INTERAGENCY WORKING GROUP ON youth PROGRAMS

Youth Don't Need to Be Fixed: Strategic Framing for Messaging on Positive Youth Development

Wednesday, September 26, 2018

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Youth Engaged 4 Change

HOSTED BY

INTERAGENCY WORKING GROUP **ON** youth PROGRAMS

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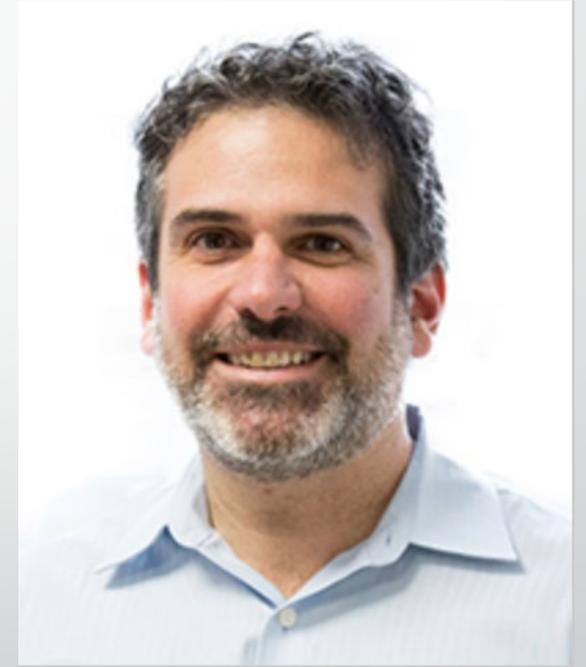
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Principal Researcher
American Institutes for Research

AGENDA

- Positive youth development: various perspectives

- Social media landscape on PYD

- Understanding culture's role in strategic message framing

- Cultural barriers to communicating about PYD

- Framing strategies to increase understanding of PYD

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

WHAT IS *POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT?*

From youth.gov:

PYD is an intentional, prosocial approach that:

- Engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive;

- Recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and

- Promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.

WHAT IS *POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT?*

According to experienced PYD practitioners, PYD programs and policies...

- Provide positive experiences/opportunities, supportive environments, and empowering relationships

- Are designed to be safe, supportive, and culturally responsive

- Recognize and respect the strengths youth already possess

- Recognize youth and their capacity to contribute

- Build the skills, assets, and competencies of youth

- Support the development of positive identities among youth

- Promote positive outcomes and empower youth to reach their full potential

"Youth are precious assets to be nurtured not problems to be solved."

-Interviewee

WHY IS *POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT* IMPORTANT?

- **We need to foster youth assets.**
  When youth are recognized, appreciated, and engaged for their strengths, they develop more assets. When youth have more assets, they engage in healthier behaviors, demonstrate more resilience in the face of challenges, and thrive.

- **PYD programs don't just benefit the youth involved.**
  They also improve outcomes for communities as a whole.

"Young people can contribute to decisions and actions in a meaningful, productive way."
-Interviewee

HOW WOULD THINGS BE DIFFERENT IF PEOPLE UNDERSTOOD *POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT?*

PYD interviewees explained that…

- "More programs would employ PYD approaches and practices."

- "Policymakers would invest in PYD."

- "We would see a shift in the types of supports and services provided to young people."

- "We would develop different measures to determine program successes as well as individual successes."

- "We would achieve the kind of change we want to see in the world… If you really want to have behavioral change happen and communities be healthy, then PYD's the approach."

WHAT ARE BARRIERS TO
POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT?

- Ignoring or trivializing youth voice

- Lack of cultural competence and responsiveness

- Excessive focus on negative risk-taking

- Expectation that we need to "fix" youth

- Well-intentioned efforts still falling short, as in "youth are the leaders of tomorrow" (not today)

"I think we live in a society that doesn't value teens. You can tell by the way we talk about them."
-Interviewee

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU TALK ABOUT *POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT* WITH OTHERS?

- Explain that youth are not simply recipients of services.

- Talk about *youth as partners*.

- Create opportunities for youth to speak for themselves and be heard.

- Tell stories and provide examples to help people understand what PYD is and why it's effective.

