National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth NCLD Youth

Information Brief

Five Areas of Youth Development/Youth Leadership

The National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth (NCLD/Youth) models its program around the Five Areas of Youth Development, as defined by the Forum for Youth Investment. These five areas cover seven out of the eight "areas of emphasis" defined by the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 1999 and ensure that youth and emerging leaders with disabilities are achieving the competencies they need to make a successful transition to adulthood.

Area of Youth Development/ Youth Leadership	Areas of Emphasis in the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 1999
Learning	Education
Connecting	Housing Transportation
Thriving	Recreation Health Child Care
Working	Employment
Leading	Quality Assurance

The Five Areas of Development
Some common competencies and desirable outcomes emerge from a review of youth development and youth leadership research. The competencies and outcomes are best articulated in a framework created by the Forum for Youth Investment that organizes the range of youth development outcomes into five developmental areas: **learning, connecting, thriving, working, and leading.** Youth development and leadership programs strive to provide supports, services, and opportunities that help youth, including youth with disabilities, achieve positive outcomes in all five of these areas. Using the Forum for Youth Investment's framework, NCLD/Youth's sister center, NCWD/Youth has outlined intended outcomes and examples of program activities for each of the five areas.

Learning refers to the development of positive basic and applied academic attitudes, skills, and behaviors. Beneficial outcomes that fall under this area include rational problem solving and critical thinking.

Programs can include the following sorts of activities to help youth achieve the

outcomes listed in the category of **learning:**

- Initial and ongoing skills assessment, formal and informal
- Initial and ongoing career and vocational assessment, formal and informal
- Identification of one's learning styles, strengths, and challenges
- Creation of a personal development plan
- Contextualized learning activities such as service-learning projects in which youth apply academic skills to community needs
- Monitoring of and accountability for own grades and creation of a continuous improvement plan based on grades and goals
- Showcase of work that highlights a youth's learning experience (e.g. an essay, a painting, an algebra exam, etc.)
- Development of a formal learning plan that includes long- and short-term goals and action steps
- Group problem-solving activities
- Preparation classes for GED, ACT, SAT, etc.
- Peer tutoring activities that enhance the skills of the tutor and the student

Connecting refers to the development of positive social behaviors, skills, and attitudes. Positive outcomes that fall under this area include quality relationships, the ability to build trust, and effective communication.

Programs can include the following sorts of activities to help youth achieve the outcomes listed in the category of **connecting:**.

- Mentoring activities that connect youth to adult mentors
- Tutoring activities that engage youth as tutors or in being tutored
- Research activities identifying resources in the community to allow youth to practice conversation and investigation skills
- Letter writing to friends, family members, and pen pals
- Job and trade fairs to begin building a network of contacts in one's career field of interest
- Role plays of interview and other workplace scenarios
- Positive peer and group activities that build camaraderie, teamwork, and belonging
- Cultural activities that promote understanding and tolerance
- Workshops in public speaking
- Research on historical or current leaders
- Contact with local leaders
- Strategic planning to change something in the community or within the youth program

Thriving refers to the development of attitudes, skills, and behaviors that are demonstrated by maintaining optimal physical and emotional wellbeing.

Beneficial outcomes that fall under this area include knowledge and practice of good nutrition and hygiene and the capacity to identify risky conditions.

Programs can include the following sorts of activities to help youth achieve the outcomes listed in the category of **thriving:**
- Workshops on benefits and consequences of various health, hygiene, and human development issues, including physical, sexual, and emotional development
- Role playing adverse situations and how to resolve them
- Personal and peer counseling
- Training in conflict management and resolution concerning family, peer, and workplace relationships
- Community mapping to create a directory of resources related to physical and mental health
- Meal planning and preparation activities
- Social activities that offer opportunities to practice skills in communication, negotiation, and personal presentation
- Sports and recreational activities
- Training in life skills

Working refers to the development of positive attitudes, skills, and behaviors around occupational and career direction. Positive outcomes that fall under this area include demonstrated work-readiness skills (resume writing, cold calls, and soft skills) and involvement in meaningful work that offers advancement, satisfaction, and self-sufficiency.

Programs can include the following sorts of activities to help youth achieve the outcomes listed in the category of **working**:
- Career exploration activities including career interest assessment, job shadowing, job and career fairs, and workplace visits and tours
- Internships
- Work experience, including summer employment
- Information on entrepreneurship
- Networking activities
- Mock interviews
- Work readiness workshops
- Visits from representatives of specific industries to speak to youth about the employment opportunities and details of working within their industry
- Mock job searches, including locating positions online and in the newspaper, "cold-calling," preparing resumes, and writing cover letters and thank-you letters
- Visits to education or training programs
- Career goal setting and planning

- Job coaching or mentoring
- Learning activities using computers and other current workplace technology

Leading refers to the development of positive skills, attitudes, and behaviors around civic involvement and personal goal-setting. Beneficial outcomes that fall under this area include a sense of responsibility to oneself and others and the ability to articulate one's personal values Activities such as the opportunity to take a leadership role and participation in community service projects help youth achieve these outcomes.

Programs can include the following sorts of activities to help youth achieve the outcomes listed in the category of **leading:**
- Personal plan development with goals, action steps, and deadlines
- Resource mapping activities in which youth take the lead in planning and carrying out a search of community resources for youth
- Voter registration and voting in local, state, and federal elections
- Participation in town hall meetings
- Community volunteerism such as organizing a park clean-up or building a playground
- Participation in a debate on a local social issue
- Training to be a peer mediator
- Participation in a letter-writing campaign
- Opportunities to meet with local and state officials and legislators
- Participation in a youth advisory committee of the city, school board, training center, or other relevant organization
- Learning activities or courses about leadership principles and styles
- Group activities that promote collaboration and team work
- Mentoring relationships with positive role models
- Opportunities to serve in leadership roles such as club officer, board member, team captain, or coach

Bear in mind, no single program is expected to contain every outcome and every activity included in the five areas of youth development and youth leadership. Instead, they are to be used as a guide to offer suggestions and ideas to improve programs, and in turn, improve outcomes for all youth.. Shortly, NCLD/Youth will be publishing two self-assessment tools about using the five areas of YD/YL to improve outcomes for youth with disabilities. One tool will be developed for program staff and a second tool for youth participants of the program, in order to engage both parties in a candid and informed conversation about the Youth Development/Youth Leadership needs of all youth—including youth with disabilities.

Few programs for youth include all of the youth development, youth leadership, and disability-related components necessary for youth to participate fully in all

aspects of their lives and society. Even fewer programs have youth in the position to design, implement and evaluate these programs. No one project is expected to cover ALL the five areas and achieve all of the outcomes. However, project staff should strive to connect to national resources as well as other youth-serving organizations in their own community to incorporate these components. The increasing recognition of the importance of youth development and youth leadership for all youth holds both promise and challenge. To meet the challenge of ensuring that all youth, especially youth with developmental disabilities, have access to high quality programs focused on youth development and youth leadership, NCLD/Youth is seeking to work with across systems within the youth development/youth leadership arena, and disability-specific organizations to develop needed resources and materials for program staff and youth and their families. The American dream is achievable, but through YD/YL it can be made accessible.