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SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

A STRATEGIC
SYNTHESIS
AND FRAMEWORK FOR
COMMUNITY YOUTH
DEVELOPMENT

By James B. Hyman, Ph.D.

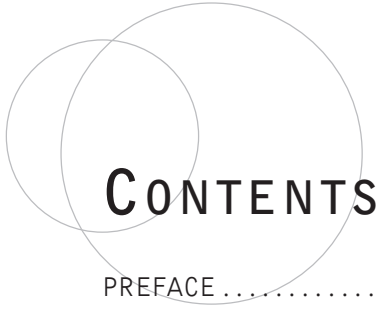


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*Prepared by
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June 1999*

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PREFACE

In the fall of 1996, I was invited to present at the Youth Summit sponsored by Mayor Willie Brown of San Francisco. At the time I was a foundation executive. And because of a long career that had focused on issues of education, employment and training, welfare reform, and youth development, I had a strong background from which to speak on the question of developing urban, poor, and minority youth. The problem, though, was that I had nothing to say — or, at least, nothing that I wanted to say.

In fact, the invitation to speak tapped into a deep frustration that until then I hadn't even recognized. The truth was that, for all my familiarity with the numerous issues and concerns that we all hold for poor, inner-city kids, I had no clue as to how to define the problem. There were always so many things to consider: joblessness, poverty and poor neighborhoods, poor schools, single-parent and fragile families, and vanishing role models, just for starters. And then there were the health and safety issues — particularly the guns, gangs, and drugs — and the violence and fear they introduce into neighborhoods and into the psyches of young people.

I wondered, “In the face of so many issues, how do we go about the task of considering what to do?” Absent some means of defining the youth development challenge as a whole, we are left to address these issues one at a time, fracturing our efforts and resources and thus guaranteeing our failure in the aggregate. Indeed, a review of the status of America's children and youth would reveal that we have failed as a nation to improve the life chances of our urban children.

But the prospect of giving another speech that only recounted the difficulties and deficits of distressed communities held no appeal. Nor could I find satisfaction in reminding an audience just how difficult all of this is. I wanted to say something that might be useful to listeners who might share this concern. I wanted to draw a “map” that would lay out the youth development terrain in ways that would make the challenges facing communities more graspable. So I set out to do that, and the result is presented here. As such what follows is more a product of exasperation than inspiration.

The “overheads” used in my San Francisco presentation have waited until now to find their voices in print. In the interim, I believe I have stumbled upon some additional insights that were not a part of my original motivation. Through literature reviews and personal interviews I have come to believe that, despite differences in the language and frameworks employed in the youth development field, there is a great deal of commonality and agreement in what we believe works and how we should proceed. I have also come to believe that reaching a more formal consensus on these things is a necessary condition if

the field is ever to win the public and political support for youth that is largely missing from today's public discourse.

Spheres of Influence is offered as a vehicle to advance a conversation — a conversation within the youth development field and within concerned communities, a conversation about new roles and directions that might be pursued in the cause of bettering youth futures, and a conversation about new competencies and capacities that may be required in their pursuit. Having now drawn that “map” that I sought three years ago, I am pleased to share it with you in the hope that it helps us find our way to a new consensus on future youth development directions.

James B. Hyman, Ph.D.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The preparation of this document has been every bit as challenging an endeavor as I could have imagined. It has also been rewarding in ways that I could not foresee. In fashioning this discussion, I have sought the counsel of respected colleagues from a variety of disciplines and venues. From each I have gained valuable insights. It has been heartening to find that so many people in and around the youth development field have grown impatient with our progress. They want to do more, earlier, better, and faster, and they want to do it for more young people. There is a hunger in the field for new directions and a growing optimism that we may be close to discovering them.

I am also grateful for the encouragement I have received for this effort and for being made to feel welcomed in the discourse on the well-being of America's children. Indeed this document and I owe a great deal to a good many. And without suggesting that they endorse all of the discussion that follows, I have listed below the names of those who have advised this work as a means of expressing my sincerest "THANX."

I am especially grateful to Doug Nelson and The Annie E. Casey Foundation for their generosity in supporting this effort and to Gary Walker and Public/Private Ventures for giving it a home. Thanx again to all.

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ABSTRACT

This is a paper about the youth development field — where it has been, where it is, and where it is going. Its primary purpose is to examine two major issues: our lack of progress as a field in securing better futures for poor, urban, and minority children and the lack of public will and political support for a new, aggressive, and more promising youth agenda. In pursuing these issues, the report highlights an additional question; that is, whether the poor and distressed communities about which we are most concerned have sufficient capacity to engage in a new and more aggressive approach to assisting their young people.

The report argues that our lack of progress is a result of a history of incomplete strategies — strategies that relied heavily on the delivery of programs and services to *targeted* young people and families to the exclusion both of other critical supports and of other needy youth. In addressing this issue the report documents the evolution of youth development from its early focus on wayward youth in the nineteenth century to its more promising focus on the positive development of all youth today. The paper argues that, by focusing on all young people and explicitly recognizing the importance of community influences to their development, our new positive youth development thinking offers more promise than previous services-only, remedial approaches.

But the report blames the dearth of public support on the field's confusing array of models and frameworks and the differing language in which they are couched. The paper argues that the proliferation of paradigms has hindered public understanding. And it suggests that finding a unifying vision for the field would go a long way toward making the nation's youth development challenge more comprehensible and, as a consequence, make it easier to garner the kind of public and political support that will advance the cause of youth among the nation's domestic priorities.

The good news in this report, however, is that there is much more agreement than fracture in the youth development field. The field is rapidly reaching consensus on the value of the new positive approaches. What is still needed is a series of conversations aimed at formulating a generic model for positive youth development — one that can encompass the varying frameworks, prescriptions, and models currently vying for the field's attentions and offer a more coherent approach for building public awareness and support.

To promote this debate in the field, this paper offers such a framework. Called *Spheres*, the new framework highlights the two questions most fundamental to youth development:

What do youth need to grow into positive and productive adulthood? And whether and how the resources available within their communities provide what they need? Each question is illustrated in the exhibits as having three spheres. On the youth side of the framework, the paper asserts that skills, attitudes, and experiences are the primary needs that constitute the three Spheres of (youth) Development. On the community side, programs and services, community supports, and the local opportunity structure form the three Spheres of (community) Influence. The paper describes how the new model works — explaining that the six spheres are ongoing, simultaneous, and highly interactive in determining how young people will turn out as adults.

It argues that, to improve youth outcomes, the youth development field and the residents of concerned communities need to intervene in *all three* of the community-side Spheres of Influence and not just through programs and service strategies. The report suggests that, while continuing effort toward program improvements and service reforms is worthwhile, the new frontier for positive youth development lies in paying more deliberate attention to how communities support and socialize their young people and to whether local institutions and organizations are providing those young people with meaningful opportunities for exploration, participation, and contribution.

The principal impediment in this new thinking, however, is the capacity of poor and distressed communities to actually engage these community strategies. The report suggests that, if “it takes a village to raise a child,” you first have to have a village — a “community” that is, in many senses, “communal” — a place where adults share a set of common interests and goals for themselves and their community and will maintain themselves as a group to pursue and preserve them. Alternately referred to as civic participation, social organization, or social capital, the capacity of communities to engender and sustain, in their residents, a sense of collective stake holding, and consequently, an interest and involvement in issues affecting community welfare, is an essential ingredient to the Spheres framework.

Unfortunately, there is ample evidence that, in most of the distressed communities where at-risk young people live, this village does not exist — that the social fabric and “neighboring behavior” of these communities have been strained and torn by the ravages of increasingly concentrated poverty and isolation and by the arrival of cheaper and more addictive drugs along with the rivalries, violence, and fear that those drugs introduce.

The report argues that, if young people in these communities are to grow into positive adult roles, means must be found to help their communities become more supportive of that growth. This is a difficult question because, while social science literature has come a long way over the last decade in clarifying how the concept of social capital applies to communities, less is known about how to create it. This report provides an explanation for why efforts at mounting national program demonstrations have failed to shed much light on community capacity issues or on how we might consider investing in social capital.

The report asserts that answering these questions is a pivotal next step in the research agenda on Spheres or any other positive youth development framework. Indeed, in this author's view, strengthening the social fabric of communities so they become more supportive of positive youth aspirations, behaviors, and pursuits may be the transformation most essential to improving the health and welfare of young people in distressed communities.

The report concludes with an appeal that the field seize the opportunity that the growing positive consensus affords it to clarify its directions, unify the field, and galvanize public and political support. The report suggests it is time to construct a generic, overarching framework, and it offers Spheres as a starting point.

INTRODUCTION

The past several decades have witnessed an increasing concern over the declining life prospects for inner-city youth as urban communities that were struggling with economic and demographic transitions in the '60s declined into distress throughout the '70s, '80s and '90s. Out-migrations of both jobs-supporting businesses and middle class wage earners gradually eroded the ability of these communities to adequately support their schools and other critical institutions and facilities.

At the same time a growing influx and concentration of poor, low-income, and minority families placed additional demands on those already-weakened institutions while contributing to the segregation and the isolation of these communities from their larger social, political, and economic regions. Add to this the arrival in the '80s of newer, cheaper, and more addictive drugs and their wider use, and the result is a tragic scenario — one that forecasts the greater vulnerability of inner-city youth to guns, gangs, drugs, teen pregnancy, dropping out of school, unemployment, incarceration, continued poverty, and early mortality.

Indeed, on almost any dimension imaginable, poor, inner-city, and minority (particularly black) youth are at risk and many are faring badly. Recent data indicate they are more than twice as likely as white youth to reside in single-parent families¹ and twice as likely to live in poverty² with five times the likelihood that their poverty will persist for six or more years.³ Moreover, they are 50 percent more likely to drop out of school,⁴ more than twice as likely to be unemployed, four times more likely to be arrested for violent crimes,⁵ and more than twice as likely to succumb to violent death.⁶ Grim as these figures are, they represent only surface manifestations of the quality-of-life issues challenging poor families and children in many of the nation's poor and urban communities. And by all indications these challenges are likely to grow.

Demographic projections suggest that this generation of youth will comprise the fastest growing segment of America's population as they grow to young adulthood (ages 18 to 24) through the year 2005.⁷ Between now and 2005, the number of young people in this age group is expected to rise by 14 percent. And fully 60 percent of the projected 3.4 million new young adults will be Hispanic or nonwhite. These projections are not being taken lightly. Indeed, some observers have suggested, alarmingly, that this bulge of young people presages sharp rises in the frequency and severity of violent youth crime, redoubling concerns about the social costs of idle and ill-prepared youth.⁸

On almost any dimension imaginable, poor, inner-city, and minority (particularly black) youth are at risk and many are faring badly.

One could easily speculate that this scenario might pose the most pressing domestic problem facing the United States over the long term. At very least, it may be a prescription for future intergenerational struggles, as America depends more and more on its younger generations for its economic production and for support of an increasingly aging population — a population that is disinclined to vote the tax increases that may be necessary for urban programs and services. At worst, this may be a recipe for wider political and social instability and unrest as increasing numbers of American young adults see themselves being locked out of the mainstream and of the riches and rewards mainstream America offers to others. Adding the racial overtones to this picture of haves and have-nots “ups the ante” on this issue to a level of national urgency. At stake may be nothing less than the salvation of a nation increasingly cleaved in half by the facts of race and residence.

Yet in the face of what should be a growing national concern, we are helpless to articulate a coherent strategy for action. Neither at the federal, state, nor local level is there evidence of anything resembling a youth policy. Child welfare systems, juvenile authorities, educators, and employment and training providers each have a fragmented view of young people’s needs and of the challenges to their positive development. And while the past few years has heard the outcry from many in the field for increased services integration and collaborative approaches, no agreed-upon blueprint exists to suggest either where such efforts should lead or even how the pieces fit together.

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Not only is there no evidence of a policy — other than the “apparent” twin policies of containment, evinced by the race to construct more penal institutions; and deterrence, suggested by tougher and more mandatory sentencing laws — but neither is there a public outcry demanding that government address these concerns by any other means.

But how can this be? Three-quarters of Americans polled in a recent survey felt that young people without education, job prospects, or connections to the American mainstream were a greater danger to the United States than any threat from abroad.⁹ So how do we explain the dearth of public and political energy focused on this issue?

There are at least three plausible answers. First may be a public impression that nothing works, or at least, that government programs don’t work. The disappointing evaluations of several program interventions and demonstrations over the past few years have certainly undermined the zeal of the Congress¹⁰ and may have sapped public will as well.¹¹ Second, and related to the first, is a strong public opinion that government has misdiagnosed the problem — that the challenge lies in character and moral development within the province of good parenting, not in resources and programs.¹² And finally, it may be that the lack of consensus on a compelling and comprehensible vision leaves public opinion without a strategy to rally behind.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

But the youth development field does not suffer from any lack of prescriptions. To the contrary, the field is rife with frameworks and conceptual models. Some are specific to particular risks, while others fewer, it is safe to say — attempt to achieve a broader range of outcomes. In fact, the profusion of models and frameworks is becoming of increasing concern to potential sponsors as well as to practitioners in the field. Community organizations are often confused by the plethora of models and the differences among them. And funders are becoming impatient to know what our knowledge adds up to.

Given the plethora of paradigms, it is difficult to suggest here that what is needed is yet another new model. But indeed that is the purpose of this paper — to present a new framework that helps us think about the youth development field as a whole. There can be little hope of mustering public and legislative support for youth development, or for building a coherent national movement, until the field can agree with itself about what it is doing and put forth a vision that is clear and compelling to policy makers, practitioners, and the American people.

The good news, however, is that the youth development field may be on the brink of converging on a more unified vision. Despite the variety of approaches to youth development, researchers of various persuasions have little difficulty negotiating each other's language and frameworks when discussing the youth development challenge. Most would agree, for instance, that over the past decade or so, the field has been shifting its orientation away from seeing disadvantaged youth as a collection of various pathologies needing treatment, and has begun to focus more on building, nurturing, and sustaining their assets. More and more of the nation's leading researchers and practitioners are seeing young people in the context of their communities and wondering openly about ways in which the youth and their communities can interact to bolster their mutual development.¹³ But, as is so often the case, research is way ahead of public awareness. And if public opinion is to catch up, common ground must be found among the many visions competing for its attention. It is in this context that the model below is being offered.

As such, this paper is not intended to compete with existing theories and frameworks — far from it. Its purpose is to demonstrate the common ground that exists among many in the field who are focusing on the newer and more promising idea of developing the whole child in the context of his or her community. The hope here is that sharing the model described below will accelerate the growing consensus by energizing the debate about how the various exciting and hopeful new strategies come together. (See Appendix A: *Relationship to Other Frameworks and Models* for a discussion how of other promising models compare with the Spheres framework.)

To achieve this, what is needed is a framework that can make the youth development challenge more comprehensible as a whole — a blueprint of sorts that will outline in and through which spheres we might intervene to influence youth development and youth out-

comes. It is for this purpose that the Spheres of Influence model was designed — to serve as an overarching visual depiction of the nation’s youth development challenge.

GOALS FOR THIS PAPER

So, where are we headed? The Spheres framework is put forward as a conceptual model of how youth develop. It is a vehicle through which we might better understand how to intervene in the lives of young people to increase the likelihood that they will grow into positive and productive adults. But it is also a model that helps explain why some kids don’t. The model has implications for a wide age range, but we will be particularly concerned about youth aged 10 to 21 — a range that encompasses the passage of young people out of childhood, through adolescence, and into early adulthood.

It is also important to note that we envision this model as applicable across a wide range of communities: rich, poor, urban, rural, black, white, Hispanic, or diverse. In some of these communities, the forces described in the model work well, largely un-

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tended, unnoticed and on “automatic pilot,” to foster positive youth outcomes. In others, particularly for the populations cited above, they cannot, do not, and will not, without deliberate intervention. By proposing an overarching model of how youth develop, Spheres highlights those avenues for intervention and provides a framework through which comprehensive strategies might be conceived, planned, and executed.

The framework starts from the recognition that *kids do develop*. As obvious and trivial as this observation may seem, it is a fact that deserves a declarative statement. Indeed — and contrary to how it is often portrayed — youth development is not just something that results from a programmed intervention or service. It is an ongoing internal process that occurs with or without our help, or often, even, notice.

The framework will posit three spheres through which that internal growth and development occurs — asserting that these *spheres of development* are individually powerful, simultaneous, and highly interactive and that in combination they define the range of potential outcomes youth are likely to achieve as adults. It is important to state again, however, that, with or without any intervention, these powerful forces are constantly at work shaping young people into adulthood — for the most part, positively and productively, other times, not.

The principal focus of this paper will be on how to intervene in that development process to effect better outcomes, particularly among the at-risk populations of urban, poor, and minority youth for whom the process cannot be presumed to work well automatically. So, after presenting our conception of the development process, we ask in and through what spheres might we hope to intervene?

In answer, the framework proposes three *spheres of influence*. These external spheres of influence represent aspects of the communities where young people live that are the pivotal inputs to that development process. Like the developmental spheres, these external spheres of influence are individually powerful, simultaneous, and highly interactive. And again like the developmental spheres, these external influences are always in play, for better or worse, in determining how our children will be disposed as they grow into adults.

As such, the framework focuses on the interactions of these two sets of dynamics — the developmental spheres that comprise the internal youth development process (*spheres of development*) and the community influences and actors that are external to young people (*spheres of influence*). Because they represent our avenues of intervention, our particular interest, and hence, the title of this paper is Spheres of Influence.

In this paper we will explore what kids need in order to grow into productive adulthood, and whether and how their environments support their acquiring what they need. In doing so, the paper will highlight the importance and the power of communities as settings for youth development. We will suggest that communities and their residents need to become active participants in youth development and do so on a communitywide, “saturation” basis. And in order to enable that community involvement, we will stress an urgent need to bolster the capacities of local communities and their residents to organize themselves for sustained collective action on behalf of their young people.

As we develop these arguments and themes, we hope to demonstrate that the concepts presented here are matters on which many in the field have shared views and experiences. We believe that, given a fuller airing, these shared values might form the basis for a new, unifying consensus for how the field might proceed into the next decade. And in the process, we believe the field will lay a better foundation for galvanizing public and political support and resolve for raising youth development to a higher level of national priority and action.

CONTENT AND READER’S GUIDE

Section II will open this discussion by outlining some of the issues involved in this ever-evolving field, providing background for the promising recent focus on positive youth development. Building on that background, Section III will introduce the Spheres framework, describing the two sets of dynamics — the spheres of development and the spheres of influence. Section IV describes how the framework functions as an overarching model of the youth development challenge. Section V summarizes the Spheres discussion and Section VI focuses on the importance of community capacity building to the implementation of community-driven youth initiatives. The Appendices provide additional observations on the Spheres relationship to other frameworks and models, issues that have arisen in its design, and its implications for the youth field.