"Give concrete examples like…
A positive relationship is one that makes you feel valued, respected, and listened to."
-Interviewee

QUESTION 1

- **What are some challenges you've encountered when communicating about PYD?**

(Write your answer in the "Submit Questions Here" box.)

QUESTION 2

- **What are some strategies you've used that have been successful for communicating about PYD?**

(Write your answer in the "Submit Questions Here" box.)

SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

UNDERSTANDING PYD CONVERSATIONS ACROSS SOCIAL MEDIA

- How has the PYD conversation trended over time?

- What has driven the spikes in the PYD conversation?

- Who is influencing the PYD conversation?

- How has the conversation shifted?

- How can the conversation be amplified?

HOW HAS THE *POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT* CONVERSATION TRENDED OVER TIME?
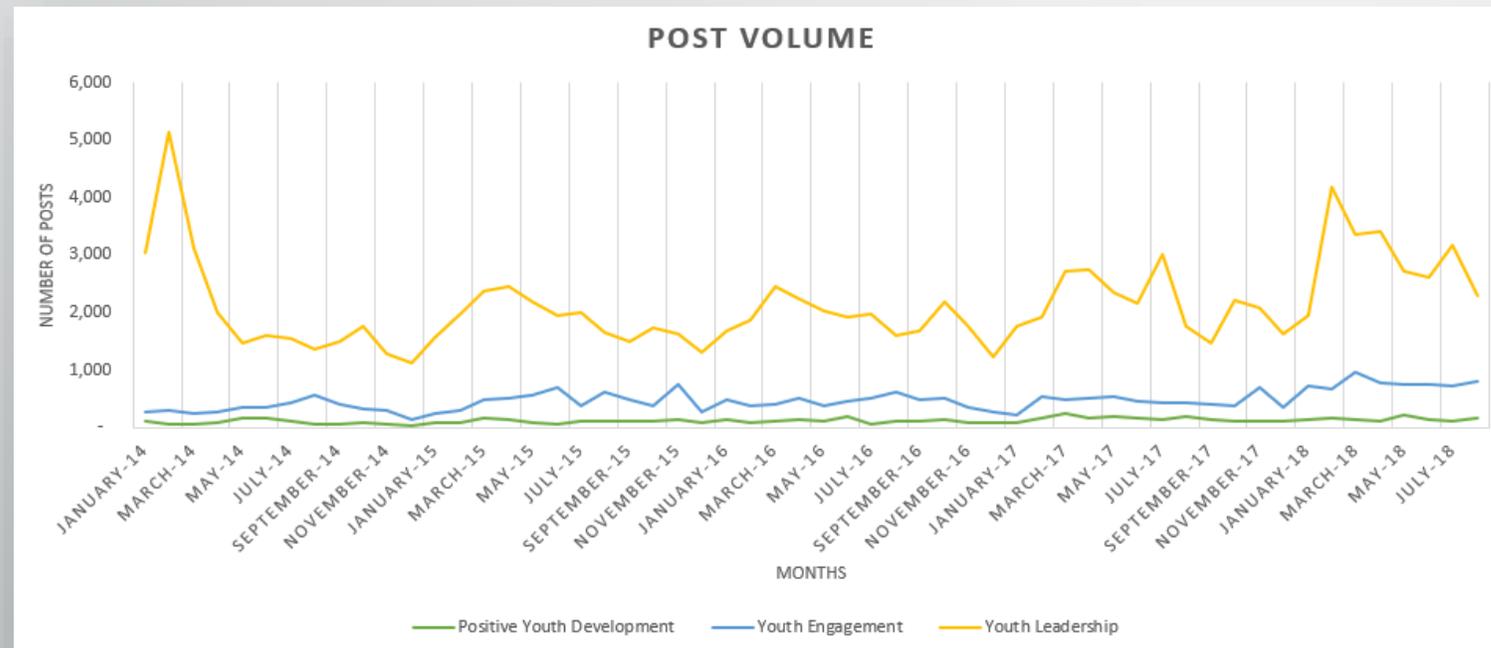
- **Youth Leadership** total post volume: 119,292

- **Youth Engagement** total post volume: 26,474

- **Positive Youth Develop** total post volume: 6,627

Filter: (United States)
Date Range: January 1, 2014 – August 30, 2018

WHAT DROVE THE *POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT* CONVERSATION?

