

Youth Outreach from Public Libraries



Centre for
Youth & Society 

Youth Outreach services operating from the public library has the potential to engage at-risk youth and to provide support during after school hours.

Why This Matters

Youth need positive community supports during after school hours – youth outreach services based from the library can be one practice which contributes to youth well-being.

Key Points

After school hours are a vulnerable time for at-risk youth in which they might:

- Have a greater chance of being victims of violence
- Rely on negative peer supports instead of positive supports or role models
- Lack places where they can identify with and feel supported by – even home
- Be at risk to experiment with drugs; youth who are without after-school programming are 49% more likely to have used drugs

What the Research Says

- The public library is an institution where everyone is welcome regardless of economic background, social background, age, or if they even have a home. Public libraries are one of the last places that do not require money to have a place or to participate.
- The library can viewed as a “therapeutic” place, where an individual can feel safe, calm, and unpressured to perform or conform.
- Since libraries are enmeshed within the community, there is potential to have social services workers in public libraries, and youth outreach services.
- The library historically has been a place to gather information and learn. Libraries are beginning to explore the inclusion of social services to help people seek information, be directed to resources, and also receive support.

“Public libraries are recognized as having the potential to be ‘fertile ground to cultivate positive youth development.’”

What the Research Says

- ❑ Marginalized youth need positive, caring and stable relationships. Trust is the foundation of the relationship between youth and outreach services. Developing trust and providing space are imperative, so that youth can feel safe in order to communicate the complexity of their lives.
- ❑ Several researchers agree that a Positive Youth Development (PYD) model is the most effective framework for working with marginalized or youth who are at risk.
- ❑ A PYD model recognizes that all youth have strengths and the ability to pursue developmental growth and change.
- ❑ The central hypothesis of a PYD perspective is that “if the strengths of youths are aligned across adolescence with ecological developmental assets, then every young person’s development can be enhanced.”

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What You Need to Know

- ❑ A 2003 program called “Finding My Place” utilized a PYD model in the public library. Youth who were at risk of leaving high school early participated in motivational workshops and were provided an alternative learning space in the library.
- ❑ The program successfully retained high school students, and the students developed a stronger sense of future career directions.
- ❑ The Philadelphia Free Library hired Teen Leadership Assistants under a PYD model. The TLA’s received training and were to facilitate educational and cultural enrichment programs to youth 8 to 18 years old.
- ❑ The Edmonton Public Library partnered with a local community service organization to place homeless outreach workers in the library. Their program has implications for placing Youth Outreach services in the library because it is public space that is accessible and free.