NOTES

- ¹Data for 1996 suggest that only 33 percent of black children live with both parents compared to 75 percent of white children. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. 1997. *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*. Washington, DC. Pg. 10.
- ²In 1993, 61 percent of black children under 18 compared to 33 percent of white children lived in families with incomes under 150 percent of poverty. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. 1996. *Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth: 1996*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Table ES1.3A, pg 39.
- ³Nineteen percent of black youth who turned 18 between 1988 and 1990 had experienced poverty for 6 to 10 years, 22 percent for 11 to 16 years, and 6 percent for 17 or more years compared to white youth whose rates were 4, 4, and less than 1 percent respectively. Ibid. Figure E S15.B, pg. 49.
- ⁴High school completion rates were 90 percent for whites and 85 percent for blacks in 1995. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. 1997. Op. Cit. Pg. 48.
- ⁵Arrest rates for nonwhite youth under age 18 were 534 per 100,000 compared to 126 per 100,000 for same aged white youth. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. 1996. Op. Cit. Pg.134.
- ⁶The mortality rate for black males ages 15 to 19 stood at 234 per 100,000 in 1994 compared with 109 for similar aged white males. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. 1997. Op. Cit. Pg. 30.
- ⁷Sum, Andrew; Neeta Fogg; and Neal Fogg. 1997. "Confronting the Demographic Challenge: Future Labor Market Prospects of Out-of-School Young Adults." In *A Generation of Challenge: Pathways to Success for Urban Youth*. Baltimore, MD: Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies, Johns Hopkins University. Policy Issues Monograph 97-03.
- ⁸American Youth Policy Forum. 1997. *Some Things Do Make A Difference for Youth: A Compendium of Evaluations of Youth Programs and Practices*. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership. Pg. vii.
- ⁹Princeton Survey Research Associates (sponsored by Newsweek and NBC News). National telephone survey of 656 adults, conducted April 1997.
- ¹⁰Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies. 1997. *A Generation of Challenge: Pathways to Success for Urban Youth*. Institute for Policy Studies. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University. Pg 8, it is argued that discouraging evaluation results combined with a demographic decline in the size of the youth population caused policy makers to ignore the needs of this group.
- ¹¹In the introduction to American Youth Policy Forum. 1997. Loc. Cit. Pg. viii, Thomas Smith argues that these "null effect results" both gave rise to public skepticism and that the skepticism is widening.
- ¹²Farkas, Steve; and Jean Johnson. 1997. *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation*. New York: Public Agenda. Pgs. 21-22. Also see Immerwahr, John. 1995. Talking About Children: A focus Group Report. New York: Public Agenda.
- ¹³Two very recent forums for such discussions were: "Building Constructive Communities for Youth," a conference of the National Research Council's Committee on Youth Development held in December 1997; and "Community and Youth Development: Complementary or Competing Priorities for Community Development Organizations," a conference sponsored by the Ford Foundation and the International Youth Foundation held in April 1997.

EVOLVING PERSPECTIVES ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT:

FROM YOUTH RECLAMATION TO POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

In describing the current status of the youth development field, it is useful to recount from whence it has come. Unfortunately, a history of youth development has never been written and doing so would present a daunting challenge. Indeed, depending on what we mean by youth development, the field could be described as either in its second decade or as well into its second century.

The reason is that youth-serving institutions have a long history. Hence, if we define youth development to mean what youth-serving institutions did and do, the field is very old. A few historical referents might prove helpful here. For example, the Young Men's Christian Association, the YMCA, founded in England in 1844, was incorporated in the United States in Boston in 1851. The Boys & Girls Clubs of America date back to a first club in 1853 but were not founded as a national movement until 1906. The Big Brothers — Big Sisters of America was founded in 1904; the Boy Scouts of America in 1910; and the Girl Scouts of America, 1912. YWCAs, Campfire Girls, and numerous early neighborhood and settlement houses were also quite active around and through the turn of the century.

Regardless of what we call it, it was the activity of these organizations and others that defined youth work well into the twentieth century. In fact, youth work then and now still have much in common in that the earliest youth work seems to have been born out of a desire to reclaim young people. For instance, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, to a lesser extent, into the early twentieth century, youth work was undergirded by the dominant Judeo-Christian traditions that stressed piety. The principal objective of youth-serving organizations was to provide religious guidance and prepare young people to meet their God. Idleness, lack of piety, drunk and disorderly behavior, and dishonor were the main concerns adults had for youth at the time. As an example, YMCA literature, in describing its origins in London, states that George Williams “organized the first YMCA to substitute the Bible study and prayer for life on the streets.”¹ Similarly, the first-ever paid director of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America was a Yale divinity student who, in 1871, established the New Haven organization as “the Boys Club Missionary.”² It, like all subsequent chapters of the organization, advertised its mission as “guidance and individual service to youth”³ — a mixture of protection and character building that came to typify much of the youth work during the early part of this century.

This early youth work focused particularly on wayward boys. And having young men get settled in a vocation was the primary goal and prevention strategy. Thus, youth service has had a long-standing focus on both reclaiming youth and the value of work. These twin themes still dominate youth work today. But is this what we mean by youth development? Some researchers in the field would answer “no,” and that youth development as a field is relatively new. For instance, consider this excerpt from a recent report to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation:

Youth-serving organizations have a long history in the United States. However, the concept of programs geared specifically for youth development briefly entered the public policy arena in the early 1960s, but did not begin to gain prominence until the late 1980s. One result of the relative infancy of the field is the lack of clarity and consensus of exactly what constitutes a positive youth development program.⁴

Indeed, whether young or old, the point of this discussion is that youth development as a field is still quite “dispersed” in terms of its definitions and language as well as its goals, objectives, and approaches. The passage above goes on:

An abiding concern for the well-being of our country’s adolescents has spurred a multitude of program services intended to intervene in the lives of these youngsters. More and more these program initiatives refer to themselves as youth development programs. The Directory of American Youth Organizations lists 500 national youth-serving groups. Another 17,000 not-for-profit organizations classify themselves as youth development agencies.⁵

This seeming cacophony can only be viewed as a result of the energy and creativity of thousands of organizations and individuals throughout the nation who are struggling to make a difference for kids in a field that is still evolving and discovering itself. And evolving it is.

TREATMENT VS. PROBLEM PREVENTION: A PERSPECTIVE

Youth work, at least rhetorically, can be viewed as having a developmental trajectory of its own. But whether it is described as saving young people from the wages of sin or rehabilitating them from addiction or some other contemporary threat, the first and still primary and pervasive objective of youth work is, and always has been, treatment.

Treatment Strategies and the Services Orientation. The treatment approach to youth work is characterized by two very powerful dynamics. The first is an exclusive focus on youth already exhibiting behaviors such as truancy, delinquency, substance abuse, etc., that may threaten themselves or others. The second is a reliance on structured programs and services as the vehicles for ameliorating those problem behaviors. The focus on treatment and its services orientation has led to many calls for a variety of systems and service

reforms including better integration of human services, various partnerships with schools, collaborative structures for community service delivery, and more.

In fact, many in the youth development field have even called for a comprehensive service system as the answer to America's youth development challenge. On its face this idea has some appeal. It is clear, for instance, that the service structures available to non-college-bound youth are at best hit and miss, second rate, and uncoordinated. It is also clear that greater value would certainly derive to such youth if services were provided on a more intensive, more comprehensive, and more continuous basis. What is not clear, however, is that these kinds of systemic changes are the answer in the long run. Putting too much faith in this services approach may be tantamount to confusing the necessary with the sufficient.

As we will later explore in describing the Spheres framework, the nation's service agenda represents only one of several environmental spheres of influence important to positive youth development. Though it is an extremely important component, the services strategy is inherently insufficient. The truth is that America will never "service" its youth: out of poverty, away from racism, or into positive adulthood.

In a way youth development is similar to medicine as an ideal and as a practice. While in the ideal, medicine as a field should keep us healthy, the truth is that, in practice, it settles for a far less ambitious goal of getting us well. For the most part medicine intervenes when we are sick. Granted, there is a preventive side. Physicians routinely prescribe certain tests and other regimes for patients whose characteristics or family histories suggest susceptibilities to disease and disorder. And of course there are vaccines for polio, diphtheria, flu, and a host of other health-threatening viruses and ailments. So goes youth development.

Ideally, youth development should foster the healthy maturation of youth into productive, well-adjusted adulthood. But in practice it has historically focused on service strategies that address presenting problems. And as in medicine, prevention is also a matter of addressing particular risks or susceptibilities, but, in this instance, the viruses are childhood pregnancies, dropping out of school, substance abuse, and others. This analogy raises the question of whether youth development as a field can and should move its practice closer to its ideal. Should youth development be much more proactive and do so in ways that go beyond a series of programmed "inoculations?"

An even more appropriate analogy here may be to the public-health field, where medicine has recognized the importance of community level interventions in areas such as crime prevention and public safety, or teen pregnancy and substance abuse, to individual health promotion. Likewise today's youth work should be exploring strategies for intervening in *community environments* in ways that will better support the positive development of youth.

Because today's service strategies are so focused on pathologies ("deficit driven"), they give rise to two very dangerous errors that cause us to underestimate young people's devel-

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opmental needs. The first error occurs when our focus on pathologies causes us to limit our concerns and treatments to the particular presenting issues in children we have so identified. This kind of error can cause us to underestimate the extent and complexity of the challenges facing even those children we believe to be at risk. And because this approach leads us to treat presenting problems one at a time, it encourages a “child-splicing” approach to youth development. This approach has led, over time, to the current array of separate, single-issue, categorical programs and funding streams that the field now rails against.

By contrast, the second error in deficit thinking causes us to underattend more generally to needs of young people because of the mistaken assumption, implicit in these strategies, that children who are not so identified are therefore problem-free and not at-risk. For both reasons it should be clear that our deficit-driven services strategies cause us to fall short of meeting the needs of our young people.

Still, even if we could believe that comprehensive service systems were the answer, it would be difficult to imagine one. What would it look like and how would it be defined? Since there is no agreed-upon formulation of what youth development is, gaining consensus on how to erect a “system” to provide it seems daunting. Even if we could find a way of agreeing on a structure, its prospects would be doubtful. It is difficult to imagine, given the skepticism described earlier, that sufficient resources, public will, and political support could be mustered for the kind of institutional reinventing, reordering, and expansion that would be necessary to bring this system about in any promising way. Another answer must be found.

This is not to say, however, that strengthening youth services is a bad idea — quite the contrary. Cancerous conditions need treatments, as do heart ailments, gallstones, and the flu. In each case we want that treatment to be as professional, efficient, and effective as medical science can make it. Similarly, our treatment strategies for limiting the damage of risky youth behaviors must take fullest advantage of lessons learned from research and from practice in the field.

To sum up, the message here is not that treatment approaches to youth work are wrong-headed, but rather that we should not confuse current practice with the ideal. The fact is that our treatment strategies are not designed to keep youth “healthy” — these strategies are merely trying to make them well. If we are to change this agenda to a more proactive and prospective one, we will have to rescue youth development from the programs and services box so as to expand its focus and lodge its strategies more within communities.

Problem Prevention as a Goal of Youth Development. There are other issues that argue for change. For instance, the long-run effectiveness of our treatment-based strategies has much in common with bailing water. Success depends, in large part, on how rapid the flood. The data on the well-being of America’s children, particularly urban and minority youth, clearly show that our programs and service strategies have not kept pace with the flood of demand. In short, we haven’t been able to bail fast enough to effect a positive

change in the overall status of American youth. This reality leads many in the field to focus on prevention.

Problem prevention strategies offer the hope that we can slow the flow while we bail, so that the flood will over time recede. But our prevention approach resembles reclamation strategies in significant ways. For one thing, problem prevention approaches are restrictive. In this case, rather than being targeted to individual youths who are demonstrating risky behaviors, problem prevention strategies are targeted to groups of youth who, while not yet demonstrating these behaviors, are deemed susceptible and therefore at risk. Thus, and like reclamation efforts, they are motivated less by what society should *want for* its young people than by what society *fears from* its young people.

Further, it is not always clear what prevention really means. For instance, research shows that youth who are already one or more grades behind in school, fairing poorly in their current school work, and truant are at great risk for dropping out and perhaps worse. In response to these data a myriad of dropout prevention efforts has been launched around the country based on schools' abilities to offer services of varying sorts to groups of youth exhibiting this profile. A hard look at many of these efforts might suggest that, in reality, the differences between reclamation and problem prevention might be only semantic.

In the above example, for instance, one might easily consider poor school performance and truancy to be causes for intervention *themselves* regardless of the potential dropout threat. The point is that problem prevention may only be youth reclamation at an earlier stage. Note the following passages from William Lofquist's book:

“. . . a proposal is written for a new “prevention” program, funding is obtained, and then there is yet another application of the same remedial methods that had been used before.”

“. . . as an example, in the language of “delinquency prevention” it has been fashionable to say that a new project will achieve “early identification” of the “pre-delinquent” and use methods of “early intervention” to “prevent” delinquent behavior. Many projects based on this kind of thinking have been implemented, and the resulting activity can more appropriately be called remediation.”⁶

The point of this discussion is less to be critical than to be clear. If indeed our focus on problem prevention, as a goal for youth development, translates into earlier identification and intervention, it can only be viewed as a positive step in the evolution of our thinking. We will be much better off, in our communities and as a nation, if our problem prevention strategies can effectively intercept negative youth trajectories before they become serious enough for young people to get involved with “deep end” and “custodial” service systems such as detention facilities, detox centers, and group homes. But again, this should not be confused with the ideal. Problem prevention strategies, like their remedial, reclamation forebears, are about “getting kids well.” Still, these strategies may have advanced us to the point where we are paying attention to the symptoms instead of waiting to treat a full-blown disease.

It is now widely acknowledged in the field that these treatment- and prevention-oriented efforts are not enough.

We would be remiss, in this discussion, if we failed to distinguish between two types of problem prevention strategies — primary and secondary prevention. While at times there are only subtle shades of gray that separate the two, primary prevention usually means interceding to prevent the initial onset of life-compromising problems. Secondary prevention, on the other hand, usually refers to interventions aimed at preventing a *recurrence* of problems or an *escalation* of initial compromising behaviors. In general, programs that deliver services to youth on the basis of their individual *status* (for example as truants, delinquents, teen parents, etc.) can be viewed as secondary prevention activities. Programs and services targeted at classes of youth on the basis of their individual *demographic profiles* (such as household income, family status, neighborhood conditions, etc.) can be considered primary.

It may seem ironic that, historically, secondary prevention preceded primary prevention as an approach. But, as stated, the earliest interventions were born out of the need to reclaim youth who, by their behaviors, were already considered “wayward.” Not until recently have social scientists and others begun to turn their attention away from those behaviors to focus more on antecedent conditions. Thus, primary-prevention strategies represent an advance in the field, expanding the thinking beyond the mere consideration of current or past youth behaviors to include risk factors that might predict those behaviors. Still, like secondary prevention, primary-prevention strategies remained problem focused and restricted to specific, identifiable groups of young people.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AS THE NEW PARADIGM

Until recently, the problem prevention orientation still reigned as the dominant ethos of the field, and with good reason. In 1990 Joy Dryfoos sounded an alarm with the report that up to 50 percent of all young people in the United States between the ages of 10 and 17 were engaging in behaviors (such as unprotected sex and substance abuse) that could impair their health and their futures.⁷ Given these observations, there can be neither wonder at, nor argument with, the need to address, deter, and prevent certain youth behaviors. Both for the good of the children and for the health and viability of their communities, such efforts must continue. But it is now widely acknowledged in the field that these treatment- and prevention-oriented efforts are not enough.

There is increasing recognition in the field of a tension between the level of effort and energy we devote to the children who are currently “targeted” in comparison to those who are not. This is a real dilemma because, regardless of how we choose to define youth development, the fact is that the field is still largely in a treatment mode. And as long as data continue to suggest a “clear and present danger” to substantial numbers of our children,

the debate about treatment for *at-risk youth* as opposed to positive development for *all youth* may never be fully resolved or its fruits realized. Nevertheless, as suggested earlier, many in the field have begun to see the challenge of youth development in a broader and more universal light.

In a widely cited 1991 paper, Karen Pittman, then director of the Center for Youth Development, urged the field to focus on the concept of positive youth development.⁸ Arguing that “problem free is not fully prepared,” she challenged the field to begin thinking beyond the problems to consider what it takes to prepare young people for positive adult roles: “The concept of prevention is anchored to the concept of problems. It does not lead naturally to discussion, measurement, or funding for preparation of potential.”⁹

Positive youth development strategies expand the focus of our youth development concerns beyond the consideration of problem behaviors and risk factors to a consideration of building and nurturing young people’s developmental assets. Moreover, because the concept focuses on the potential of young people, it offers a framework for thinking more universally about all young people, not just those fitting a particular profile. Pittman defines youth development as “an ongoing process in which all young people are engaged and invested, and through which young people seek ways to meet their basic physical and social needs and to build the competencies and connections they perceive as necessary for survival and success.”¹⁰

Because this definition is commonly used in the literature on positive youth development, we adopt it here as the starting point for the framework. And because the Spheres framework attempts to present an overview of positive youth development, we will not deal explicitly with issues relevant to the remediation, prevention, and “second chance” program approaches spoken to above.

NOTES

¹YMCA literature attributes its formation to social conditions at the end of Britain’s industrial revolution (1750-1850) which saw large migrations of young men and boys from rural areas to the new city centers of industry and commerce and the emergence of large numbers of abandoned children. See *YMCA of the USA*. Undated. *A Brief History of the YMCA*. Chicago Illinois: Author.

²Boys & Girls Clubs of America. 1995. *Connections: The Voice of the Boys & Girls Club Movement*. Atlanta, GA: Author. Pg. 11.

³Ibid.

⁴Brooks-Gunn, Jeanne; Jodie Roth; and Britt Galen. *Promoting Healthy Adolescence: Youth Development Frameworks and Programs*. New York: Center for Children and Families, Teachers College, Columbia University, March 18, 1997. Unpublished. Pg. 5. Submitted to: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The reference to the 1960s is probably reflective of the joint effort by the Ford Foundation and the National Institute of Mental Health in launching the Mobilization for Youth demonstration project. Its focus was to provide services and opportunity structures for youth development and delinquency prevention. A history of the project was published in 1969.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Lofquist, William A. 1993. *Discovering the Meaning of Prevention: A Practical Approach to Positive Change*. Associates for Youth Development, Inc., AYD Publications. Pg. 3.

⁷The book concludes that 25 percent of American youth are at serious risk of not developing into productive adulthood and that another 25 percent are at moderate risk. The book asserts four behaviors — substance abuse, adolescent pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, and school failure and dropping out of school — that interfere with healthy adolescent development. Dryfoos, Joy G. 1990. *Adolescents at Risk: Prevalence and Prevention*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁸Pittman, Karen; and Michele Cahill. 1991. *A New Vision: Promoting Youth Development*. Washington, DC: Center for Youth Development, Academy for Educational Development, Pg.3.

⁹Pittman, Karen; and Merita Irby. 1995. *Promoting Investment in Life Skills for Youth: Beyond Indicators for Survival and Problem Prevention*. Prepared for *Monitoring and Measuring the State of the Children: Beyond Survival, An International Workshop*, Jerusalem, Israel, January 22-25, 1996. Baltimore, MD: International Youth Foundation. Pg. 3.

¹⁰This formulation can be traced to the influence of Urie Bronfenbrenner who in *The Ecology of Human Development*, Harvard University Press, 1974, suggested a transactional–ecological model of human development in which the human personality is viewed as a self-righting mechanism that is engaged in active, ongoing adaptation to its environment. Pittman's first articulation of this definition appears in Pittman, Karen; and Marlene Wright. 1991. *A Rationale for Enhancing the Role of the Non-School Voluntary Sector in Youth Development. A Report to the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development*. Washington, DC: Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, Academy for Educational Development. Pg. 8. Also see Benard, Bonnie. 1991. *Fostering Resiliency in Kids: Protective Factors in the Family, School and Community*. San Francisco, CA: Northwest Regional Laboratory.