Youth Leadership
February 2014
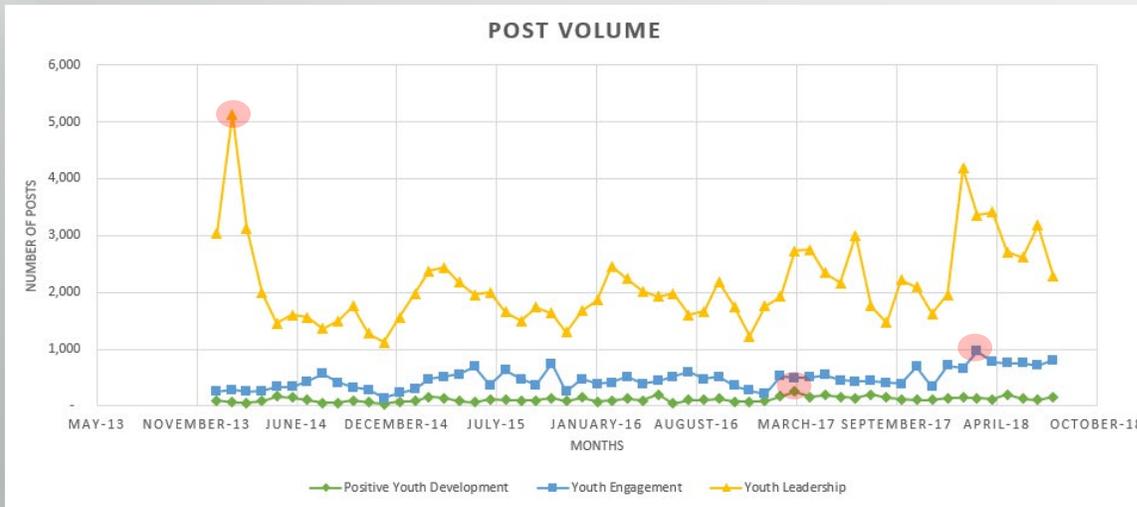
Youth Engagement
March 2018

Positive Youth Development
March 2017

HOW HAS THE *POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT* CONVERSATION CHANGED OVER TIME?

