

## PSI Agency Update – February 2008

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As our friend, Brad Perry, M.A., Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator from the Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance puts it, “Not perpetrating is not enough” we must look at “Adding a promotion paradigm.”

From the beginning, Peer Solutions has been dedicated to ending sexual violence. As we enter into our 13th year, we continue to learn the most effective and long-term/generational means to this end. We adapt to change as lessons are learned and believe that it takes everyone to end sexual violence. We are committed to a primary prevention approach highlighting all categories across the ecological model.

Peer Solutions utilizes an evidence-based approach and includes the following research to support activities: Positive Youth Development, Developmental Assets, Community Development, Social Norms, Peer Education/Mentoring, Social Change and more. For the purpose of this posting, Peer Solutions would like to share some Positive Youth Development excerpts from the following preliminary paper written by Marc Mannes, Ph.D.

### **The Theoretical and Empirical Basis for the STAND & SERVE Program**

Marc Mannes, Ph.D.

It is natural, and commonplace for youth work to pay exclusive attention to risk factors, deficits, and pathology. Far too much attention is paid to risks and deficits than is paid to the factors and ingredients that constitute positive and healthy development. The biggest problem with this traditional orientation is that the emphasis on risks and deficits severely limits how youth are perceived and how they are served.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is defined by the presence of protective factors, the manifestation of resilience, and an emphasis on promotion. Healthy youth are understood as much more than individuals being problem free or successfully avoiding the negative consequences of risk. Instead, healthy youth are understood as young people living with emotional vitality, experiencing emotional, psychological, and social well-being, and capable of performing positively in the private and social realms of their lives.

The STAND & SERVE Program operated by Peer Solutions embraces and employs a PYD orientation. It makes use of the most widely known PYD models, the research-based Developmental Asset Framework, created by Search Institute of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

PYD is an approach predicated upon applied research and practice. It is well grounded in theory and empiricism, and encompasses various conceptual models and frameworks that guide a broad range of community-based initiatives responsive to youth along with youth-serving programs. PYD addresses the shortcomings of traditional risk-based or developmental deficit reduction strategies when dealing with youth, and contend that much more is needed. This perspective is best captured in the youth development mantra “problem free is not fully prepared” (Pittman & Fleming, 1991).

Catalano et al. (2004) conducted an extensive review of PYD programs and concentrated on 25 that were well-evaluated and showed significant effects on behavioral outcomes. Nineteen of them demonstrated significant improvements in PYD outcomes such as: interpersonal skills, quality of peer and adult relationships, self-control, problem solving, cognitive competence, self-efficacy, commitment to school, and academic achievement. Twenty-four showed significant reductions problem behaviors such as: alcohol and other drug use, school problems, aggressive behavior, violence, and risky sexual behavior.

Zweig, Phillips, and Lindberg (2002) examined data on 12,500 9th to 12th graders from the original Add Health (the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health) study pool of 7th to 12th graders, and reported that students with higher levels of protective factors consistently had lower levels of risk behaviors. Leffert et al. (1998) studied a sample of nearly 100,000 youth from over 200 American communities. They reported that a cluster of four assets – positive peer influence, peaceful conflict resolution, school engagement, and safety – added 30% to the explained variance associated with engagement in violence, compared to only 8% explained by demographics.

Research conducted by Search Institute consistently shows that the more Developmental Assets youth experience in their family, school, and community life, the less likely they are to get involved in risk behavior patterns, and the more likely they are to be protected from risk factors/processes. The Developmental Assets framework has also shown its merit with more challenging youth populations. Taylor and associates (2002) conducted an investigation with youth gang members in the Detroit area and drew the conclusion that gang youth's positive development can be promoted by embedding them in a more asset-rich environment.

STAND & SERVE pays attention to empirically grounded positive developmental themes and intervention strategies, which when successfully implemented, are expected to enhance positive outcomes, and simultaneously reduce problem behaviors and negative outcomes. STAND & SERVE, by virtue of operating a PYD-based sexual violence prevention initiative, concentrates on promotion and delivers a more expansive portfolio of positive supports, opportunities, and resources, with the empirically-based assumption that reductions in risks will co-occur.

**Peer Solutions is an Arizona-based nonprofit established in 1996.**

**Vision:** That we internalize respect in thought, reflect it in action, and spread it to others, resulting in an increase of peace in our hearts, homes, schools, workplaces and communities.

**Mission:** To cultivate positive social change by uniting schools, families and communities through STAND & SERVE, an asset-based, peer-facilitated program fostering peace, respect, empathy and ownership of the solution.

**STAND & SERVE (S&S)** unites elementary through post secondary students, families and communities by hosting weekly meetings with on-going outreach campaigns, peer education trainings, service projects and summer programs. [www.PeerSolutions.org](http://www.PeerSolutions.org)

*We would like to thank Marc Mannes for his brilliance.*

For more information or list of references, please contact Peer Solutions at 602-225-0942.