THE SPHERES FRAMEWORK

To this point we have argued that the nation's young people, and particularly urban young people, are facing increasing challenges to their maturing into positive and contributing adults. We have posited this as a major domestic policy issue. Pondering the explanations for the lack of national focus on this issue, we have asserted that a comprehensible and compelling vision for youth development might offer promise of galvanizing forces to combat the declining life prospects that otherwise lie ahead of significant numbers of our children. We have also suggested that the thinking about youth work has evolved to a point at which consensus on such a vision may be possible.

Indeed, though the field has not yet reached consensus on an overarching model, there are several fundamental tenets on which many in the field seem to agree. For the most part, the prevailing view involves two major propositions: that youth development should focus on positives rather than negatives; and that how youth develop is subject to environmental influences.

Focus on positives. Several additional principles can be derived from the focus on positives. First, a positive focus suggests that our strategies can be asset based, not deficit driven. It is widely recognized that deficit-driven strategies are dysfunctional. Too much of the nation's youth work has in the past been focused on someone's assessment of what it would take to "fix" certain kids. Not only does this approach "blame the victim" but it also confines our assistance to remedial strategies with the inherent limitations we have discussed.

Second, a positive focus allows us to think more universally rather than confining our concern to youth who are presenting problems or showing signs of risk. It allows us to be more youth centered — focused on the needs of young people rather than on the needs of youth-serving institutions or the needs of community stakeholders to solve youth-related problems. Finally, it allows us to view youth holistically rather than through a single problem-focused or issue-oriented lens.

Context matters. The resources, amenities, "hospitality," and overall climate within neighborhoods and communities greatly influence the quality of living environments and the experiences from which children learn. Over the past several decades, resiliency research has drawn increasing attention to the importance of protective environmental factors that strengthen young people's "immunities" to adverse influences and circumstances. Consequently, there is growing agreement in the field that context matters and that youth

Though the field has not yet reached consensus on an overarching model, there are several fundamental tenets on which many in the field seem to agree.

development strategies should focus on both developing the child as well as attending to the community environment upon which that child's development depends.

These are by no means the only areas on which we find widespread agreement by researchers and practitioners in the field. But they do represent the most basic *principles* (as opposed to program parameters or components) on which consensus exists.¹ Like much of the current thinking in the field, the Spheres framework is based on these two fundamental principles.

INTRODUCING THE SPHERES FRAMEWORK

If they were asked what young people need to improve their chances for positive growth, most “man-on-the-street” respondents would unleash a laundry list: more two-parent families; healthier communities; more and better employment opportunities; better schools, healthcare, and housing; fewer guns, gangs, and drugs, and more. This list could go on and on, and in the end appear so daunting as to offer more by way of paralysis than prospects for action. Even among sophisticated researchers published in the field, there are a large number of lists describing such things as the assets and competencies youth should develop, youth developmental needs, desired outcomes for youth development, and policy goals.²

What is needed is a framework that can make the youth development challenge more comprehensible as a whole.

These lists will never go away. Nor should they, because the issues they address are real and should remain as focal points on the nation's domestic agenda. What is needed, however, is a means of getting one's arms around these issues — a framework that can make the youth development challenge more comprehensible as a whole — a blueprint of sorts that will outline in and through what spheres we might intervene to influence youth development and youth outcomes. The intent with the Spheres framework, then, is not to do away with these lists but to make them less daunting by embedding them within a framework that makes them more manageable.

The Spheres framework offers a conceptual model of America's youth development challenge by focusing first on the attributes that help youth grow and succeed and second, on the external supports that can help young people develop those attributes. Thus, Spheres avoids the “deficit thinking” that has placed so much of its emphasis on notions of what youth don't know, ain't got, or can't do. By contrast, Spheres highlights the assets in urban communities that can and should be brought to bear in support of the talents and abilities youth do possess and the things they can do. Its emphasis is upon developing the whole child in the context of his or her community.

We should be clear at the outset, however, that Spheres is not a predictive model that posits cause-and-effect relationships between and among variables thought to be important to youth outcomes. Our research and experience in the youth development field have not yet led us to that level of precision. Which particular aspects of the framework will have

what relative impacts on which youth are still unanswerable questions. Consequently, Spheres is not a model for thinking about individual youth.

Instead, Spheres is intended as an overview of the influences in youths' environments that affect how they grow and mature. As such, the Spheres model is more like a topographical map that outlines the natural features of the youth development terrain and less like the Road Atlas that we often depend on to help us navigate from one place to another. Still, an overview of the youth development terrain, if generally accepted, could provide us with a much greater sense of purpose and direction — even if we are left to construct the roads and bridges ourselves.

The framework is intended to be a simplification of the youth development challenge. But because it has several interacting parts, it may at times appear more complex than we intend. Moreover, it is important to note that the framework is not leak-proof. Readers may legitimately disagree with our assignment of certain assets or influences to one sphere or another, or for that matter, fault us for not assigning certain issues to more than one sphere at a time. We would welcome that level of engagement with the discussion and encourage such readers to apply their own interpretations, rather than ours, if that feels more useful. Given the highly interactive nature of the framework, it is likely that our insights into the challenges facing the youth development field will still obtain despite these differences. (See Appendix B: *Issues and Questions Inherent in the Model* for further discussion of relevant issues.)

THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF SPHERES

The framework begins by asking the two questions most fundamental to youth development: What kinds of assets and experiences do youth need to have in order to develop into positive and productive adulthood? And second: What environmental inputs are important to those assets and experiences, and how can they be made more nurturing, productive, and supportive of their development?

To accommodate these issues; the Spheres framework is divided into two sides, a *youth side* and a *community side*. The youth side represents our spheres of development — the things youth need to have “going for them” in order to succeed as adults. The elements in these spheres can be viewed as ingredients in a growth and development process that occurs within each young person. The community side represents our spheres of influence — the external inputs, actors, and influences that affect the youth's growth and development process.

Historically, the youth side of the model has been the primary focus of youth work. Whether the goal was salvation, reclamation, or remediation, youth work, until recently, has focused on the behaviors and/or conditions of youth and how to fix them — leading to responses, as we have noted, that were defined in rather narrow treatment terms. By contrast, the recognition of environmental influences as important to youth development is a much more recent phenomenon. Despite Wilson's highly acclaimed 1987 publication on the context of underclass communities,³ policies, programs, and practice have not paid suf-

ficient attention to neighborhoods and communities as variables in the youth development equation. In a compelling 1993 report of its Panel on High-Risk Youth, the National Research Council expressed it this way:

The focus on settings reflects the panel's appreciation of the profound influence that context has on adolescent behavior and our judgement that the power of settings on adolescent development is underappreciated. The lack of attention to settings has resulted in an incomplete picture of adolescence and an excessive concentration on individual adolescent behaviors and programs such as teen pregnancy prevention, drug abuse prevention, smoking prevention, and dropout prevention. The categorical focus on individual behaviors has been largely ineffective because behavior is the result of individual and group interactions with the environment. Primary, sustained attention must be paid to reducing the exposure of children and adolescents to high-risk settings, because reducing the risks generated by these settings is virtually the precondition for achieving widespread reductions in health- and life-compromising behaviors.⁴

The Spheres framework will attempt to raise this “settings” question to the position of primacy that this author and many others writing in the youth development field believe it warrants. In the process, the framework will outline the principal components of the community’s influence and show how they affect the growth and development of young people. But for the moment we will begin our description of the Spheres framework on the youth side.

THE YOUTH SIDE OF THE FRAMEWORK: SPHERES OF DEVELOPMENT

The youth side of our framework begins with the question, “What kinds of assets and experiences do youth need to have in order to develop into positive and productive adulthood?” Our framework asserts that the answers lie in three *spheres of development*: skills, attitudes, and experiences.⁵

The Skills Sphere. “Skills,” as the term is used here, should be interpreted broadly to include all the dimensions of what economists often term *human capital*. We use the term to refer to any attribute or quality in which it is possible for young people to attain some level of proficiency, mastery, or expertise. We can think of this sphere as representing “things youth can do.” It encompasses attributes normally associated with the “skills” label, such as basic skills, problem-solving, and communications skills. But it is also intended to include talents for music, dance, and the visual arts, for example, as well as other natural gifts, such as athletic ability.

The skills sphere is particularly important because one of the primary attributes of adulthood is learning to function as an economic entity. Indeed, our value as economic entities is founded primarily on the skills, abilities, and talents we develop. The skills sphere is also dynamic because of the rapid and constantly accelerating transformation our econ-

omy has experienced, particularly during the last 20 years — as it has moved from manufacturing to services and, with the aid of rapidly advancing technology, from services to information. Most of us are not consciously aware of how rapidly this change is occurring.

Recall that it was in the mid-1950s that the Rand Corporation unveiled UNIVAC (the Universal Automatic Computer), the commercial version of ENIAC, the world's first successful digital computer. ENIAC, built in 1945, was little more than a high-speed calculator, weighing more than 60,000 lb. and built with more than 18,000 vacuum tubes (2,000 of which had to be replaced each month by a full-time team of six technicians) and miles of wiring.⁶ Fast forward to 1998, personal computers, and the internet. The *Wall Street Journal* recently reported that 45 percent of American households (roughly 40 million) have at least one personal computer⁷ and that, in 3.5 million of those households, 5.7 million children have modem connections to the World Wide Web.⁸ This is an amazing pace of change considering that the first personal computer was not built until 1975 and was not heavily marketed commercially for another 10 years.

It follows then that what constitutes skills, particularly marketable skills in today's economy, will constantly change and will present a continuous developmental challenge to young people and adults for the foreseeable future. Thus, for example, a major concern for youth development in the skills sphere is the huge demographic disparity in access to information technology. The same *Journal* article reported that 80 percent of the households with incomes over \$100,000 owned PCs, compared with only 25 percent of the households with less than \$30,000 in annual income. And public provisions for access outside the home (e.g., in schools and libraries) are a poor substitute. In the wealthiest American schools, one of every three instructional rooms offers access to cyberspace, compared with fewer than one in seven rooms in the nation's poorest schools.⁹

To sum up: The skills sphere represents our hope to have our young people develop a range of competencies that will enable them to become self-sufficient economic entities and productive adult members of society.

The Attitudes Sphere. The term “attitudes” is meant as shorthand for something much larger — the full range of qualities and traits that comprise the affective domain of personality — what some might refer to as the individual embodiment of “social capital.” Other labels considered for this sphere included disposition, perspective, and character. Whatever the label, this sphere is intended to reflect things like identity in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, and region; motivations; aspirations; autonomy and world view; and a host of other factors that go beyond the “things young people can do” to “who they are.”

The critical questions in this sphere concern the extent to which youth are both motivated and emotionally and psychologically prepared to successfully negotiate the stresses of maturing into mainstream adult roles. Parenthood, employment and self-sufficiency, and good citizenship are examples of such roles. And the challenges of navigating these stressful seas are particularly steep for poor, urban, and minority children. Increasingly, the accumulation of adverse circumstances and negative influences is eroding the confidence and dimming the aspirations of these young people. As conversations with urban youth indi-

cate that many do not expect to live beyond their 21st birthdays, the urgency of the developmental challenges in this sphere becomes more evident.

Many believe that the lowering of expectations and aspirations is a major factor in a growing counter-cultural peer pressure, among minority students, that labels the pursuit of academic excellence and other mainstream goals as “acting white.”¹⁰ To the extent that this attitude prevails, it represents a horrific influence on young people’s aspirations and self-esteem, and sends a terrible double message about what it means to be nonwhite.¹¹

By contrast, there is considerable evidence that a positive view of one’s future can be instrumental to helping postpone and avoid participating in risky behaviors. Consider, for example, some recent research on the relationship between the future expectations of adolescent girls and their early childbearing behavior. In a 1997 analysis of data on more than 6,300 eighth-grade girls,¹² Barbara Sugland, et. al., found a strong correlation between the girls’ perceptions of their educational and occupational futures and their rates of adolescent childbearing.¹³ And these perceptions tended to vary by income. Though the students had uniformly high expectations for high school graduation (at around 99 percent), a strong pattern of decreasing future educational expectations was evident as income declined. For instance, only 64 percent of girls in the lowest income quartile expected to attend college, compared with 76, 89, and 97 percent for the next three quartiles, respectively. Still fewer, at 47 percent, expected to complete college, compared with 60, 77, and 91 percent for the three progressively higher income groups.

Perceptions of occupational opportunities also favored girls from higher socioeconomic households. Only 36 percent of eighth-grade girls in the lowest income quartile expected to be professionally employed (at age 30) whereas 46, 49, and 60 percent of their progressively wealthier classmates expected professional occupations. Indeed, the lowest income group, at 64 percent, were more inclined than their more affluent counterparts (at 54, 51, and 40 percent, respectively) to see themselves in nonprofessional jobs. This consistent pattern of lower expectations was found to be associated with an equally consistent pattern of adolescent childbearing.

Follow-up data strongly indicated that these eighth-grade girls were at increasing risk of early childbearing as their families’ incomes and their perceptions of opportunity declined. Almost one-third (31 percent) of the girls in the lowest quartile had given birth before age 20, compared with 19, 13, and 4 percent of the girls in the successive income groups. But even among these early childbirths, the data indicated a strong tendency for progressively later childbirth as income and perceived opportunities increased.¹⁴ These results led Sugland and her colleagues to conclude, “Generally, high expectations, particularly post-secondary education/training and desires for an occupation that requires a college degree are protective against fertility during adolescence.”¹⁵

Other researchers agree. In presenting a profile of the “resilient child,” Bonnie Benard suggests that having a sense of purpose and future (healthy expectancies, goal directedness, success orientation, achievement motivation, educational aspirations, persistence, hopefulness, hardiness, belief in a bright future, a sense of anticipation, a sense of a compelling

future, and a sense of coherence) “appears to be a most powerful predictor of positive outcome [for youth].”¹⁶

The attitude sphere, then, represents our concern that young people develop the kind of positive perspective both about who they are and about their future possibilities that will sustain high aspirations and their motivation to pursue them.

The Experience Sphere. The third sphere on the youth side of the framework represents experience — the opportunities young people have to gain exposure to, and to experiment in, the adult world. This is the realm in which young people actually test out their skills and attitudes, as we have defined them, in “practicing” for adult roles. Such practice is a vital ingredient of the youth development process. In a 1973 article, Gisela Konopka put it this way:

*Adolescents need to experiment with wider circles of life — meet various kinds of people, see other cultures. They need to experiment with their own strength and value systems — lead a group, try out intimate relationships, engage in some form of adventure.*¹⁷

*Since experimentation is essential to learning, adolescents should have the opportunity to discover their own strengths and weaknesses in a host of different situations, to experience success and also learn how to cope with adversity and defeat. These skills are usually acquired through active participation. Therefore adolescents should have a genuine chance to participate as citizens, as members of a household, as workers — in general, as responsible members of society.*¹⁸

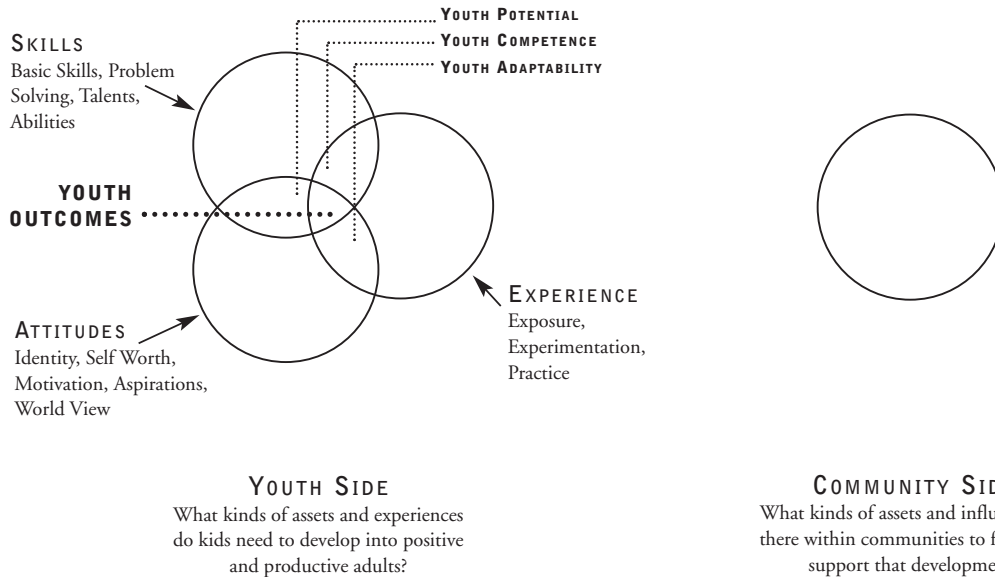
This sphere has an extremely important effect on young people because it is through experimentation and experience that they get a sense of how the world works and how it can and should be negotiated. This is the learning laboratory where the application of skills and attitudes gets processed into future expectations and life lessons. For instance, many minority youth and particularly African American males frown at employment in minimum wage jobs — seeing those jobs as work “for chumps” instead of viewing them as valuable starting points or stepping-stones on a path to bigger and better things. No doubt, more positive development in the attitudes sphere would be helpful to such youth, but they also need opportunities and exposures that can teach them about the “instrumental value” of these and other experiences.

In the experience sphere, then, we would hope to see young people gain regular, meaningful, and successful practice in applying skills and attitudes in ways that will both reinforce those skills and attitudes and increase the young people’s confidence in their futures.

INTERACTIONS WITHIN THE YOUTH SIDE OF THE MODEL

To this point, we have defined the three developmental spheres that comprise the youth side of the framework — skills, attitudes, and experience. Each represents an important area for development and growth. And while each is distinct they are not

EXHIBIT A
THE YOUTH SIDE: SPHERES OF
DEVELOPMENT AND INTERSECTIONS



independent. Indeed the three spheres are highly interactive in producing youth outcomes. Each is affected by every other, and together they set the course young people follow to adulthood. We can think of these spheres as a set of “raw materials” that come together to create various “intermediate goods” that further combine to produce a “final product.”

If each of our spheres is depicted as a circle, we can overlap the spheres as appropriate and describe the relationship between groups of spheres as “intersections.” The intersection of all three spheres — skills, attitudes, and experience — can be said to constitute youth development outcomes at any point in time. The intersection of any two spheres is described below. (Exhibit A provides a graphic presentation of our discussion thus far.)

Youth Potential: The Intersection of Skills and Attitudes. The framework defines youth potential as the intersection of skills and attitudes — a combination of abilities in some area of performance with the confidence and motivation to use those abilities. Both are necessary if potential is to develop. Neither, by itself, is sufficient. For example, an issue once prominent in educational equity literature was the concern that many young girls with aptitude in the sciences or in math never fully developed their potential in those fields. Because of traditional stereotypes about the role of women, young girls were often discouraged from viewing these fields as viable pursuits. While this is less true today, the example illustrates clearly that ability alone is not enough. Likewise, many poor inner-city young boys aspire to careers as professional sports figures or entertainers. But unless they possess the level of skill necessary to really compete in these arenas their motivation will likely not reward them.

Youth Competence: The Intersection of Skills and Experience. This intersection represents the application of skills in a particular context. Competence is a measure of performance. So here it defines the extent to which the skills young people acquire are both appropriate and adequate to ensure their success in the real-life experiences and opportunities that are available to them. The flip side of this issue, of course, is whether the experiences and opportunities available within the community are appropriate to its young people or offer sufficient challenge, given their skills and abilities. Either way it is the combination of both spheres, skills and practice (experience), that develops competence in young people.