2014

FREE Monitor: Geolocations: United... — Topics from 1/1/14 to 12/31/14

2018

FREE Monitor: Geolocations: United... — Topics from 1/1/18 to 8/31/18
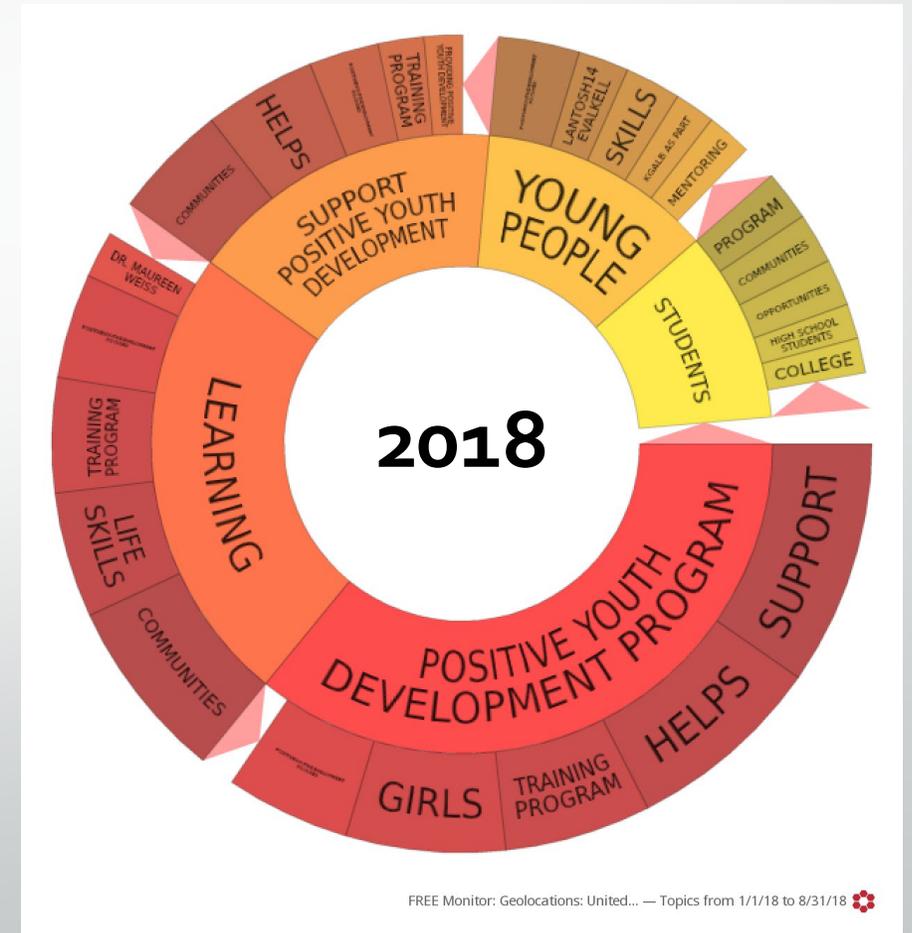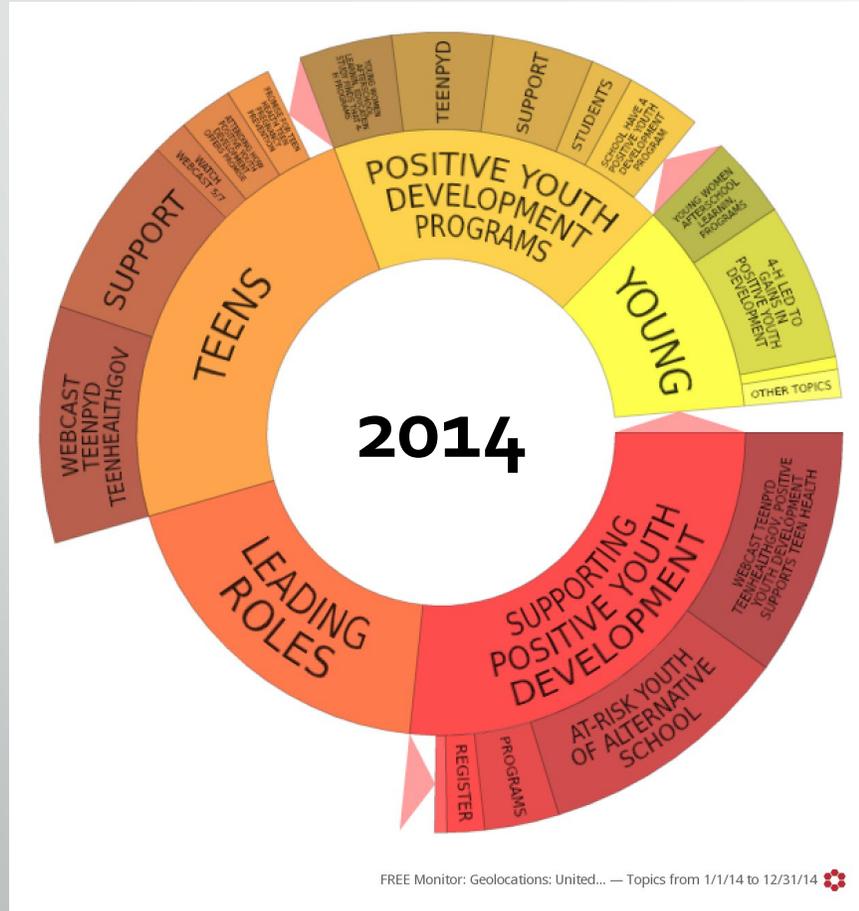
WHO IS INFLUENCING THE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CONVERSATION?

- Social influencers have dedicated and engaged followers.

- Today, content creators with a niche audience have replaced celebrity endorsements.

- There are four general types of influencers:

  - Celebrities

  - Industry experts

  - Bloggers and content creators

  - Micro-influencers

HOW IS THE PYD CONVERSATION BEING AMPLIFIED?

2014-2015

2016-2017

2018

HOW IS THE PYD CONVERSATION BEING AMPLIFIED?

