action Framework for Youth Development

E. Build Community Capacity and Conditions for Change
- Building stakeholders’ awareness, knowledge, engagement and commitment
- Conveying urgency, possibility, equity and inevitability of change

D. Implement Community Strategies to Enhance Supports and Opportunities for Youth
- Strengthen community adults’ and families’ capacity to support youth
- Reform and coordinate public institutions and services to support youth development
- Increase number and quality of developmental activities for youth
- Create policies and realign resources in public and private sectors to support community strategies

C. Increase Supports and Opportunities for Youth
- Adequate nutrition, health and shelter
- Multiple supportive relationships with adults and peers
- Meaningful opportunities for involvement and membership
- Challenging and engaging activities and learning experiences
- Safety

B. Improve Developmental Outcomes
- Learning to be productive
- Learning to connect
- Learning to navigate

A. Improve Long-Term Outcomes in Adulthood
- Economic self-sufficiency
- Healthy family and social relationships
- Community involvement
# Developmental Assets Framework

## 40 Developmental Assets® for Adolescents (ages 12-18)

Search Institute® has identified the following building blocks of healthy development—known as Developmental Assets®—that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

### External Assets

- **FAMILY SUPPORT** → Family life provides high levels of love and support.
- **POSITIVE FAMILY COMMUNICATION** → Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.
- **OTHER ADULT RELATIONSHIPS** → Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
- **CARING NEIGHBORHOOD** → Young person experiences caring neighbors.
- **CARING SCHOOL CLIMATE** → School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
- **PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS** → Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.
- **COMMUNITY VALUES YOUTH** → Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
- **YOUTH AS RESOURCES** → Young people are given useful roles in the community.
- **SERVICE TO OTHERS** → Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
- **SAFETY** → Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.
- **FAMILY BOUNDARIES** → Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person’s whereabouts.
- **SCHOOL BOUNDARIES** → School provides clear rules and consequences.
- **NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARIES** → Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people’s behavior.
- **ADULT ROLE MODELS** → Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
- **POSITIVE PEER INFLUENCE** → Young person’s best friends model responsible behavior.
- **HIGH EXPECTATIONS** → Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.
- **CREATIVE ACTIVITIES** → Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
- **YOUTH PROGRAMS** → Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.
- **RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY** → Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.
- **TIME AT HOME** → Young person is out with friends “with nothing special to do” two or fewer nights per week.

### Internal Assets

- **ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION** → Young person is motivated to do well in school.
- **SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT** → Young person is actively engaged in learning.
- **HOMEWORK** → Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.
- **BONDING TO SCHOOL** → Young person cares about her or his school.
- **READING FOR PLEASURE** → Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
- **CARING** → Young person places high value on helping other people.
- **EQUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE** → Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.
- **INTegrity** → Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
- **HONESTY** → Young person “tells the truth even when it is not easy.”
- **RESPONSIBILITY** → Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
- **RESTRAINT** → Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.
- **PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING** → Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
- **INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCE** → Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
- **CULTURAL COMPETENCE** → Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
- **RESISTANCE SKILLS** → Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
- **PEACEFUL CONFLICT RESOLUTION** → Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.
- **PERSONAL POWER** → Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.”
- **SELF-ESTEEM** → Young person reports having a high self-esteem.
- **SENSE OF PURPOSE** → Young person reports that “my life has a purpose.”
- **POSITIVE VIEW OF PERSONAL FUTURE** → Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.
Developmental Systems Theory: The 5 C’s of Youth Development

- **Skill-Building**
- **Long-Term Caring Adult**
- **4-H Positive Youth Development**

**4-H PYD Inputs** + **Outcomes** = **Impact**

- **Meaningful Leadership**
- **Competence**
- **Caring**
- **Character**
- **Connected**
- **Confidence**
- **Reduced Risk Behavior**
- **Contribution**
Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development
(Source: University of Florida)

Belonging
Youth need to know they are cared about by others and feel a sense of connection to others in the group. This “fellowship” has always been an important part of a 4-H experience. 4-H gives youth the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe while actively participating in a group. Current research emphasizes the importance for youth to have opportunities for long-term consistent relationships with adults other than parents. This research suggests that a sense of belonging may be the single most powerful positive ingredient we can add into the lives of children and youth.

Mastery
To develop self-confidence youth need to feel and believe they are capable and must experience success at solving problems and meeting challenges. By exploring 4-H projects and activities, youth master skills to make positive career and life choices. To do so, youth must have access to quality research-based content and have the opportunity to learn by doing. Youth also need a safe environment for making mistakes and getting feedback, not just through competition but also as an ongoing element of participation. Finally, youth need the breadth and depth of topics to pursue their own interests.

Independence
Youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action. By exercising independence through 4-H leadership opportunities, youth mature in self-discipline and responsibility, learn to better understand themselves and become independent thinkers.

Generosity
Youth need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. By participating in 4-H community service and citizenship activities, youth connect to communities and learn to give back to others. It’s clear that these experiences provide the foundation that helps us understand the “big picture” of life and find purpose and meaning. Community service projects allow 4-H club members to see that their effort to help others is important and valuable. Youth learn that they do not live in a secluded world, but in a global community that requires awareness and compassion for others.
Soft Skills that Foster Youth Workforce Development
Targeting Life Skills Model

- **HEART**
  - Emotional Intelligence
  - Empathy
  - Understanding
  - Honesty
  - Respect
- **HEAD**
  - Critical Thinking
  - Problem Solving
  - Decision Making
  - Learning
  - Interpersonal Skills
- **HANDS**
  - Practical Skills
  - Social Skills
  - Teamwork
  - Self-motivation
  - Self-esteem
  - Self-responsibility
- **HEALTH**
  - Physical Health
  - Mental Health
  - Emotional Health
  - Social Health
  - spiritual Health

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Targeting Life Skills Model – 1996
The Oregon 4-H Program Model

OEORGEN 4-H PROGRAM MODEL

INTERACTION BETWEEN YOUTH AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

THRIING TRAJECTORY

Developmental Relationships
4-H Program Quality PIP Principles

Academic Motivation
Academic Success
Reduction in Risk Behaviors
Healthful Choices
Social Competence
Personal Standards
Connection to Others
Contribution to Others

Long-term Outcomes
Successful Transition to Adulthood
Health and Wellbeing
Economic Stability
Civic Engagement

Openness to Challenge and Discovery
Hopeful Purpose
Transcendent Awareness
Pro-social Orientation
Positive Emotionality
Intentional Self-Regulation
**Positive Youth Justice Framework**

### Positive Youth Justice Model

<table>
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<tr>
<th>PRACTICE DOMAINS</th>
<th>Domain-Specific Example*</th>
<th>Learning / Doing</th>
<th>Attaching / Belonging</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work</strong></td>
<td>Job readiness</td>
<td>Resume writing workshop</td>
<td>Resume submitted to potential employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>One-on-one skill building in HTML or other language</td>
<td>Youth has an operating web site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>Training in conflict management</td>
<td>Youth completes training program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
<td>Youth-led civic improvement campaign</td>
<td>Prepare and present formal testimony</td>
<td>Youth speaks at public hearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
<td>Physical Fitness</td>
<td>Weight training</td>
<td>Number of training circuits completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creativity</strong></td>
<td>Self-expression</td>
<td>Mural art program</td>
<td>At least one mural designed or completed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 12: Step-It-Up-2-Thrive Theory of Change