Youth Adaptability: The Intersection of Attitudes and Experience. Here the framework highlights the relationship between youth attitudes (aspirations, demeanors and behaviors, etc.) and the suitability of those attitudes to the structured opportunities and experiences available to them. The concern is whether young people have attitudes and behaviors that are conducive to success in a variety of settings — persevering through a minimum wage job, for example? Are they adept at “code switching” — altering speech, dress, and mannerisms to accommodate the demands of a social milieu that may be different from that of the neighborhood?

Youth Development Outcomes: The Intersection of Skills, Attitudes, and Experience. As we have noted, the Spheres framework asserts that youth development occurs at the intersection of youth skills, attitudes, and experience. Consequently, these outcomes can be thought of as the sum of what kids do, what they learn, and how they feel. At the center of all these interactions, then, is our summary of who the young person is at any given time.

In summary, the Spheres framework suggests that youth development is a three-tiered process wherein the individual spheres or “raw materials” come together, form intermediate outcomes, then combine again to yield a final product. Stated another way, Spheres suggests that youth development outcomes are a product of pair-wise intersections that are, in turn, built upon our individual spheres. These processes, however, are not sequential. They are simultaneous, ongoing, and highly interactive in conditioning the range of outcomes youth may attain. Moreover, because they are ongoing, the outcomes from these processes must themselves be considered short term and dynamic over time.

Youth development is a three-tiered process wherein the individual spheres or “raw materials” come together, form intermediate outcomes, then combine again to yield a final product.

It is important to emphasize that neither this discussion nor its attendant diagram presumes that positive outcomes will result from the processes we have outlined. Indeed, a young person’s potential to become a good parent, worker, or citizen, attaining the necessary competence and flexibility to perform in these roles, is as allowable in this framework as is his/her potential to be a burden to society. Our quest in the youth development field has been figuring out what precisely we can do that will help to make the difference.

We know that most youth strive to achieve avenues for recognition and distinction — some means of establishing who they are separate and apart from everyone else. Whether

that “identity” finds its roots in positive aspirations and reinforcing experiences or in negative ones will be largely a function of the external cues, messages, exposures, and opportunities offered within the community environment. Next, we turn to the community side of Spheres to examine the model components that are influential to that determination.

THE COMMUNITY SIDE: SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

The community side of the model answers the framework’s second fundamental question: What environmental inputs are important to young people, and how can they be made more nurturing, productive, and supportive of positive development? By contrast to the many long-lived prescriptions on the youth side of this framework, the intense interest in community-side influences is still in its infancy — sparked by the persistence of problem youth behaviors and the limitations of remedial-services strategies to effect change and by the promise of resiliency¹⁹ and protective-factors research.

Our framework identifies three spheres of influence through which developmental support to youth can be offered: programs and services, community supports, and structured opportunities. And because they do influence young people’s lives, these spheres are also avenues for intervention.

Throughout our earlier discussion, we stressed the importance of effective remedial strategies even while expressing serious reservations about their potential to offer long-term solutions to the nation’s youth development challenge. Necessary but not sufficient was the language we used. Indeed, the community side of the Spheres framework recognizes the value of programs and services, but as only one of the three areas for intervention.

The Programs and Services Sphere is broadly construed to include the activities of institutions and organizations that are geared to delivering a social “product” or “good” to individuals, families, and/or communities.²⁰ Examples of such “products” include child-care, education, recreation, child welfare, public safety, healthcare, housing, and employment training. While neighborhoods will vary in the density of services available to them, nationally this is a vast and often redundant realm.

In addition to the thousands of nonprofit youth-serving organizations cited earlier, the General Accounting Office (GAO) in a 1996 report identified 131 programs for at-risk and delinquent youth strewn across 16 different federal departments and agencies at an estimated 1995 cost of more than \$4 billion.²¹ Their observation that many of these separate programs were providing the same services to similar target groups caused GAO to recommend a review for the purposes of possible streamlining. Recent calls for increased consolidation, integration, and collaboration across these programs and services are born of the need to rationalize this complex array of offerings and actors in ways that will make these services more accessible and effective in local applications. (For a discussion of an early consolidation initiative and for a perspective on the schools, see Appendix B, Part I: *Issues Arising in the Programs and Services Sphere.*)

The Community Support Sphere. This second sphere on the community side represents social capital. Social capital is defined as an intangible resource that “exists in the relationships among persons.”²² Social capital “takes specific form in terms of the level of trustworthiness within a social environment and the extent to which people feel obligated to one another.”²³ Information channels, norms, and sanctions are important aspects of this resource. The concept offers one way of defining how families, and communities invest in the development of their children. Embedded in it are mechanisms for how parents, families, and communities instill values and norms in young people and prepare the next generation for adult life.

In the oft-quoted phrase, “it takes a village to raise a child,” this is the village. Consequently, this sphere encompasses the cadre of individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions that nurture young people and contribute to their socialization. Fathers, families, peers, clubs, churches, and unrelated adults are among the many exerting such influences. It is here where the break with traditional service strategies must occur. Rather than providing reactive interventions to identified youths or targeted groups, this sphere stresses the need for collective responsibility within the community for proactive supports for all young people. Hence, the focus is on the roles and contributions of individuals and organized groups within communities rather than on those of institutions and programs. (For a discussion of the Spheres perspective on families, see Appendix B, Part II: *Issues Arising in the Community Supports Sphere.*)

In this sphere we look across communities for the role models, cultural norms, standards for behavior and discipline, and levels of social organization that form the social context in which children grow and define themselves. The “messages” communicated in this context, and the meaning youth assign to them, are the important issues in this sphere: messages that speak to self-identity and self-worth and hence self-esteem; messages that speak to group identity, belonging, and participation; messages that speak to competence, efficacy, and achievement; and messages that speak to, and condition, youth aspirations and the motivation to achieve them. Research shows that community social capital can make a difference in what youth can achieve.

As an example, using data on 5,000 young women aged 14 to 24 from the National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women, Barbara Sugland²⁴ and her colleagues at Child Trends Inc. examined the extent to which investments in social capital can minimize the negative effects of a disadvantaged family background in the lives of young women. The analysis included several measures of disadvantage and of social capital as well as other measures that reflected important aspects of the young women’s environments. The report concludes:

We have observed that many of the young women in our sample were from disadvantaged families at the beginning of the study. Yet by their late twenties and mid-thirties, many had secured a college education, many were consistently employed, and many were able to avoid poverty and welfare for significant periods of time across the life

*course. Furthermore, we found that social capital significantly enhanced young women's ability to secure these positive attainment.*²⁵

What is important here, then, is achieving some level of *density* and *consistency* to the individual and community “messages” that make up this social capital. Be it block by block or neighborhood by neighborhood, communities need a shared set of expectations about, and standards for, both youth achievement and acceptable youth behavior. Even if these “rules” are largely unspoken, expectations that are both clear to youth and consistent across adults are an important component of community supports and an important contributor to growth in young people.

Equally important is the density of these expectations — that is, the larger the number and/or proportion of community members subscribing to them, the more effectively they can be communicated and reinforced. Thus, a fundamental issue on the community side of this framework is how to build or enhance community structures that are capable of enlisting substantial resident participation in forming and transmitting positive development messages.

What much of this implies, though, is that *there is a need to focus on the quality and density of social relations among the adults in communities and how they can be mobilized.* This is no small issue. Indeed it is a question that is occupying a growing number of communities, researchers, and program and policy specialists on a host of issues important to the quality of life in poor and urban areas. At the heart of the issue is how to strengthen the social capital and civic infrastructure necessary to increase a community's social organization. Again, social capital refers to features of a community's social organization such as networks, norms, and trust that can be drawn upon to improve the circumstances of individuals and communities.²⁶ Civic infrastructure refers to the complex interaction of people and groups through which decisions are made and problems resolved.²⁷ Both are important components of communities' capacities to mobilize themselves and their resources to affect change in their neighborhoods.

As we will discuss later in Section VI, enhancing the social organization and civic infrastructures of distressed communities and their capacities is likely the single most important prerequisite to the successful mounting of Spheres or any other community-driven change strategy.

The Opportunity Sphere. The final sphere on the community side of the model reflects the “opportunity structure” available within and through the community. Be they formal, informal, educational, occupational, recreational, social, or of any other variety, there is a strong consensus in the youth development field that young people need to have structured opportunities for gaining positive experience. In its 1992 report, *A Matter of Time*, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development focused on this issue:

*By any standards, America's young adolescents have a great deal of discretionary time. Much of it is unstructured, unsupervised, and unproductive for the young person. Only 60 percent of adolescents' waking hours is committed to such essentials as school, homework, eating, chores, or paid employment, while fully 40 percent is discretionary.*²⁸

The concern that today's young people may not have enough meaningful things to do is also borne out by surveys of youth themselves. In its 1997 report, Kids These Days, Public Agenda reports that "69 percent of American young people do not belong to any club or organization outside of school, and 70 percent say they usually "hang out" when they are with their friends. Only 28 percent get together with friends to do something specific."²⁹

While these data do not speak directly to the experiences of poor and minority children, it is reasonable to assume that their levels of undirected activity are at least this high or perhaps greater. In reviewing the offerings of youth-serving community organizations, the Carnegie Council observed that many existing programs tend to serve people from more advantaged families. They do not reach millions of young adolescents who live in low-income urban and rural areas.³⁰

James Connell relates this "lack of opportunity" in poor communities to their relatively weak institutional infrastructure:

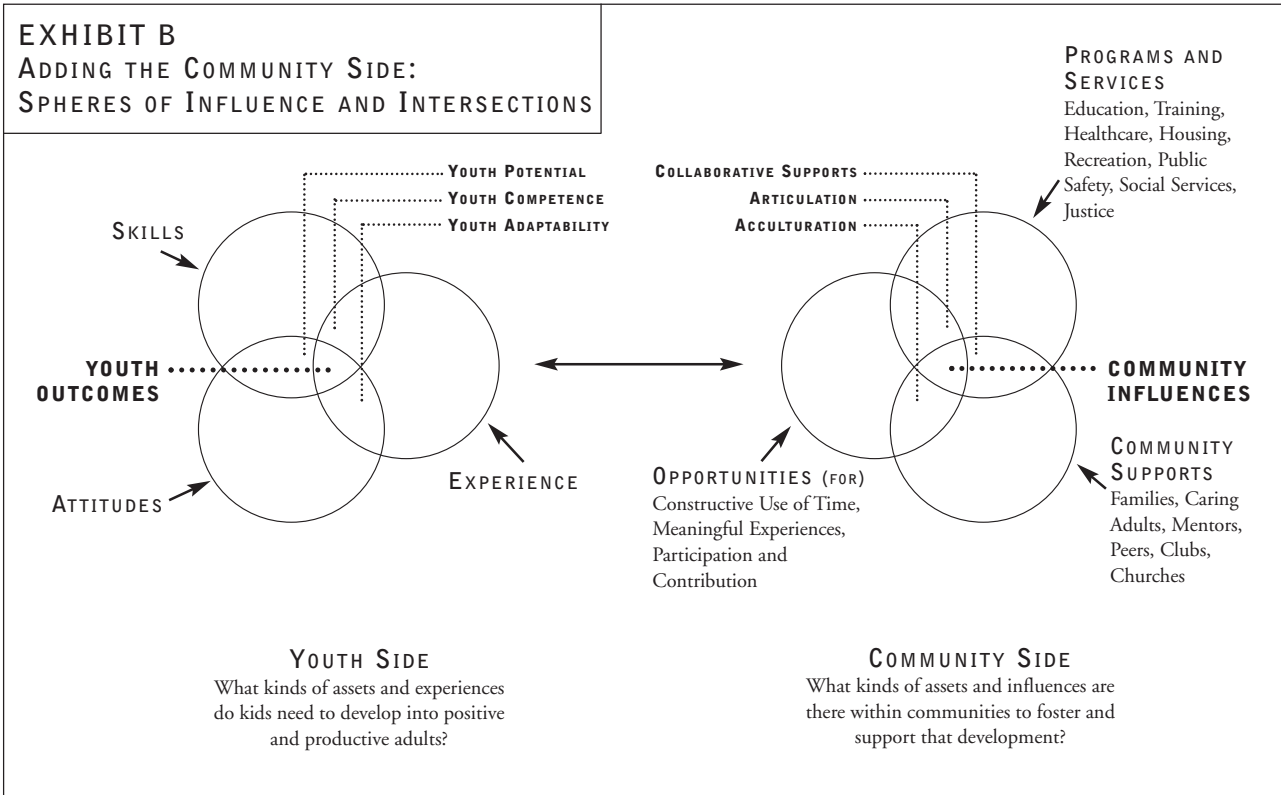
Poor communities — communities with high concentrations of poor, single-parent families and jobless males, and low concentrations of well-educated, professional and managerial workers — do not usually command the economic or political resources necessary to development or sustain high-quality institutions and organizations that support healthy youth development . . . This dearth of institutional capacity, along with that of schools, means that youth are often without attractive, organized, and positive activities for most of their weekdays, evenings and weekends.³¹

So, in contrast to our prior focus on mobilizing individuals (in the community supports sphere), *here we are concerned about strengthening the institutional capacities and the reach of local youth intermediaries and service providers in order to expand and broaden the opportunities available for the meaningful engagement of young people.* Of the two agendas, increasing institutional capacity may be the easier to conceive — being largely a matter of securing the financial, leadership, and other human resources necessary to the effective pursuit of an institutional mission. While we are not suggesting here that this is easy to do, the task of organizational development within institutions is considerably more finite than the task of creating or strengthening the social capital and civic infrastructure necessary to increase community social organization and capacity. We will return to the discussion of community capacity in Section VI.

INTERACTIONS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY SIDE OF THE FRAMEWORK

We see then that the community side of the framework also consists of three spheres — Programs and Services, Community Supports, and Opportunities. And, as was true on the youth side, these spheres are also highly interactive through their "intersections." In this instance, however, the intersection of all three repre-

EXHIBIT B
ADDING THE COMMUNITY SIDE:
SPHERES OF INFLUENCE AND INTERSECTIONS



sents the community’s influence or impact on young people. The point where any two spheres intersect again has special meaning. The community influences and their intersections are diagrammed in Exhibit B.

Collaborative Supports: The Intersection of Programs and Services with Community Supports. In essence, the programs and services available to youth, and the community supports we have described, represent the “deployable” resources available within communities and neighborhoods. The resources contained in either sphere can be marshaled in support or on behalf of young people. Consequently, the sum of the resources deployed from these two spheres can be thought of as the community’s “investment” in its young people.

But the intersection of the two spheres represents a uniquely defined area that suggests a close alignment of programs and services to the social organization and functioning of communities. This is the realm of collaborative supports in which culturally appropriate and context-sensitive services reside. It is an area where, for instance, community leaders and residents may be joining with institutions to fashion community responses to neighborhood issues, such as the needs of neighborhood youth, and where, perhaps as a consequence, residents may be more active in and supportive of child protective services, law enforcement, and the schools. It is also a realm in which some 55 urban communities around the nation are pursuing comprehensive community initiatives in attempts to become agents of change.³²

As with every interaction in the framework, this collaborative supports intersection can manifest itself in positive and negative ways. Community supports that reinforce positive messages through families, churches, peers, mentors, and other social networks are likely to dispose young people to subscribe to community programs and services that are constructive and enriching. Negative messages brokered by gangs and through the “street culture” may make young people more susceptible to the kinds of risk behaviors that occasion the need for remedial and corrective programs and services.

Articulation: *The Intersection of Programs and Services and Opportunity.* A not-too-frequently-used meaning of the word “articulate” is “to unite or form by a joint.” Here we use the term “articulation” to denote the area where the programs and services available to youth and the opportunity structure come together. The issue of concern is how the two interact either to support or to inhibit the ability of neighborhood youth to apply themselves as may be required for them to succeed in various venues and endeavors.

School-to-work transition programs are an example of efforts at articulation. Their objective is to increase the quality and relevance of educational preparation to the needs of local and regional labor markets and to thereby ease the entry of local young people into meaningful jobs. In fact, the appropriateness of employment and training opportunities to local job opportunities has historically been a concern for publicly funded programs both under the former CETA legislation (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973) and now under the Job Training Partnership Act of 1982. As another example, several school districts have experimented with various approaches to increasing youth opportunities in education through “articulation” agreements (sometimes called two-plus-two programs) that coordinate curricular offerings during the last two years of high school with two-year community college programs.

The point here is that the intersection of these two community influences defines a very important area of supports. What is at stake is whether community institutions, programs, and services provide appropriate and sufficient preparation and support to promote success in the opportunities available to young people. But we can also ask this question in reverse — and that is, whether, at any given level of preparation, the community is able to provide a sufficient number of challenging and meaningful opportunities to its young people.

Acculturation: *The Intersection of Opportunities and Community Supports.* This intersection represents the “closeness of fit” between the culture, norms, and behaviors that prevail in the neighborhoods and those that are appropriate in the settings that offer opportunities to young people. This is a particularly difficult issue on which to have impact because of the problem of separating fact from fiction and real people from stereotypes.

For instance, whether real or imagined, many employers perceive differences, and consequently discriminate, between entry-level job applicants based on where they live and the

The intersection of all three community-side spheres represents the synthesis of the external influences that impinge on youth and on the internal processes of their development.

reputations of their communities. This is particularly true of suburban employers and young urban black males. Clearly, where this occurs, employers are making presumptions about the community's social structure and, on that basis, prejudging its young residents as unsuitable or undesirable workers. Fairly or not, such perceptions are likely to be further reinforced, for example, if the young person were to present himself in today's "hip hop" attire and speak in street slang.

There can be no question that employment decisions based on stereotypes are unfair. At the same time, though, given the high dropout, incarceration, and unemployment rates in many distressed communities, it is also likely that some of their young residents may in fact not possess levels of job experience, social skills, and work ethic sufficient to immediate success in a job. Nevertheless, it is in this acculturation intersection that we become concerned about bridging cultural divides and combating unfair perceptions.

Community Influences: The Intersection of Opportunities, Programs and Services, and Community Supports. The intersection of all three community-side spheres (programs and services, community supports, and opportunities) represents the synthesis of the external influences that impinge on youth and on the internal processes of their development. The pair-wise intersections we have just described are the intermediate steps in that process. To the extent that effective services and positive youth programs combine with strong social supports and meaningful opportunities within communities, positive results for young people should obtain. By contrast, weak institutions, few opportunities, and weak support systems will increase the susceptibility of young people to risky behaviors and poor developmental outcomes.

THE "ETHER"

The final component of the Spheres model represents the overall context in which the framework rests. The "Ether" as we have labeled it, is the "medium" in which the framework's complex processes and interactions take place. It is composed of three macro forces representing the larger political, economic, and social realities poor communities face. Each has the potential to affect youth outcomes in powerful ways.

For instance, the now eight-year expansion in the American economy has taken the slack out of today's labor market. Unemployment is at its lowest levels in 30 years, and the impacts of prosperity can be seen everywhere. Youth employment is up. Welfare rolls are down. And still many jobs go begging. The opportunities for youth to gain valuable work experience are bountiful. Looking solely from the standpoint of putting people to work, these are surely the best of times.