TOP HASHTAGS FOR POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

CULTURE'S ROLE IN STRATEGIC MESSAGE FRAMING

MISSED MESSAGE EXAMPLE 1

- **Expert Message:**

  "Prison only makes a youth offender more likely to commit future crime. Prison doesn't do any good for youth who engaged in minor crimes."

- **General response:**

  "Yes, prison is too cushy, like a holiday camp! We need to take away prisoner activities and make prison more harsh so that they never want to come back."

Source: Baran, M., et al. (2015). *"Like a Holiday Camp" Mapping the Gaps on Criminal Justice Reform in England and Wales.* Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute.

MISSED MESSAGE EXAMPLE 2

- **Expert Message:**

  "Stress is harmful for young children's cognitive development."

- **General response:**

  "I experienced stress and it made me stronger."

Source: Bales, S. (2005). *Talking Early Child Development and Exploring the Consequences of Frame Choices: A FrameWorks Message Memo*. Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute.

EXPLANATIONS FOR MISSED MESSAGES

- Message was too complicated.

- Message was poorly distributed.

- Message was not memorable or attention grabbing.

- Message did not trigger strong emotion.

- Message did not contain facts (or contrasted facts with myths).

- People misunderstood the message.

Another possibility…

- Culture gets in the way!

CULTURAL MODELS IN MIND

- From 0-3, the brain develops 700 synaptic connections per second.
- Cultural models are implicit patterns of thinking widely shared in a given population.
- They help us organize the vast, complicated stimuli of life into a shared common sense.

Source: Shore, B. (1996). *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning*. London: Oxford University Press.

HOW DO CULTURAL MODELS AFFECT COMMUNICATION?

- The way that messages are framed (values, metaphors, key words, messenger, tone, etc.) cues cultural models.

- Those cultural models then determine how a person understands the message.

- Unlike what a "code" model would predict, miscommunication is the norm.

Source: Shonkoff, J., & Bales, S. (2011). Science does not speak for itself: Translating child development research for the public and its policymakers. *Child Development, 82*(1), 17–32.

HOW DO WE GATHER EVIDENCE FOR A COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY?

Phase 1: Formative Research

- Conducting in-depth interviews that ask the most basic questions

- Analyzing implicit "common sense" understandings

- Mapping the cultural models in the space

Phase 2: Message Testing

- Developing messages to target productive understandings and avoid problematic ones

- Testing hypotheses with a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods

REFRAMED MESSAGE EXAMPLE 1

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- **Cultural models:**

  retribution, rational actor

- **Reframe with:**

  "Prisons sweep young people into a powerful stream of crime from which it is difficult to escape."

Source: O'Neil., et al. (2016). *New Narratives: Changing the Frame on Crime and Justice*. Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute.

REFRAMED MESSAGE EXAMPLE 2

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MISSED MESSAGES EXAMPLE 2

- **Expert Message:**

  "Stress is harmful for young children's cognitive development."

- **General response:**

  "I experienced stress and it made me stronger."

- **Cultural models:**

  individualism, resilience = willpower

- **Reframe with:**

  A taxonomy of normal stress, tolerable stress, and toxic stress.

Source: Bales, S. (2005). *Talking Early Child Development and exploring the Consequences of Frame Choices: A FrameWorks Message Memo*. Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute.

BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATING ABOUT *POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT*

CULTURAL MODEL: PUBLIC THINKING THAT ADOLESCENCE IS INHERENTLY RISKY

- Youth are highly susceptible to influences.

- They will do foolish things and make bad decisions.

- More worry than ever because of current environment.

- Therefore they must be protected with strict boundaries.

Source: Volmert, A., et al. (2016). *"It's a Rite of Passage" Mapping the Gaps Between Experts, Practitioners, and Public Understandings of Adolescent Substance Abuse.* Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute.

CULTURAL MODEL: PUBLIC THINKING OBJECTIFIES TEENAGERS

- Youth are little understood – not children but essentially different from adults.

- No developmental understanding (parental responsibility until 18, and then considered adult).

- People use a rational actor model to think that youth have bad judgment, have no willpower, and make bad decisions.

- Negative stereotypes about youth attitudes – wild and rebellious, disrespectful, stubborn, selfish.

Source: Aubrun, A., et al. (2004). *How Two Cognitive Biases Work Against Support for Youth Development Programs*. Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute.

