

IDENTIFYING HIGH QUALITY YOUTH PROGRAMS

An Introduction

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About the Fact Sheets

There is growing evidence to suggest that participation in youth programs benefits young people. Compared to family and community factors, participation in youth programs contributes to enhanced self-esteem, increased school performance and aspirations to attend college, the ability to overcome adversity, willingness to engage in efforts to help others, leadership skills, efforts to maintain good physical health, and involvement in political and social activities in young adulthood (Holland & Andre, 1987; Quinn, 1995; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000; Scales & Leffert, 1999). Youth programs provide an important context for the promotion of crucial life skills as well as safeguards against negative behaviors. McLaughlin (2001) found that youth with high levels of participation in community youth programs were more likely to: (1) have good grades; (2) rate their chances of attending college as “very high”; (3) consider themselves as “worthy persons”; and (4) express a sense of civic responsibility. In summary, time spent in youth programs is a consistent predictor of youth thriving in several life domains.

Given the potential benefits of participation in youth programs, it is essential that these programs include the elements necessary to promote the positive development of young people. Therefore, this series of Fact Sheets is designed to provide critical research-based information to parents, youth, youth development professionals and others regarding the selection of quality youth programs. These fact sheets are designed to address issues facing youth ages 9 to 19 and include the following topics:

- Information for Youth Development Professionals
- Information for Middle School Youth Professionals
- Information for High School Youth Professionals
- Information for Parents
- A quick reference guide

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