The outlook on the political landscape is less bright. At times, politicians and elected officials seem to be waging war on young people. With the expansion of mandatory sentencing laws, the increasing efforts to lower the age at which children can be tried as adults, and the increases in funds available for new corrections facilities — the watchword seems to be "get tough" on America's youth. Congress's recent failure to enact a youth bill or the

Kennedy–Hatch bill for children’s health insurance does not bode well for the political fortunes of American young people. For minority communities the situation is particularly dismaying. The watering down of the Voting Rights Act and the systematic dismantling of affirmative action in recent years suggest that poor and minority communities have lost much of their political capital, at least for now.

The larger social context, too, seems increasingly less hospitable to youth. For minority youth the challenge of racism is still pervasive and, many would argue, on the rise. But looming increasingly large in this social milieu is another pervasive influence on young people that disregards race, religion, and gender — the media. Indeed, some might argue that the gratuitous sex and violence to which today’s young people are increasingly exposed is sufficiently powerful and unrelenting as to warrant being modeled as its own sphere of influence in the framework.

In summary, the Spheres framework views youth work as a “constrained maximization problem” — that is, as an attempt to secure the best possible outcomes for young people within the boundaries that are determined by other influences. These macro forces are important, then, because they define the limits in the range of possibilities. If the economy “goes south,” for example, so too does the range of possibilities and opportunities for youth. Similarly, greater or lesser levels of political support and public will should also effect the range of youth outcomes.

NOTES

¹ As an example, few would argue about the developmental value of meaningful work experiences or caring relationships with adults. But for our purposes, these prescriptions are more matters of youth development content rather than fundamental precepts.

² In: Pittman, Karen; and Marlene Wright, 1991. Op. cit., the authors array variations in the competencies stressed by a sample of 19 organizations and individuals published in the literature. See Table 1, pg. 13.

³ Wilson, William J. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

⁴ Panel on High-Risk Youth. 1993. *Losing Generations: Adolescents in High-Risk Settings*. Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. Pg. 11.

⁵ Before going much further we should pause to clarify terms. Throughout the development of the model right up to the point of writing this very page, the terminology for Spheres has been in flux. Iteration after iteration of terms and labels has been tested for the various concepts that make up the model and, so far, including those used above, none has proved satisfactory. So here we elaborate a bit on what we mean to capture in each of the three spheres in the hope that it helps convey the breadth of what we intend to cover.

⁶ “Computer,” Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia® 1993-1996 Microsoft Corporation.

⁷ Report from Computer Intelligence published in the *Wall Street Journal*, March 10, 1998.

⁸ Grunwald Associates, “American Internet User Survey 1997,” FIND/SVP.

⁹ Mendels, Pamela, “Study Shows Disparity in Schools’ Internet Access,” *Cybertimes*, March 11, 1998.

¹⁰ Michelson, Roslyn Arlin. 1990. “The Attitude-Achievement Paradox Among Black Adolescents.” *Sociology of Education*, 63: 44–61.

¹¹ Also see Ferguson, Ronald F. 1999. “There’s Still More to Learn About the Burden of ‘Acting White:’ A Response on Cook and Ludwig,” In *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, Eds. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

¹² Data taken from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988.

- ¹³Sugland, Barbara W.; Jennifer Manlove; and Angela Romano. 1997. *Perceptions of Opportunity and Adolescent Fertility: Operationalizing Across Race/Ethnicity and Social Class*. Washington, DC: Child Trends, Inc. Paper presented at the 1997 annual meeting of the Population Association of America, March 27–29, 1997, Washington, DC
- ¹⁴Although the study's findings generally hold when analyzed by race, the results were less straightforward. Although African American eighth graders, at 30 percent, exceeded their Hispanic, Asian, and White counterparts (23, 14, and 4 percent, respectively) in bearing children before age 20, their expectations for attending and completing college and for professional careers were quite high. Second, although the strong relationship of SES to perceptions and early childbirth held for whites and Hispanics, it was less consistent for blacks and Asians. Sugland suggests this finding may be due to the inability of measures used to capture cultural influences that may be operative within these populations.
- ¹⁵Sugland, et. al. 1997. Op. cit. Pg. 31.
- ¹⁶Benard, Bonnie. 1991. Op. Cit. Pg. 5.
- ¹⁷Konopka, Gisela. 1973. "Requirements for Healthy Development of Adolescent Youth," in *Adolescence*. 8 (31): 300.
- ¹⁸Ibid. Pg. 303.
- ¹⁹Research on youth resiliency, begun in the 1950s, focused on trying to understand how and why young people brought up in the kinds of adverse circumstances that ordinarily would predict poor adult outcomes, instead grew to productive adulthood. See Benard, Bonnie. 1991. Op. Cit. Pgs. 1-3.
- ²⁰Our interpretation of programs and services as delivering a "product" may seem too narrow to some readers. It can be argued, for instance, that some programs (e.g., mentoring, work experience, community service programs, etc.), rather than delivering a service or product, are really intended to create opportunities and, as such, should be assigned to the Opportunity Sphere discussed below. Where appropriate, such interpretations are consistent with the intent of the framework and we encourage them.
- ²¹U.S. General Accounting Office. 1996. *At-Risk and Delinquent Youth*. Washington, DC: Author.
- ²²Coleman, James S. 1988. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology*. 94 (Suppl.): S95–S120.
- ²³Temkin, Kenneth; and William Rohe. 1998. "Social Capital and Neighborhood Stability: An Empirical Investigation." *Housing Policy Debate* 9(1): 61–88.
- ²⁴Sugland, Barbara W., Connie Blumenthal; and Byoung-gi Hyatt. 1993. *Social Capital and the Successful Transition to Adulthood Among At Risk Young Women*. Washington, DC: Child Trends Inc.
- ²⁵Ibid. Pg. 42.
- ²⁶See: Coleman, James S. (1988). Op. Cit. Pgs.95-120.
- ²⁷National Civic League, Inc. 1993. *The Civic Index: A New Approach to Improving Community Life*. Washington, DC: Author.
- ²⁸Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. 1992. *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Non-School Hours*, Report to the Task Force on Youth Development and Community Programs. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.
- ²⁹Farkas, Steve; and Jean Johnson. 1997. Op. cit. Pg. 33.
- ³⁰Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. 1992. Op. cit. Pg. 12.
- ³¹Connell, James P.; J. Lawrence Aber; and Gary Walker. 1996. "How Do Urban Communities Affect Youth? Using Social Science Research to Inform the Design and Evaluation of Comprehensive Community Initiatives." In *New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives*. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute. Pg. 99.
- ³²This estimate was offered by Ann Kubisch, Director of the Aspen Institute's Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families, in an interview in September 1998.

HOW THE SPHERES MODEL WORKS

The relationships we have shown in the framework can be summed up in the following statements about the challenge of positive youth development:

- ***On the youth side:*** Acquiring positive skills and applying them competently are crucial to material, social, and civic success in adult life. But without the motivation and high aspirations born out of positive identities and hopeful futures, their proper development, honing, and mastery will likely not occur. These skills and attitudes, in turn, can be reinforced or hampered by the kinds and qualities of the experiences young people have.
- ***On the community side:*** Contributing to these skills, attitudes, and experiences are the various programs and services provided to youth and their families; community supports in the form of the relationships, expectations, and messages from adults and peers; and the opportunities that allow youth to participate in meaningful pursuits. Positive influences from the community will increase the likelihood of positive youth futures. Negative influences will not.

DIRECT RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS THE SPHERES FRAMEWORK

What we have described here is what we believe to be the challenge facing youth development as a field—how to manage or intervene in a system of influences and interactions that are in constant motion and all happening at once. Each sphere of the framework is linked to every other because of their mutual interactions and interdependence. This may make the Spheres framework seem daunting as a model for designing, planning, and implementing intervention strategies. But a closer examination may suggest otherwise. Because some of the relationships in the framework are more direct than others, those relationships offer a manageable set of leverage points for intervention.

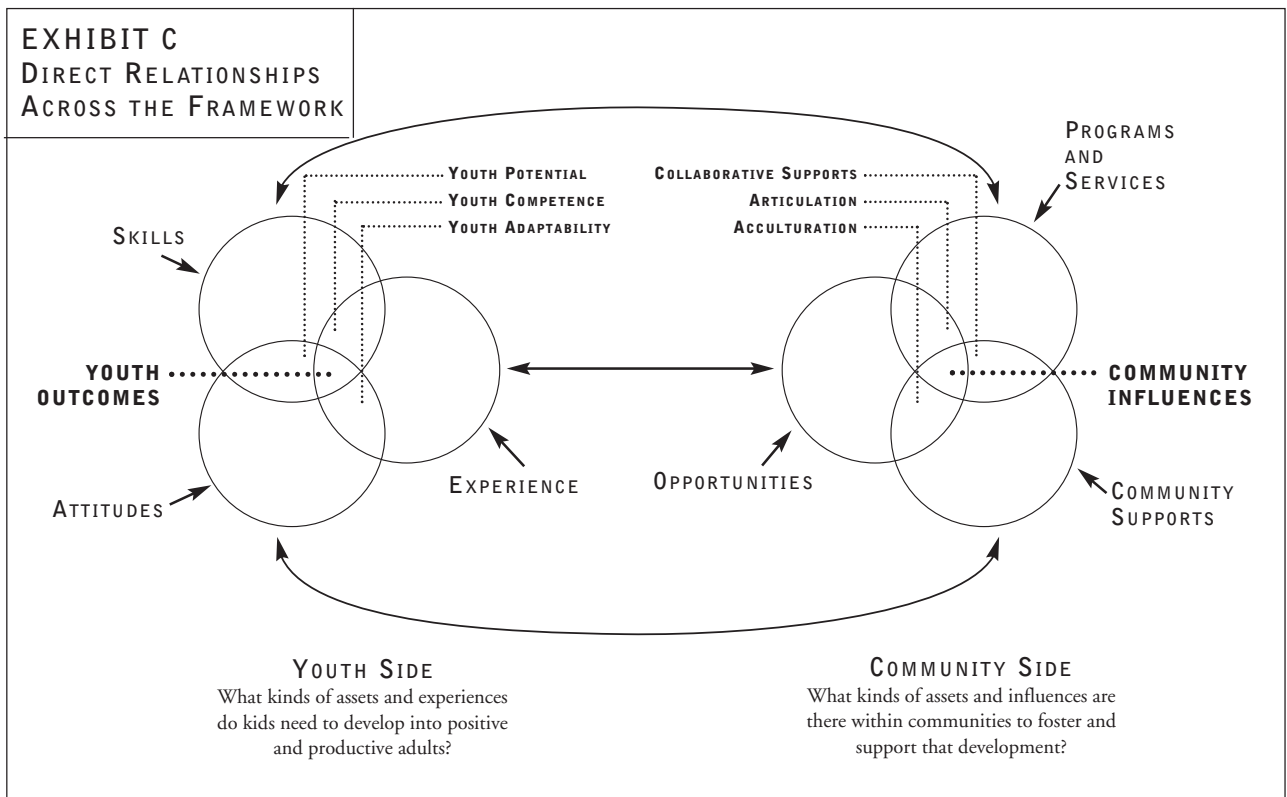
For instance, the programs and services sphere on the community side of the framework is directly linked to the skills sphere on the youth side. Programs and services are largely but not solely responsible for the development of young people's skills, talents, and abilities. Similarly, the community support sphere on the community side is directly connected to the attitudes sphere on the youth side. Community supports are largely but not solely responsible for developing and nurturing the identity, values, aspirations, and world-

view of young people. Finally, the opportunities sphere on the community side is linked to the experience sphere on the youth side of the model. Structured opportunities for young people allow them to gain valuable experience in applying the skills and attitudes they acquire. These relationships are shown in Exhibit C.

The challenge facing youth development as a field is how to manage or intervene in a system of influences and interactions that are in constant motion and all happening at once.

By positing only three avenues for intervention, these direct relationships make the challenge of youth work more manageable. Indeed, a central point of the framework is that communities cannot intervene in youth development outcomes directly. The framework suggests that, in order to effect a positive change in outcomes for poor, urban, and minority children, additional investments are needed to strengthen youth skills, foster positive youth attitudes, and provide ample opportunities for quality youth experiences. The spheres depicted on the community side of the framework, then, represent the vehicles through which these investments must be made. And it is the quality of those investments that will influence the formation of our intersections and, ultimately, our youth outcomes.

Implicit in the way we postulate these relationships is our view of communities and their influences as the “drivers” for youth development. The internal growth and development processes that determine youth outcomes depend heavily on the messages, cues, resources, and opportunities present in youths’ external environments.



Things that happen on the community side of the framework get transmitted to the youth side where they become inputs to the ongoing development process happening there. For the most part, then, the framework has things moving primarily from right to left (or from the community to the youth side) in Exhibit C. But ideally the framework should also include a “feedback loop” from the youth side to the community side: Our youth outcomes should inform and alter our behaviors on the community side of the framework.

In this formulation, youth development and community development are interdependent, simultaneous, and inextricably linked. Again, everything in the Spheres framework affects everything else through a dynamic process that is happening all of the time.

THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INTERSECTIONS

As was true of the individual spheres in the framework, there are corresponding relationships between the intersections across the framework. For example, the Spheres framework asserts a direct relationship between collaborative investments in youth and youth potential. The greater the connection a community can make between accessible and effective youth services and supportive youth relationships, the more we can bolster the likelihood of youth developing the potential to succeed as adults.

The framework also suggests a direct relationship between a youth’s competence in a given situation and the relevance or appropriateness (articulation) of his or her training for the real challenges and opportunities he or she is likely to face. Good performance requires good preparation. Finally, the framework suggests that the adaptability that enables young people to meet situational expectations for their personal behavior and performance derives in large part from the acculturation experiences in their communities.¹ Thus, once again, the framework shows multiple interactions between its individual spheres and among their intersections in producing youth outcomes. (Exhibit D provides a full depiction of the Spheres framework.)

In this formulation, youth development and community development are interdependent, simultaneous, and inextricably linked.

NOTES

¹It should be restated, however, that although there are direct links between these intersections, the framework suggests that we must invest and intervene in the individual spheres in order to affect them.

SUMMARY:

WHAT DOES SPHERES TELL US?

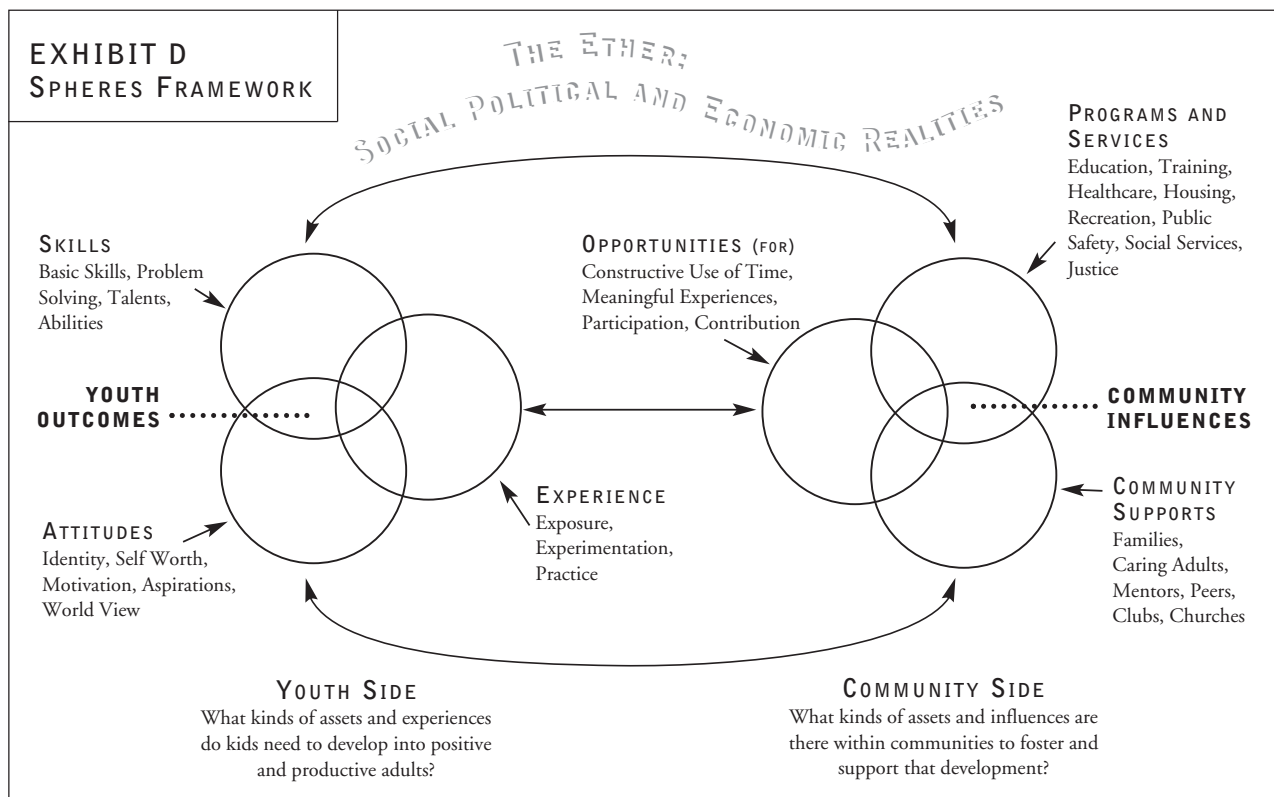
What we have described here is a view of what we have termed the youth development challenge. The Spheres framework is not a proposal for how things should be or for how we should proceed from here. On the contrary, it is suggested as one interpretation of how things are, for good or ill, in the youth development terrain. The picture we have painted is intended as a means of visualizing both the development process and the avenues available to influence it. Again, youth do develop. They develop skills and attitudes that are both a result of and conditioned by their real-life experiences and the meaning they make of them. It is what youth learn, how they feel, and the avenues they have to act upon those things that ultimately determine the paths they will take toward adulthood.

Everyone in the community is player in this game, intentionally or not, knowingly or not. Consequently, the job of developing our children into healthy, contributing adults is a communitywide responsibility requiring communitywide attention and mobilization. Community action is needed to augment and strengthen the effectiveness of government and privately funded programs and service interventions. Communities need to play nurturing roles in new, collective, and more comprehensive ways. (Ironically, this may suggest a return to the intent and the values that propelled the early “character-building” youth work of the nineteenth century, only this time as a positive approach to *all* young people rather than as a reclamation strategy for *troubled* youth.)

Establishing Youth Development Goals. The implication is that communities need to establish formal, concrete means for identifying the developmental outcomes they want for their children, for devising strategies for intervention and support, and for mobilizing themselves and the institutional resources available to them to implement an ongoing agenda.¹ The Spheres framework is helpful in arraying the broad outlines for both the developmental goals and the intervention strategies. For example, if we distill the discussion of each youth development sphere into a single lesson, it would suggest that youth should:

- Develop a range of skills that will enable them to become self-sufficient economic entities and productive adult members of society,

It is what youth learn, how they feel, and the avenues they have to act upon those things that ultimately determine the paths they will take toward adulthood. Everyone in the community is player in this game.



- Develop the kinds of positive attitudes — both about who they are and about their future possibilities — that will sustain high aspirations and the motivation to pursue those aspirations, and
- Have ready and continuing access to a number of meaningful opportunities to practice applying their skills and attitudes in ways that will both reinforce those skills and attitudes and increase their confidence in their futures.

These general objectives outline the broader goals from which more detailed “lists” of specific developmental milestones and objectives may be formulated and considered. Ultimately, the Spheres framework suggests that, if these three developmental goals are attained, young people should possess sufficient raw potential, contextual competence and social adaptability to make successful transitions to productive adulthood.