CULTURAL MODEL: PUBLIC BELIEFS ABOUT "KIDS THESE DAYS"

- Not only are youth considered essentially different, but the youth of *today* are considered especially irresponsible, spoiled, lazy, disrespectful, morally defective, and entitled.

- Millennial is used as an insult.

- People ignore data to the contrary (increased volunteerism, more alignment with adult values, etc.).

Sources:. Volmert, A., et al. (2016). *"It's a Rite of Passage" Mapping the Gaps Between Experts, Practitioners, and Public Understandings of Adolescent Substance Abuse*. Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute.
Aubrun, A., et al. (2000). *How Americans Understand Teens*. Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute

CULTURAL MODEL: PUBLIC BELIEFS THAT DIGITAL MEDIA IS DISTRACTING AND DANGEROUS

- Digital media, especially smart phones and social media, are considered trivial and a luxury.

- They are an escape from real life that takes people away from responsibilities in the real world.

- Digital media are inherently passive and therefore lazy.

Source: Kendall-Taylor, N., et al. (2010). *"It's Just a Fancier Book:" Mapping the Gaps between Expert and Public Understanding of Digital Media and Learning*. Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute.

CULTURAL MODEL: FATALISM IN PUBLIC THINKING

- It's too confusing to figure out.

- Youth attitudes are inherently bad.

- Once they are not the parents' responsibility, there's nothing anyone can do.

Source: Volmert, A., et al. (2016). *"It's a Rite of Passage" Mapping the Gaps Between Experts, Practitioners, and Public Understandings of Adolescent Substance Abuse.* Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute.

FRAMING STRATEGIES TO REORIENT TO *POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT*

REFRAMING THE CONVERSATION

1. Avoid triggering problematic *dominant* cultural models.

Don't get a laugh by insinuating that teens are crazy or amusing.

Don't use a fear or crisis frame.

Don't judge teen style or looks.

Don't use a protection frame.

Take care with how you talk about smartphones and social media.

Source: Volmert, A., et al. (2016). *"It's a Rite of Passage" Mapping the Gaps Between Experts, Practitioners, and Public Understandings of Adolescent Substance Abuse*. Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute.

REFRAMING THE CONVERSATION

2. Activate existing but *recessive* cultural models to increase understanding.

Hands-on learning is critical for youth to gain new experiences.

Youth develop by interacting with others, experiencing new things, and making their own decisions. And adolescence is a special period to do that kind of learning.

Youth are working hard to be their best selves, and they are changing fast.

Adults can't control youth, but they can support them.

Source: Volmert, A., et al. (2016). *"It's a Rite of Passage" Mapping the Gaps Between Experts, Practitioners, and Public Understandings of Adolescent Substance Abuse.* Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute.

REFRAMING THE CONVERSATION

3. Focus on explaining developmental benefits of youth programs in the community.

Youth development programs are not about just filling time or learning new information. They are about the experiences that adolescents need to shape who they will be in adulthood.

Source: Bostrom, M. (2004). *A Developmental Perspective: An Analysis of Qualitative Research Exploring Views of Youth Programs.* Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute.

REFRAMING THE CONVERSATION

4. Use the Brain Architecture *explanatory metaphor* to emphasize the developmental process.

Our brains get built like the structure of a house —
what comes first in childhood lays down the foundation.
As children grow, the basic structures get built.
The experiences and environments that adolescents
have available to them become the building materials
that allow them to adjust to new demands, to support
new skills, and to develop as unique people.

Source: Bales, S., et al. (2015). *Talking Juvenile Justice Reform: A FrameWorks Message Memo*. Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute.

REFRAMING THE CONVERSATION

5. Use the Air Traffic Control *explanatory metaphor* to further explain what is developing during adolescence.

> Air traffic control at a busy airport coordinates many things to keep planes moving and keep everyone safe. Similarly, the human brain controls its mental airspace through what's called executive function. It lets us create priorities, focus, and make good decisions. The air traffic control of an adolescent brain is still developing into its mid-20s and we need to make sure that youth get support and practice as they develop these skills.

Source: Bales, S., et al. (2015). *Talking Juvenile Justice Reform: A FrameWorks MessageMemo*. Washington, DC: The FrameWorks Institute.

QUESTIONS?

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