Determining the Community Agenda. This turns our attention to what communities can do. On the community side of the framework, the challenge lies in devising intervention strategies that can increase the likelihood of achieving the developmental goals. Distilling lessons from the community-side spheres yields an agenda as follows:

- Reform efforts to increase the reach and effectiveness of youth programs and services must continue and, where appropriate and possible, be expanded to include a wider range of developmental outcomes among their objectives. But again this approach is not enough.

- In addition, there is a need to enhance the quality of social relations and the density of social networks among the adults in poor communities and devise strategies for mobilizing these community supports as instruments of a youth development intervention.
- And beyond that, greater effort is needed to strengthen the capacities and the reach of local organizations, youth intermediaries, and service providers in order to expand the opportunities for the meaningful engagement of young people.

One of the major issues facing the future of youth work may be determining in what balance to pursue these community-side strategies. Over the past few decades, the vast majority of what we formally recognize as youth development has focused on youth skill building and on the institutions, programs, and services that provide it. And though many of these skill-building strategies may have also created opportunities or supportive environments for young people as *supporting components* of a program, we have not focused sufficient attention on providing opportunities or community supports as the *primary objective* of an intervention strategy. The Spheres framework suggests a great need to do both.

This summary of the framework raises three critical questions. The first is whether and to what extent the low-income communities, about which we are most concerned, are positioned to engage in the kind of collective and deliberative processes implied by this framework. Second, what resources might they have to bring to bear in devising and implementing an agenda? And finally, what abilities do they have to mobilize and redirect those resources? These fundamental capacity questions are crucial to the formulation of any community-driven intervention strategy.

NOTES

¹For a discussion of some of the issues and challenges involved see National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth. 1996. "Youth Development at the Local Level: Collaborating for Change." *Reconnecting Youth & Community: A Youth Development Approach*. Washington, DC: Families and Youth Services Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

A COMMUNITY EXAMPLE:

CAPACITY AS THE PRIMARY CHALLENGE

The youth development field now explicitly acknowledges that youth are active participants in their own development — assimilating information from all sources around them, drawing conclusions about who they are and what they can become, and acting upon them. The community side of the Spheres framework is about paying attention to those sources and to the quality of information they impart.

The Spheres framework therefore is a community-driven vision — a “map” that can be applied within communities to guide community efforts to better understand, explore, and address the developing needs of their young people. Like most of the thinking about positive youth development, Spheres seeks to insert the community back into youth development and youth into community development.

But the framework also raises questions about how a community actually engages this new vision of youth work. What would a community-driven youth initiative look like? And what would it take to organize and sustain? The following example illustrates the shape a community initiative might take, what it might require, and what it may suggest about the challenges of the Spheres framework.

A HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE

Let us suppose that the leadership in the Parkside community of Camden, New Jersey (this author’s hometown), were concerned about mounting some effort to reach out to neighborhood youth. Further suppose that they had reviewed our framework and decided to focus on finding some means to affect youth “attitudes.” Specifically, let’s say that, in the face of a flourishing drug trade and growing youth violence, residents are concerned about the community’s ability to communicate and enforce their expectations for positive youth aspirations and behaviors. The Spheres framework suggests that addressing this problem requires strengthening the “community supports.” How might they do that? And what might an initiative look like? Here’s a possibility.

Suppose that the Parkside leadership has decided that, to accomplish their goal, they need to do something that would strengthen relationships between the adults in the community. They believe that increasing the levels of adult familiarity would build a base for establishing community norms and a critical mass of connected residents to transmit them.

They also believe that building more adult-to-adult links would establish more and better relationships between adults and youth. With these goals in mind they set off to “design” an initiative and, after extensive discussions within and outside the community, a design emerges.

The plan is to involve the eight to 10 churches in and around the Parkside community in joint planning exercises in which each church would plan and “put on” a Sunday afternoon festival. Each festival would be one in a series that would take place over eight to 10 consecutive weeks during the summer. Joint planning for the overall effort is to be complemented by extensive outreach and decentralized event planning within individual congregations. Events sponsored by individual churches are to be open to communitywide attendance and are to be publicized throughout the collaborative. The programs and activities themselves are to be designed so as to maximize opportunities for young people and adults from across the community to participate in joint recreational and cultural events.

Each congregation is to appoint some of its members to a team that will present a post-event “assessment” back to the joint planning group. These assessments are to be used to determine future directions for the project and next steps for strengthening this adult–youth linkage and extending it beyond the summer pilot. Sound simple? Maybe not.

A QUESTION OF COMMUNITY CAPACITY

This example is intended to provide only a general sense of the kind of effort that communities might undertake within the Spheres framework. But it presumes a great deal. It presumes that there is an identifiable leadership in Parkside that can actually come together; agree on a vision; recruit others into that vision; design an intervention; marshal the institutional support, capacity, and resources for planning and implementation; rally the larger community to participate; and sustain the momentum through the project period. Clearly, the relative simplicity of this idea masks a great deal. At the heart of our various assumptions lies the question of community organization and capacity. Indeed, like the “village” metaphor, this kind of community saturation activity may require a great deal more organization and capacity than may exist in many communities, poor or otherwise.

For example, at the forefront of our learning about community-building issues are the 55 or so communities that are involved in the growing CCI (Comprehensive Community Initiatives) movement. CCIs are community-based efforts to effect change that will improve the lives of the community’s residents. As perhaps the quintessential examples of aspiring community organization and capacity, they offer insights into the complexities of community-driven initiatives. A recent Aspen Institute publication summarizes some of the concerns that drive this CCI movement.

CCIs are concerned with the accessibility and quality of social support, economic opportunity, and physical infrastructure within the target neighborhood . . . CCIs are also concerned with the qualities of collective life provided through community attributes

such as strong personal networks, “social capital,” and “sense of community,” as well as the neighborhood’s ability to handle conflict, solve problems, and/or express its voice and represent its interests in the larger economic and political arena.¹

CCIs explicitly seek to improve the quality and quantity of services and other investments provided by outside systems (including social services, schools, the judicial system, commercial activity, and private sector investment) and to increase access for neighborhood residents to the structure of opportunity that exists at the municipal or regional level.²

These excerpts suggest that the interests and goals of CCI communities align well with the emphases of the Spheres framework and can shed light on the capacity issues embedded in our model. Like positive youth development, the CCI movement, too, is struggling to break free of problem-focused, services-only strategies:

The tools that are available for the majority of community change efforts across the country have been cast in the “old” mold of discreet program activities. To a large extent, foundations still operate as grantmakers rather than partners in the change process; funding is still allocated in short-term intervals; technical assistance is still provided on a problem-specific, temporary basis; evaluation is still focused on measuring broad indicators that can be unambiguously linked to particular interventions; and capacity building and community building are still considered secondary to putting programs on the ground.³

The report highlights local capacity-building as a principal challenge for community improvement, asserting that “neighborhood transformation may depend less on putting into place a model configuration of comprehensive neighborhood-based activities than on developing capacity at the neighborhood level to define and effect responses to local needs on a sustained basis.”⁴ The issue is vivified by the following quote from one of the report’s funders:

Neighborhood capacity . . . is relatively stagnant or rising at too slow a rate to respond to real opportunities. And much of the problem is that we under-attend, in significant and consistent ways, to the issue of capacity building . . . So, we are always left with the unconscionable dilemma of slowing down the process until somebody can play catch up.⁵

What does this suggest for the prospects of a community-driven youth development framework like Spheres? Among other things, it suggests that mobilizing the social organization and community capacity of neighborhoods is likely the primary initial and ongoing challenge to Spheres or any other community-driven framework for positive youth development.

Perhaps the most pointed lessons we are learning in this area are offered by the early experiences of Public/Private Ventures, Inc. (P/PV), as it launched its Community Change for Youth Development (CCYD) demonstration in three “full implementation” cities (St. Petersburg, Florida; Austin, Texas; and Savannah, Georgia). Because of resources and time constraints, CCYD, like other national initiatives before it, “assessed” the capacity of its

sites using proxy measures of elements that would be important to the initiative’s implementation. CCYD looked for places “where a developmental approach to youth intervention was already evidenced; where there were some city-wide and neighborhood resources to devote to CCYD — especially a strong potential lead agency with the legitimacy to do neighborhood work; and where there was some history of a successful collaborative approach to intervention.”⁶

Though P/PV was pleased with its planning results, its 1997 report notes several capacity-related concerns. All of the sites expressed concern about their outreach activities and their abilities to sustain sufficient resident involvement in CCYD planning. They were particularly concerned about whether that involvement was sufficiently inclusive and representative of the community.

These insights are only partial, focused as they are only on CCYD’s early planning experiences. Moreover, because the program is at an early stage, these findings do not directly assess the capacity within the three communities to implement and sustain CCYD’s goals. It is hoped that addressing these questions will be part of P/PV’s future assessment agenda. The resulting lessons should be invaluable to strengthening our approach to community-driven youth initiatives. In general, however, national demonstrations have an almost inherent aversion to probing local capacity issues.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY AND THE DEMONSTRATION DILEMMA

To advance the cause of community-driven interventions, we need to learn more about what constitutes community capacity, how to measure it, how to build it, and how to sustain it.

This example points to an inherent dilemma in the way demonstrations are pursued. Demonstrations are the social science tool for experimentation. Researchers use their findings and expertise to design interventions that they hope will be effective in improving social conditions. But to be “proven” these interventions have to be tested in real places. And what this normally means is that researchers need to identify places that are both willing and “capable” of mounting the effort. The latter part of the search for place presents the dilemma. On one hand, the principal objective in the demonstration is to determine if the idea will work. But, to give that a proper test, researchers need to select places that have a shot at giving it a good go. To do that, they establish a set of “threshold” criteria for selection that they feel if met will provide reasonable assurance that what is being tested is the demonstration idea and not the ability of the place.

The flip side, of course, is that, depending on where the threshold is set, researchers may wind up demonstrating an idea that many of the places most in need may lack the ability to implement even if “proven.” Reconciling this tension between testing substance and testing capacity, within the bounds of reasonable resources constraints, is difficult. To

do so, researchers would have to mount the experiment in a larger number of places stratified according to varied threshold criteria and assess their differing impacts. This expansion in both the number of sites and the attendant research effort would carry prohibitive costs. Alternatively, they could proceed with the original, less complicated selection process, document the evidence, and, if successful in the selected places, attempt new startups in places with lower thresholds. Over time we might learn more about the capacities needed to implement the intervention and how to build them.

The common problem in demonstrations, however, is that, once the results are in, we never go to the next step of teasing out what it might mean for lesser capacity places to take on the design. Instead, if the results are promising and replication is pursued, we either maintain the criteria from the demonstration or abandon them altogether as though we have forgotten that our results were obtained from a select group of communities. Either way lower capacity places are left at serious disadvantage.

To advance the cause of community-driven interventions, we need to learn more about what constitutes community capacity, how to measure it, how to build it, and how to sustain it. This suggests that finding ways to test community capacity, even as we experiment with intervention designs, should assume a higher priority in social science research.

NOTES

¹Roundtable On Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families.1997. *Voices from the Field: Learning from the Early Work of Comprehensive Community Initiatives*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute. Pg. 14.

²Ibid. Pg. 15.

³Ibid. Pg. 8.

⁴Ibid. Pg. 7.

⁵Ibid. Pg. 27. Quote is attributed to Ralph Smith, vice president of The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

⁶Gambone, Michelle A. 1997. *Launching a Resident-Driven Initiative: Community Change for Youth Development (CCYD) from Site Selection to Early Implementation*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures, Inc. Pg. 8.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing we have highlighted the need for positive approaches to youth work and the importance of communities as settings for youth development. We have suggested that communities and their residents need to become active participants in youth development on a communitywide, “saturation” basis. To effect that change, we have also suggested that there is an urgent need to bolster the capacities of distressed communities, their residents, and their institutions to engage in the kind of collective and deliberative processes necessary to providing the community supports and opportunities that other communities may take for granted.

We believe that the framework and the concepts presented here are matters that touch the experience and views of many in the youth development field. Given more discussion, and perhaps some honing, these concepts might form the basis for a new, unifying consensus for the field in the next decade. If the field could reach such a consensus, we could hope to galvanize public and political support for according our nation’s young people the priority attention they need and deserve.

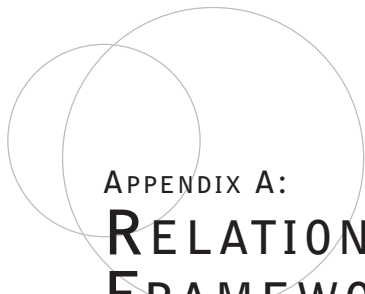
**Spheres
of Influence is
offered as a frame-
work for bringing
this coherence and
convergence to
the field.**

With regard to the well-being of American youth, we may have arrived at a period in the United States where great need meets great opportunity. The prospects of a burgeoning youth population over the next several years suggest that, without change, the limitations of status quo, services-only, youth development strategies will carry an even higher future cost for urban youth and our society as a whole. The good news, however, is that our strategies *are* changing. New research over the past several decades and the disappointing results of the nation’s major youth demonstration programs have focused our attention on the youth themselves rather than on their problems and on their environments in addition to our service strategies. Instead of being in the business of saving kids or fixing them, we now recognize the need to nurture them and to do so in the context of the settings in which we find them.

Several challenges remain, however, if we are to marshal the supports and resources necessary to making a difference in the aggregate. We need to find a way to make the youth development field more coherent to policy makers, practitioners, and the general public. We need to provide a comprehensible and compelling vision that will garner public opinion and support as well as offer a “map” that can help communities and their residents consider what to do. And, finally, we need to recognize the importance of building the kind of capacity and leadership that will enable communities to mount communitywide change strategies successfully. We need to help them become that “village” that raises the child.

In this author's view, much of this challenge lies nearly within our grasp. There is more agreement than fracture to be found in today's literature, and momentum is building on the community empowerment front. Still, practice in the field lags behind the new positive youth development thinking and, for this new paradigm to take hold, we need to distill our youth development lessons and our community development lessons and bring them together in place.

Spheres of Influence is offered as a framework for bringing this coherence and convergence to the field. To the extent that it may fall short it is the author's hope that the shortfall will inspire others to continue attempts to further this goal.



APPENDIX A:

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER FRAMEWORKS AND MODELS

At the outset of this paper, we asserted that the youth field might be converging on a consensus vision of youth development and that hastening that convergence would constitute a major step forward both for the field and for America's young people. Below we will briefly describe several of the other promising frameworks known to the field and suggest how they may be related to the Spheres framework.

The field is converging on a model that implicitly links youth resiliency and associated attributes and traits, on the development side of our framework, to the supports and influences within communities that foster those attributes. Common across current models are the two fundamental principles outlined earlier: that youth development should be positively focused and that context matters. Some of the models below are embedded in initiatives that began as small demonstrations to test their feasibility for replication into national programs. Others are "standalone" conceptual frameworks intended to increase our understanding and inform the design of initiatives and interventions. Here we will briefly mention just a few of them and how we feel they comport with Spheres.

I. INITIATIVE MODELS

We will begin with the initiatives. We should acknowledge that there are a large number initiatives that are worthy of mention. A 1997 report of the American Youth Policy Forum provides information on 50 such programs¹ and in her 1988 book, *Within Our Reach*,² Lizbeth Schorr highlights scores of relatively small, entrepreneurial, heroic, and largely unknown efforts that are making a difference for young people. For this discussion, we have selected a diverse set of initiatives that best exemplify the two principles.

Healthy Communities/Healthy Youth. Between 1989 and 1995 the Search Institute conducted in-depth studies of more than 250,000 6th through 12th graders (12- to 18-year-olds) in 500 school districts across the country. Their research led them to suggest 40 "building blocks" of positive youth development that they labeled "developmental assets."³ These 40 developmental assets are organized into Internal Assets and External Assets. Four categories of internal assets are commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. Complementing them are four categories of external assets: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time.

Through its national Healthy Community/Healthy Youth Initiative, the Search Institute has created a vehicle to provide research, technical assistance, and support to local communities in applying this asset-based framework in their youth development efforts.

The Beacons is an initiative that promotes school–community partnerships. Sponsored by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, Beacons school-based community centers were created on the premise that positive youth outcomes result from combining individual development opportunities with community-wide support. The project seeks to make schools a genuine community resource by keeping them open 7 days per week, 10–12 hours per day, year-round. The intent is to make the schools a vehicle for community development in addition to delivering services.

Since its inception in 1991, Beacons has grown from 10 school-based community centers across the five boroughs of New York City to a projected 80 by 1999. Replication and adaptation efforts around the country are under way, assisted by organizations such as the Center for Youth Development, in Washington, D.C., and the Youth Development Institute in New York City.

Beacons addresses both the resiliency needs of youth (through educational enrichment offerings) and the ecological and environmental aspects of youth development (through parental involvement and family support programs, strong linkages to the community, and building safe and child-supporting neighborhoods). The Beacons community centers are managed by community-based organizations in collaboration with local community school boards and building principals.

Community Change for Youth Development (CCYD) is a demonstration of Philadelphia-based Public/Private Ventures, Inc., that began in 1995 and is now operating in six U.S. cities. “The underlying theory of CCYD is that mobilizing the key local institutions and residents of a community to rebuild the social infrastructure for youth in five critical areas will lead to better life outcomes for a substantial share of the youth living in that community.”⁴

The five “core concepts” on which CCYD is based are increasing adult support and guidance, providing gap activities to ensure more constructive use of discretionary time, using work as a developmental tool, increasing youth opportunities to play meaningful roles in projects and organizations, and providing community support during key transitions during adolescence. In “Spheres” terms, CCYD is a community-driven initiative focused largely on strengthening the community support structure and increasing youth opportunities.

YouthMapping is one of eight strategies of the Center for Youth Development’s larger Youth Development Mobilization (YDM) Initiative. Through the YDM Initiative, the center pursues a variety of strategies, independently and in partnerships, to effect positive changes in youth information, youth attitudes, and youth involvement. The Community YouthMapping Project, as an example, provides youth with paid positions to canvass their communities and gather data on resources available to youth. Essentially, the project involves participating youth in an important community discovery effort — providing them with new insights into and connection with caring adults, worthwhile places to go,

and positive things to do. Though the project has important “services” and “support” implications and benefits, from a Spheres perspective we would classify it as primarily and “opportunity sphere activity” — providing young people with a meaningful challenge of identifying people, services, places, and other resources that can offer further opportunities and supports.

YouthBuild USA is a national program born of a demonstration that began in 1991. Now including 108 sites across 89 U.S. cities and counties, YouthBuild is a good example of the melding of youth and community development. The program rehabilitates abandoned buildings in distressed communities while providing academic, public speaking, and leadership skills to participants. The project involves 16- to 24-year-olds. Historically, its enrollments have been a largely male, largely minority population that is unemployed and has dropped out of school.⁵ The program alternates its activities each week between academic remediation and preparation for the GED and hands-on experience at the construction site. Participants are empowered to make decisions on the disposition of properties when construction has been completed.

Summary. These initiatives do very different things. They approach youth development through very different avenues (community schools, community reconnaissance, housing rehabilitation, etc.). And, depending on how we argue the point, we can describe each as addressing various aspects, though not all, of the Spheres framework outlined in this paper. This is to be expected. As we have stated, Spheres is not intended as an initiative model but as an overarching depiction of the youth development challenge. As such, we should not expect a single intervention to mimic the Spheres framework. Doing so is not necessary for initiative success. Moreover, it is not reasonable to expect that a single intervention will do all that needs to be done.

Consequently, we should expect that initiative frameworks will vary in many of their dimensions including their focus (i.e., which elements on the youth side of Spheres to focus upon), their entry point (i.e., which sectors on the community side of Spheres to “stimulate”), and their actors (i.e., which specific players within the various sectors of the community may be most instrumental to a change effort). Moreover, wherever these initiatives “touch ground,” they must be further modified to fit local dimensions and exigencies, such as capacity, leadership, resources, and other local issues. Thus, variation both among and within initiatives is to be expected and encouraged.

On the other hand, we should *also* expect that interventions on behalf of young people share a common vision of what positive youth development is and how it can be assisted. Common to all of these examples is a vision that explicitly attempts to anchor youth development within the context of the communities where young people live; to strengthen networks of adult support; and to provide meaningful, enriching activities for youth engagement.

The challenge facing individual communities is determining how their various programs and initiatives fit together as a community strategy. This is where an overarching framework has its utility. It is in the planning and evaluating of strategies that a framework such as Spheres can be most useful.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

In addition to these promising initiative frameworks, there are several powerful prescriptive models also worthy of note.

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, in the concluding report of its decade-long inquiry, identified eight basic requirements for healthy adolescent development⁶ and another six competencies that are necessary in today's "technologically advanced democratic society"⁷ The report also stressed five "pivotal" institutions (families, schools, health-care organizations, youth organizations, and the media) as critical to developing these qualities. Each of these elements is firmly embedded in the Spheres framework.

*Bonnie Benard*⁸ highlights four attributes of the resilient child: social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future. Her work identified three institutions or venues — families, schools, and communities — that can provide young people with "protective factors" that can strengthen these attributes. Particular protective factors included caring and support from at least one caring adult, high parental expectations for achievement and behavior, and opportunities for participation and contribution.

James Connell, Larry Aber, and Gary Walker, in a 1994 report commissioned by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, constructed a framework depicting how urban communities affect youth.⁹ The framework defines the process by which ecological and resiliency factors interact to predict youth outcomes. In their formulation, community dimensions and characteristics¹⁰ are interpreted or mitigated through social mediators (family, peers, and other adults) and processed through three developmental objectives (learning to be productive, navigate, and connect) to determine outcomes.

Karen Pittman, from the International Youth Foundation, in a 1996 article¹¹ defined desirable youth outcomes as having a sense of confidence (including self-worth, mastery, and future), character (meaning responsibility, autonomy, and spirituality), connection (safety and structure, membership and belonging) and competence.

SUMMARY

What is notable about the initiatives and conceptual frameworks is how similar they all sound despite differences in language. Like the Spheres framework, each emphasizes the importance of skills, such as problem solving; "experience;" and "attitudes" (variously specified to include character, motivation, a sense of future, and other factors). There is also reference, in many, to an opportunity structure, sometimes expressed as constructive use of time, and to the importance of various community actors and supports.

What is additionally clear from this small sample, however, is the potential for confusion. In addition to using different language, the models also differ in respect to both the

combinations of the largely agreed-upon variables they address and even how many variables need be considered. For instance, the Search Institute cites 40 “developmental assets.” The Carnegie Council posits eight “requirements for healthy adolescent development,” another six “competencies” that are necessary in today’s “technologically advanced democratic society,” and five “pivotal institutions” as critical to developing these qualities. Benard, on the other hand, specifies only four attributes (requirements, assets, etc.) and three institutions or venues. Pittman describes only three “desirable youth outcomes.”

What should be clear from this discussion is that, for the most part, these frameworks are saying the same things. The fact that some of the frameworks name 40 factors, while others only three or four, or even 19, is less a matter of disagreement than it is of focus and definition. Some frameworks aspire to be broader than others and still others use broad descriptors that characterize groups of things, as Spheres has done. For instance, Connell’s framework describes desirable youth outcomes as learning to be productive, learning to navigate, and learning to connect. It shouldn’t take too much imagination for any reader to unpack these concepts into at least 20 components.

The suggestion here is not that these formulations are somehow wrong-headed. Nor is it our intent to trivialize the differences between them or the important insights each has yielded. The point is that they are traveling the same track and that the “pooling” of these very promising models into a consensus vision would greatly help the field to clarify itself to itself and, better yet, to the outside world of the community residents struggling hardest with this challenge; to public and private funders struggling to decipher the field’s various rubrics; and to a skeptical public. The Spheres framework is offered as an example of what one such consensus vision might look like.

NOTES

¹American Youth Policy Forum. 1997. Op. cit. Pg. ix.

²Schorr, Lisbeth B. 1988. *Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage*. New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday Publishing.

³Benson, Peter L. 1997. *All Kids Are Our Kids: What Communities Must Do to Raise Caring and Responsible Children and Adolescents*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

⁴Gambone, Michelle A. 1997. Op. Cit. Pg. 1.

⁵See Ferguson, Ronald F.; Phillip Clay; et. al. 1996. *YouthBuild in Developmental Perspective: A Formative Evaluation of the YouthBuild Demonstration Project*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

⁶The council concludes that all youth must “find a valued place in a constructive group; learn how to form close, durable human relationships; feel a sense of worth as a person; achieve a reliable basis for making informed choices; know how to use the support systems available to them; express constructive curiosity and exploratory behavior; find ways of being useful to others; and believe in a positive future with real opportunities.” Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. 1995. *Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century*. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.

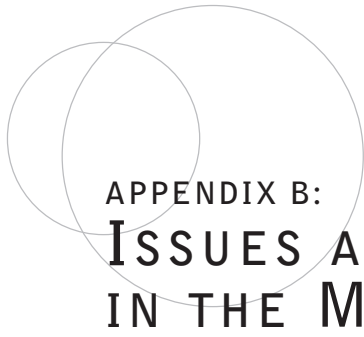
⁷The council concludes that all youth must “Master social skills, including learning to manage conflict peacefully; cultivate the inquiring and problem-solving habits of mind for life-long learning; acquire the technical and analytic capabilities to participate in world-class economy; become ethical persons; learn the requirements of responsible citizenship; and respect diversity in our pluralistic society.” Ibid.

⁸Benard, Bonnie. 1991. Op. Cit. Pgs. 3-6.

⁹A published version of their work can be found in Connell, James P.; J. Lawrence Aber; and Gary L. Walker. 1996. Op. cit.

¹⁰These are defined as the physical and demographic characteristics of the neighborhood; the social exchange process involving adult friendship networks that share common values about youth development and are accountable for the supervision and monitoring of their children; the economic opportunity structure; and capacities of local institutions.

¹¹Pittman, Karen; and Merita Irby. 1995. Op. Cit. Pg. 4.



APPENDIX B:

ISSUES AND QUESTIONS INHERENT IN THE MODEL

This appendix considers issues that readers have raised in reviewing the Spheres model. On the community side, we discuss these issues in connection with each of the three spheres — programs and services, community supports, and opportunities. On the youth side, we raise the question of the stages of youth development and the question of gender.

I. ISSUES ARISING IN THE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES SPHERE

We will consider two issues here: the need to consolidate the vast and redundant realm of programs and services, including one attempt to do so; and the question of whether to include the public schools more specifically in our model.

A Call for Consolidation. We have noted that the programs and services sphere is a vast realm of more than 131 government programs strewn over 16 different federal departments. The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 1980s New Futures Demonstration was among the first multisite initiatives to deliberately attempt to rationalize these offerings at a local community level. New Futures invited five cities to establish a broad-based collaborative effort to attempt “a fundamental restructuring of the way these communities planned, financed, and delivered educational, health, and other services to disadvantaged youth.”¹

The objective was to have these cities “engage in deep system change in order to create more effective interventions, supports, and practices capable of producing better outcomes for at-risk middle- and high-school-age youth.”² Those outcomes were to include reductions in the schools’ dropout rates, improvements in students’ academic performance, reductions in teen pregnancies and births, and increasing the numbers of students who went on to college or found employment after high school. The prescribed path to achieving those ends included

*. . . pooling of funding and program boundaries; decentralization of resource and policy decisions; development of collaborative governing bodies empowered to make decisions across youth serving systems; enhancement of flexibility, discretion, and community rootedness of frontline decision making and practice; and agreement on genuine accountability measures for children and family outcomes.*³

But at the end of the five-year demonstration, and by the foundation's own reckoning, results were mixed — both because of the complexities of the institutional change process and because of difficulties within the structure of the demonstration itself. Evaluation findings showed that, on some of the initiative's goals, measurable progress had been made, while impacts on others were more elusive.⁴ Still, two of the original sites, Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority in Georgia and New Futures for Little Rock Youth in Arkansas, emerge today as among the better examples of effective community capacity for youth development and the delivery of youth services. Today, these sites are joined by many others, and the goal of “rationalizing” government and community services has become a universal concern.

The Public Schools as Developmental Contexts. It is difficult to consider services to youth without recognizing that in the midst of this seeming profusion sits a single dominant player — the public schools. In the 1994–95 school year there were 89,151 of them in 16,4295 local jurisdictions serving 46 million children for close to half their waking hours 180 days per year and at an annual \$300 billion cost.⁶ The pervasive reach of mandatory education clearly positions schools as the single largest service provider and, hence, as potentially the most important institutional contributor to the development of children and youth. Moreover, the job of equipping young people with the skills and abilities necessary to their self-sufficiency as adults rest largely with these institutions.

How are they doing? Overall, only fair. Eighth graders in the United States scored above average in sciences while scoring below average in math in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study taken by the Department of Education in 1995.⁷ School completion rates (at 85 percent) have not improved since 1980.⁸ Math proficiency has shown only modest improvement and reading proficiency is virtually unchanged over the period.⁹ Further there has been no change during the 1990s in the proportion (at 9 percent) of youth aged 16 to 19 who are considered “detached” (neither in school nor working).¹⁰

In relation to specific groups of children and youth, it is clear that this major institution is performing even less well. Data for 1995 show that blacks' school completion rate, at 85 percent, still trails that of whites, at 90 percent, and the 63 percent completion rate of Hispanics is cause for great alarm. The 14 and 16 percent “detachment” rates for blacks and Hispanics, respectively, are double the 7 percent rate for white teens. These disparities in educational outcomes have proven persistent over time despite some narrowing. Neither the desegregation movement begun in the 1960s nor the state school finance reform movement initiated in the 1970s seems to have had much effect. These statistics only highlight what most of the American public already knows: that public schools are failing significant numbers of our children and particularly so in our poorest communities.

In the 1990s there are at least three distinct strands of reform that hope to make a difference. Standards-based reforms hope to change school performance by clarifying and raising expectations of students and school personnel. Research-based reforms — the School Development Program developed by James Comer, Henry Levin's Accelerated

Schools, Theodore Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools, and Robert Slavin's Success for All program offer various program models for improving outcomes. And market-based reforms, such as vouchers, would attempt to improve outcomes by fostering competition among schools through various means of providing parent choice.

These strategies are geared toward improving school performance and student achievement. Yet there are many noninstructional facets of schools that are also important to youth development. Schools offer a major venue for children and youth to form meaningful relationships with adults. Schools are also the place where most of their friendships are formed and where their early dating experiences begin. More broadly, they are the major venue for allowing young people to sort themselves out and identify with a peer group. Finally, schools are the most accessible source of opportunities outside the home for youth participation, contribution, and experience.

In a very real way then, schools offer their own comprehensive developmental context. And there is a substantial and consistent body of research suggesting that schools (particularly in the form of firm and caring teachers) can have powerful "protective effects" on the development of children and youth in ways that, in turn, will support better learning outcomes.¹¹ Surveys of young people themselves confirm this. For example, in a 1997 survey, teenaged students indicated that they were drawn to more rigorous standards and to policies that set clear expectations for their behavior. High school students thought highly of teachers who managed to both care about them and run a focused classroom where little nonsense was tolerated.¹² So, while the challenge of improving the delivery of instructional services is real and important, an equally important item on the community youth development agenda should be to improve the impact of schools as developmental contexts.

We highlighted education in this discussion because of its pervasive influence on the lives and development of children and youth. But if we use this kind of "prevalence of involvement" standard to single out important youth-serving institutions and services, then we must also make mention of the juvenile justice system. Given the increases nationwide in mandatory sentencing laws and the new resources being directed to facilities construction, the nation's penal system is threatening to become an increasingly important developmental context for poor and minority young people — one that has dire consequences for their abilities to mature into productive adulthood. Unfortunately, among the many institutions chartered with providing services to youth, this sector is perhaps the least amenable to community-level intervention.

Two observations about the programs and services sphere are important to note here. The first is that the entities in this sphere can pose difficult challenges to a community-driven strategy because in some ways they are very remote. Though community-based efforts of nonprofit CBO's are often easily accessible to community residents, the more "institutional" providers, including the juvenile justice system, as stated, and the schools, child welfare, and the like, are often not welcoming or have no provision or mechanism for community involvement. The second observation is that, though these services have all been the subjects of numerous reform and improvement efforts over the years, many would

argue that those efforts have not produced any material change in the overall condition of children and youth.

Still, this discussion points to two agenda items that are important in the programs and services sphere. One is that *reform efforts must continue*. Educational outcomes from our urban school systems, in particular, are unacceptable and cannot be allowed to persist. The same can be said for juvenile justice, healthcare, childcare, and a host of other services and treatments. Though, as we have argued, they do not constitute standalone remedies, the programs and services sector of the framework is a major external contributor to youth development. The second agenda item is that we *should encourage providers to examine their programs and services through the Spheres lens to determine whether the specific services offered youth can be structured to serve a wider array of needs* implicit in the framework.

II. ISSUES ARISING IN THE COMMUNITY SUPPORTS SPHERE

The community supports sphere is critical in the development of young people. Our discussion has highlighted the importance and role of social capital in providing positive supports to youth. And we have suggested very strongly that we view youth development as a communal enterprise. Indeed, “it takes a village . . .” None of this, however, is intended to dismiss or diminish the role of families in performing this important function.

Sphere and the Role of Families. There can be little question of the primacy of families in shaping youth outcomes. After all, families are the ultimate arbiters of a child’s environment. Parents determine the standard of living; set behavioral expectations; mete out rewards and sanctions; and to a large extent condition the kinds of associations, exposures, and experiences children accumulate. For most Americans, families — particularly extended families — form the basis of networks that link youth with their first jobs. And research clearly shows that families that hold high expectations for their children and offer a careful balance of caring and controls have powerful effects on the child’s development. As such, families are perhaps the largest and most important component of the community side of the Spheres framework and potentially the single largest contributor to the enhancement of attributes that comprise the youth side of the framework. So, why aren’t families featured more prominently in this framework?

The answer is straightforward. The intent of the framework is to focus on youth and on the supports they need, rather than dealing extensively with issues surrounding the entities that provide those supports. Indeed, as we discussed with the schools, most if not all of the institutions charged with providing those supports are in need of intervention and reform themselves. Families are another good example.

At the close of the twentieth century, families are less durable than they once were. Nationally, 50 percent of American marriages end in divorce,¹³ and only two-thirds of

divorced people remarry. As a result, only two-thirds of American children were raised in two-parent households in 1996¹⁴ and only three-quarters of them with both biological parents.¹⁵ These figures are even more stark among minorities, where 71 percent of black and 43 percent of Hispanic children are born out of wedlock to begin with,¹⁶ and consequently only 3 in 10 and 6 in 10, respectively, live in two-parent families.¹⁷

This is not to say that single- or step-parent families are inherently deficient in providing proper nurturance and guidance to their children. In fact, research on resilient youth suggests that “even in cases of an extremely troubled home environment, a good relationship with one parent (defined in terms of the presence of high warmth and the absence of criticism) provides a substantial protective effect.”¹⁸ Rather, it is intended to recognize that American families are often troubled institutions themselves that, while perhaps most pivotally positioned to effect positive youth outcomes, often may not, particularly in our more distressed communities.¹⁹ Indeed, this is an issue that Ron Mincy has targeted as the primary focus in *Nurturing Young Black Males*:

*. . . we must provide services to help parents, especially single mothers, nurture their boys into manhood in high-risk neighborhoods, and offer services to boys who have to make it on their own because parents cannot or will not help them.*²⁰

The point is that this community supports sphere is largely responsible for conveying messages that help youth formulate their notions of who they are and what place they can occupy in our complex society. Families have an enormous contribution to make to that identity. And while the framework highlights the need for positive messages in this sphere, it does not assume that families will always provide them. In cases where families falter, other sources of community supports must be drawn upon to fill this critical dimension. Given consistent evidence of the positive role played by unrelated caring adults in the lives of young people,²¹ it is clear that many people in the community can contribute to this aspect of youth development.

III. ISSUES ARISING IN THE OPPORTUNITIES SPHERE

We have noted that American adolescents tend to have a great deal of unstructured and unproductive time — time that is not spent in purposeful and meaningful pursuits. While the data we examined from *Kids These Days* did not specifically speak to experiences of poor, urban, and minority children, we speculated that these children would likely have even fewer avenues for meaningful engagement.

Opportunities for structured, constructive activity are an important aspect of youth development. But the opportunity sphere is about more than a mere preemptive strike against “idle hands.” Certainly, young people need opportunities for organized recreational activities and safe places in which to conduct them. But they also need opportunities to have meaningful experiences (i.e., for education, enrichment, recreation, cultural learning,

employment, and community service) within and outside their communities. They need experiences from which they can feel a sense of growth and learning as well as experiences in which they can play significant roles and to which they can make meaningful contributions.

So the question of principal concern in this sphere becomes how to enlarge the set of structured activities and opportunities that are available to urban youth. As earlier reported, Connell draws a clear link between this lack of opportunity and the comparative weakness of institutions in poor communities.²² Indeed, providing extensive opportunities for young people presumes a level of institutional capacity and social organization that is not readily available in many poor and distressed communities. As an example, a major impediment to increasing youth opportunities is the fact that the capacities of the entities specifically charged with overseeing, coordinating, or even being aware of local opportunities vary widely across most communities. And the additional capacity needed to actually assess youth opportunities and attempt to expand them is even less evenly distributed.

So our approach in this sphere focuses on *strengthening the institutional capacities and reach of local youth intermediaries and service providers in order to expand the opportunities available for meaningful engagement of young people.*

IV. THE SPHERES FRAMEWORK AND "STAGES" OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Early in our discussions, we highlighted the age range of 10–21 as the particular focus of our framework, noting that this range encompasses a transition from childhood through adolescence and into early adulthood. But for individual young people this is also a period of extraordinary growth physically, mentally, and emotionally that occurs in distinct stages. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development describes it as follows:

In the United States, adolescence occurs over so many years that it can be usefully subdivided into several phases. Early Adolescence, encompassing the changes of puberty as well as sexual and psychological awakenings, extends roughly from ages ten through fourteen. Middle Adolescence, a time of increased autonomy and experimentation, covers ages fifteen to seventeen. Late Adolescence, occurring for those who delay their entry into adult roles because of education or social factors, can stretch from eighteen into the twenties.

The distinction between early and late adolescence can be illustrated by comparing eleven- and twelve-year-olds to seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds. They have very little in common with each other. Young adolescents are barely out of childhood and, much like younger children, still need special nurturing and protection; older adolescents share many of the attributes of adults.²³

These observations raise the questions of whether and how much the Spheres framework should be adjusted to reflect various stages of youth development in order to ensure

that community-side intervention strategies are “developmentally appropriate.” One way of thinking about these questions is to ask how community interventions should be expected to vary by the age of the child. The answer, of course, is that Spheres does need to be sensitive to these developmental stages but the adjustments may only be necessary in one sphere. For instance, a close examination of offerings in the programs and services sphere, on the community side of the framework, would show that most (elementary, secondary, and higher education; childcare; child welfare; employment and training; juvenile justice and corrections, etc.) are already segregated by age. We can infer from this, then, that the skills being imparted on the youth side of the framework are, for the most part, developmentally appropriate.

In the community supports sphere, on the other hand, it is difficult to specify in what manners community supports, such as caring adult relationships, might be altered in age-relevant ways. Are the supports appropriate to producing positive attitudes in twelve-year-olds different somehow from those that might be effective with eighteen-year-olds? The answer is not at all clear.

What is clear, however, is that, at a minimum, interventions in the opportunity sphere need to be carefully considered to ensure that they are appropriate to the physical, mental, and emotional maturities of the youth who would profit from them. Ideally, opportunities available to youth should go beyond being *appropriate* to also offer an element of challenge that ensures growth and learning.

So, attention to developmental stages is important to the framework, but the critical considerations are likely to confine themselves to whether the experiences afforded youth through the community’s opportunity structure are both appropriate and challenging.

V. SPHERES AND GENDER ISSUES

Early in our presentation, we also asserted that the Spheres framework is applicable across a wide range of communities regardless of socioeconomic, racial, or cultural composition. Indeed, we believe that the process of youth development and the external factors that influence that development are universal across youth regardless of differences in their individual characteristics and circumstances. However, it is also true that the definition of what youth need to succeed as adults, and the ways in which the external environment reinforces what youth need, is dependent on the values prevailing in the larger social context. And in this connection it is important to address the issue of gender and gender bias in American society.

For our purposes, gender bias raises two issues. The first is whether or not, and the extent to which, our society assigns equal value to the potential of men and women to contribute to the health and welfare of our communities and the nation. The second issue is how our answer to the first question impacts decisions about how boys and girls should be supported and prepared for the roles we prescribe for them. For our discussion, we can collapse these issues into a single question: Are there legitimate and enduring differences between the capacities and/or the developmental needs of boys and girls that should be taken into account by Spheres or any other approach to positive youth development? Research suggests not.

For instance, it has been long accepted that girls and boys differ in their cognitive development, with girls being more verbally inclined and proficient and boys more mathematically and technically inclined. Recent research has shown, however, that over the last two decades, the gender gap in mathematics and in verbal ability have both declined to zero. And the performance differential that still exists in science knowledge and skill appears, in large part, to be attributable to gender differences in exposure to science rather than to any inherent gender differences in disposition. A 1992 report to the Carnegie Council expressed it as follows:

. . . through early adolescence and beyond girls and boys are more similar than different in cognitive structure and academic performance. Prior to puberty they also are quite similar in physical development, with the differences in performance of motor skills probably more attributable to practice and opportunity than to a biological gender difference. After puberty boys are on average larger and have more upper body strength. Based on cognitive and physical development alone there would be little reason to program separately or differently for girls and boys through early adolescence.²⁴

That same study also concluded that “most of the evidence suggests the convergence of male and female roles in the United States and . . . that all youth should be prepared for roles as paid worker (earner, colleague, customer, leader), family member (sibling, partner, parent), and community member (friend, volunteer, citizen, advocate, office holder, patron).”²⁵ Because we do not believe that girls and boys should necessarily prepare for different roles in society, we see no need to alter our interpretation of the Spheres framework

to address gender-specific differences in youth development. However research does show a few gender-specific differences that we believe are important to be alerted to and to recognize in the conduct of youth interventions.

- Though research refutes long-held beliefs about gender-specific learning styles, stereotypes persist. Young girls continue to assess themselves as less proficient in math and sciences despite their parity with boys on performance measures.
- Girls enter puberty at a mean age of 9.6 years — almost two years earlier than boys. As such the timing of their maturation, and the emotional needs and adjustments attendant to that maturation, will likely differ from boys of the same adolescent age.
- Most research indicates that physical appearance is the largest contributor to self-esteem in adolescents. Because our society has a clearer cultural bias for what constitutes attractiveness among girls and women than for men and boys, physical appearance becomes an even more important factor in the self-esteem of adolescent girls — so much so that it is believed to be a leading contributor to eating disorders.
- Though the gap appears to be narrowing over time, more girls than boys express altruistic values, such as helping others, as their primary consideration in choosing vocational and career interests. Boys, on the other hand, are more inclined to place greater importance on hedonistic values, such as making lots of money.

NOTES

¹Annie E. Casey Foundation. 1996. *The Path of Most Resistance: Reflections on Lessons Learned from New Futures*. Baltimore, MD: Author. Pg. v.

²Ibid. Pg. xi.

³Ibid.

⁴See Center for Law and Social Policy. 1995. *Building New Futures for At-Risk Youth: Findings from a Five-Year, Multi-Site Evaluation*. Washington, DC: Author.

⁵National Center for Education Statistics. 1996. *Common Core of Data Surveys, 1994–1995*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

⁶National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. *Public Elementary and Secondary Education Statistics: School Year 1997–98*. NCES 98-202, March 1998.

⁷National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Dept of Education. 1996. *Third International Mathematics and Science Study*. Washington, DC: Author.

⁸Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. 1997. Op. Cit. ED5, Pg. 48.

⁹Ibid. Figures ED4.A and ED4.B, Pgs. 46 and 47.

¹⁰Ibid. Figure ED6, Pg. 49.

¹¹Several research studies have documented the positive impact on youth of caring adults in the school environment and some have suggested the value of positive and supportive school peers. See Benard, Bonnie. 1991. Op. cit. Pg. 11.

¹²Public Agenda, Inc. 1997. *Getting By: What American Teenagers Really Think About Their Schools*. Washington, DC: Author.

¹³Norton, Arthur J.; and Louisa F. Miller. 1992. “Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the 1990’s,” *Current Population Reports: Special Studies*. Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce.

¹⁴Child Trends, Inc. 1997. *Trends in the Well-Being of America’s Children and Families*. Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Pg. 24.

¹⁵Based on 1990 data in: Norton, Arthur J. and Louisa f. Miller. 1992. Op. Cit. Pg. 5.

¹⁶Child Trends, Inc. 1997, Op cit, Pg. 28.

¹⁷Ibid. Pg. 26.

¹⁸Benard, Bonnie. 1991. Op. cit. Pg. 6.

¹⁹Research does suggest that many caregiver responsibilities are less consistently carried out in poor communities. See Sampson, R.J. 1992. "Family Management and Child Development: Insights from Social Disorganization Theory". In J. McCord, Ed., *Advances in Criminology Theory 3*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books. Pgs. 63–93.

²⁰Mincy, Ronald B. 1994. "Introduction." *Nurturing Young Black Males*. Ronald B. Mincy, Ed. Washington DC: Urban Institute Press. Pg. 8.

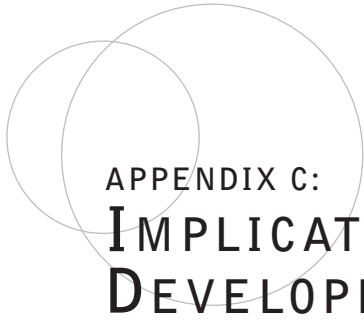
²¹See Sipe, Cynthia L. Undated. *Mentoring: A Synthesis of PIPV's Research:1988–1995*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures, Inc.

²²Connell, James P.; J. Lawrence Aber; and Gary Walker. Op. cit. 1996. Pg. 99.

²³Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. 1995. Op. cit. Pg. 19.

²⁴Johnson-Nicholson, Heather. 1992. *Gender Differences in Youth Development Programs*. Working paper prepared for the Task Force on Youth Development and Community Programs. New York: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. Pg. 11.

²⁵Ibid. Pg. 53.



APPENDIX C:

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FIELD

We have posited the Spheres framework as an overarching vision that may have value as a “generic” representation of the various promising and prominent models and frameworks vying for the attentions of the field. In this appendix, we will outline some of the issues and implications that follow from this formulation, including implications for initiative designs, for planning, for implementation, for practice, for policy, for research, and for evaluation.

I. IMPLICATIONS FOR DESIGNING INTERVENTIONS

The primary design implication of the Spheres framework stems from its explicit emphasis on the community’s contribution to youth development. Indeed, the failure of interventions to deal explicitly with neighborhood conditions, influences, and supports is a critical missing link in our youth-serving efforts. The framework makes it clear that positive youth development is everybody’s business and that it needs to be pursued on a communitywide saturation basis. This suggests that there is a need, in designing initiatives, to enlist, and link together, more and more community adults in a long-term campaign of supportive relationships and positive messages for young people.

Concerned communities need to raise their youth development concerns to the highest possible levels of recognition and awareness within the neighborhood and among its residents. The community’s aspirations for its young people (the youth side of the framework) should saturate every aspect of community life and its avenues for intervention and influence (from the community side) should be well known and accessible. Achieving these ends will require strenuous outreach, organizing, and capacity-building efforts.

Spheres also suggests the need to expand the set of meaningful opportunities available to young people within and outside of their communities. Opportunities for volunteerism, work experience, service learning, organized recreation, and others that can both occupy discretionary time and offer avenues for personal growth, learning, and leadership should be major components of a community intervention strategy. Community institutions, such as schools, churches, youth clubs, and other community-based organizations and nonprofits, need to work together in collaborations to plan and execute a coherent program of year-round youth offerings. Community leaders and institutions also need to reach beyond the neighborhood to city, county, and metropolitan entities to help further

expand youth opportunities and exposures. Providing these opportunities requires a considerable degree of social organization and institutional capacity to perform the kind of leadership, brokering, coordinating, and administrative tasks likely to be involved.

Additionally, because the framework identifies the full range of influences that need to be taken into account, it reminds us that interventions need to be approached more comprehensively. The agenda for youth development needs to develop skills, attitudes, and experiences in and for all young people. This is not to say that individual interventions themselves need to be comprehensive, but rather that each strategy, even if narrowly conceived, needs to bear some demonstrable strategic relationship to an overall effort.

Finally, because of its overarching view, the framework facilitates the planning and monitoring of initiatives on the basis of their respective contributions to overall community goals. Given resource scarcities, it is very important that communities have a vehicle that will aid decision makers in comparing alternative directions and resource uses.

II. IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING

The Spheres framework should prove to be an important aid to community planning. As an overarching model, it can be used as a diagnostic aid that will provide communities a means for assessing their entire array of youth development efforts.

- ***The framework helps planners visualize developmental goals and community influences and the relationships among them.*** On the youth side of the framework, it provides a structure that allows communities to debate the relative importance of various developmental goals and objectives. It is a vehicle for mapping the relationships between those developmental (youth-side) goals and specific entities and actors on the community side that can affect them.
- ***Given a set of goals, the framework will allow communities to assess the adequacy of their youth development efforts and identify gaps.*** They will be able to consider their activities and interventions in the light of the spheres that they do or do not address and determine what else needs to be done. Consequently, the framework should allow communities to be more strategic in their thinking, both about what else may need to be done for their young people and who should do it. And it should provide guidance about how to “bundle” existing activities, either by themselves or in conjunction with new initiatives, in order to strengthen the overall effort.
- ***The framework also provides a vehicle for considering the completeness of individual strategies and the extent to which each strategy takes other important spheres into account in accomplishing its goals.*** The six spheres empower community residents to question why certain connections are not being made for their children in any given program’s design.
- ***Perhaps most important, the framework clearly and explicitly highlights the critical influences communities exert in support of, or to the detriment of, their young people.*** As such, it makes its own powerful statement about the importance of community involvement.

III. IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The Spheres framework by its nature demands a high level of integration, coordination, and collaboration. Since all aspects of the framework are interactive, mutually dependent, and reinforcing, there needs to be a strong capacity somewhere in communities for both organization and relationship brokering. At one level it will be important to achieve some level of communication and cooperation among the various activities conducted with and on behalf of young people. At another level, however, there is the matter of the Spheres intersections — the “questions of fit” among our various spheres. These questions of fit will, on occasion, challenge some organizations and actors to change their behaviors in order to better prepare youth for the real opportunities available to them, or to find more and more meaningful ways to offer opportunities.

This suggests that a capacity-building effort that stresses leadership development and institutional strengthening as well as community organizing will need to be among the important components planned in order to implement initiatives designed through this framework.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

A positive youth development agenda, such as suggested by the Spheres framework, raises serious questions about what constitutes youth development practice. Youth work can be thought of as activities and functions carried out with, and/or on behalf of youth by persons charged with, and paid for, performing them — in other words, youth work professionals. If youth development practice were defined as what youth professionals do, then the implications of Spheres would relate only to the preparations and behaviors of the people who “inhabit” the programs and services sphere of the framework. Within this narrow construction we would be primarily concerned about the performance and the effectiveness of such persons and of the work they do. Looming large among these concerns would be such things as training and accreditation, in-service training and support, and remuneration and retention. And indeed these are the issues that dominate our practice concerns today.

But what the Spheres framework essentially suggests is that youth development, to good or ill-effect, is something that everybody does knowingly or not. Such an expanded vision raises the question of what “practice” really means. What is the discipline that underlies what we all do that contributes to how children develop? And how, if at all, can we train and certify ourselves to be competent at whatever that discipline is? These are difficult questions, to be sure, but nonetheless issues that must be dealt with if we are to achieve our aspirations for Spheres, or for any other community-centered, positive framework.

This discussion may well suggest that the phrase “youth development practice” should indeed refer only to the preparation, behaviors, and effectiveness of “professionals” and not to those of laypersons. Even so, important issues remain regarding whether and how we

can increase the level of general competence among residents of communities and neighborhoods in dealing more positively and effectively with youth. And the major implication of Spheres in this realm is that there is a great need for support systems that can enlist, train, and mentor unpaid adults to be more effective “youth workers.”

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The policy implications of Spheres are both direct and indirect. They are direct in the sense that governments administer and/or support many if not most of the programs and services provided by youth-serving institutions and organizations. The principal lesson Spheres may offer to these governments lies in its depiction of the complex nature of our youth development challenge. The framework should make more obvious why short-term, narrowly focused, and quick-fix interventions have proven ineffective. And it should help make the need for more intensive, long-term, and comprehensive strategies more acceptable.

Unfortunately, these are lessons that still need reinforcement. Consider the following passage in a 1997 report of the American Youth Policy Forum:

“ . . . even as the lesson of long-term intervention was documented, national policy turned in 1982 under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) to strategies for young people that emphasized low costs and quickie interventions.¹”

The framework should suggest to policy makers that the kinds of services and programs likely to be effective are those that pay close attention to the youth side of the framework, while at the same time finding ways to enlist or establish community supports for youth efforts and opportunity structures for young experience. The direct implication then is that, to be more effective, government remediation efforts must be enlarged to pay closer attention to the important influences on the community side of the framework.

But because the framework places such importance on the community contribution to youth outcomes, much of the effort it hopes to foster lies outside the programs and services sector and therefore beyond the direct reach of things governments can influence. To successfully address this framework, for instance, communities need the social organization, civic infrastructure, relationship networks, resources, and authority to effect change. These, incidentally, are the very same assets that are required for community development more broadly. Thus, government investment in building local community development capacity should have tangible indirect benefits to local youth development agendas.

VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

The Spheres framework has raised a host of important operational questions about communitywide intervention for which we have few answers and little guidance. The following are examples:

- What do we mean by a “saturation program” and is it a *program* or a *movement*? Is there some threshold level of community participation that would act as a standard? How would we define *participating* and in what?
- What would a communitywide, neighborhood-level initiative consist of? Are there concrete, finite components that can provide vehicles for monitoring, measurement, and evaluation?
- How do we operationalize and sustain a saturation-level community involvement? What are its governance, management, organizational, and resource requirements?
- How much organizing is required for sustaining a saturation effort, and how do we best organize to maintain an ongoing engagement as opposed to organizing for event-oriented purposes?
- What does saturation require in terms of community institutions and their capacities?

In an entirely different vein, other research is needed to further inform the model. For instance, each of the six spheres offers a fertile area for additional exploration both to inform program design questions and to further illuminate the elements they contain. On the youth side, for example, much has already been written about both the skills and the attitudes spheres but much of it comes from the perspective of documenting what contributes to youth success. This is very important work and must continue. But by contrast, data on how youth see themselves, their needs, and their prospects in the context of their communities is relatively scarce. To the extent that positive youth development seeks to inoculate young people against risky behaviors, information about youth perspectives could be invaluable in documenting our starting points.

In addition to the considerable research that has been done on the youth side, there is a relatively large body of research information on the community side of the framework. However, the vast bulk of it consists of program evaluations and the results of various attempts at institutional reforms. Critical research on noninstitutional community influences, particularly in the community supports sphere, has only recently emerged out of the resiliency and protective-factors research.

VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR EVALUATION

An important activity in any social service field is monitoring community activities to make sure they produce the outcomes that the planners wanted to achieve. In the case of youth development, those outcomes occur on the youth side of the framework — increased skills, positive attitudes, and meaningful experiences.

Direct relationships. As earlier stated, each sphere on the youth side of the Spheres model is directly related to a sphere on the community side. The skills young people acquire (on the youth side) are generally derived from the programs and services that are available to them (on the community side). Young people’s attitudes (on the youth side) generally result from community supports like parents, families, peer groups, churches, and unrelated adults (on the community side). And finally, the experiences to which young

people are exposed (on the youth side) emerge directly from the opportunities that are available to them in the community (on the community side).

Each of these relationships should be the subject of frequent assessment and evaluation to determine the community's *effectiveness* in producing desirable outcomes. Thus, for example, if computer literacy were one of the community's goals for young people in the skills sphere, the planning group should regularly assess the progress of the relevant programs and institutions. Similarly, activities and actors (churches, mentoring programs, etc.) that are responsible for fostering positive attitudes can be monitored and evaluated. The point is that each of the direct relationships shown in the framework is intended to produce growth in young people. Monitoring them, to ensure that they do, is important to the framework and ultimately to youth development.

Evaluating intersections. As we have described above, the spheres are highly interactive in determining how young people will turn out as adults. The intersections that represent those interactions on each side of the model represent the *mesh* or *closeness of fit* between any two connecting spheres. Evaluating these intersections is important because the potential, competence, and adaptability they represent, on the youth side of the framework, are interim outcomes in the youth development process. Likewise, the collaborative supports, articulation, and acculturation efforts, on the community side, are interim indicators of the community's influence and investment in youth.

So the intersections offer an opportunity to ask questions and make observations of initiatives in process. For instance: Do community programs and services offer supports that are both appropriate and adequate to ensure young people's success in available employment or educational opportunities? Is the neighborhood culture nurturing its young people and preparing them to negotiate in the majority culture of mainstream institutions and opportunities?

Summing up. The "bottom line" on youth development is the intersection where the three spheres converge. On each side of the Spheres framework, this intersection represents an outcome. On the youth side, a young person's development can be summed by the interaction of his or her skills, attitudes, and experience. On the community side, the community's overall investment and influence can be represented as the combination of its programs and services, community supports, and opportunity structure. As such, these intersections represent the summary measures of youth outcomes and community influences at any given time. Consequently, it is here where summative evaluations must be conducted to determine what impacts the community's influences, investments, and initiatives have had on the futures of young people.

The results of these evaluations can, in turn, be reentered into a community's planning process in order to reaffirm or refine the community's youth development effort. Are the community's development priorities still valid? Should the community put forth new proposals for modifying its community strategies and behaviors?

NOTES

¹American Youth Policy Forum. 1997. Op. cit.. Pg. ix.



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