



# Positive Youth Development

## Laying the Groundwork for Health and Well-Being

Preparing our youth for adulthood is top of mind for many communities. Positive youth development (PYD) focuses on building the capacities, strengths, and assets children need to succeed in adulthood. RTI offers expertise in the key topics, formats, and settings of PYD work. We can help build and refine your PYD efforts by developing interventions, evaluating programs, and providing training and technical assistance.

### More Information

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### Overview

Programs and policies for young people often focus on preventing negative outcomes, such as substance use, risky sexual behavior, delinquency, and school dropout. However, the absence of problems is not enough to ensure a successful transition to adulthood. Young people need to develop assets such as a sense of identity; career goals and preparation; physical health and safety; and skills related to emotional coping, critical thinking, and maintaining healthy relationships. As federal, state, and local agencies increase their recognition of the importance of PYD, there is a need to identify and develop effective PYD programs and to support their implementation in communities.

### Areas of Expertise

RTI International offers substantive expertise in numerous PYD topics and interventions, ensuring that we can provide human service professionals with the tools and support needed to help young people thrive. Areas of expertise include adolescent development, physical health and wellness, healthy relationships, parent-child communication, free-time activities, education and career success, identity development, and financial literacy. Our experience in forms of PYD intervention includes school-based programs, youth mentoring, workplace supports, and service provider capacity building.

RTI's technical expertise enables us to assist PYD-focused organizations and agencies with a range of goals, from developing a plan for new PYD programming, to determining whether existing programming is effective, and identifying and addressing program implementation challenges. Our technical experience includes literature reviews; needs and capacity assessment; intervention development; process, outcome, and economic evaluation; data collection and management; quantitative and qualitative data analysis; dissemination of research findings; training; and technical assistance.

## Project Highlights

**Peer Health Exchange (PHE) Evaluation (Peer Health Exchange, 2019–2022).** The PHE program trains college students to teach a 16-session, skills-based health curriculum in under-resourced high schools across the country. RTI's evaluation uses survey and archival data to compare students in PHE schools with those in propensity score-matched schools on outcomes including mental and physical health, social-emotional learning, academic achievement, substance use, sexual behavior, and accessing related resources.

**Prevention Matters Evaluation (Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation, 2018–2022).**

**Partners in Prevention Evaluation (Healthcare Foundation of La Porte, 2019–2022).**

**Evaluation of the Resilient Youth Initiative (North Central Health Services, 2019–2022).**

These three initiatives fund the implementation of evidence-based social-emotional learning and substance use prevention programming in more than 200 Indiana schools. As the contracted evaluator of these initiatives, RTI is conducting process and outcome evaluations that involve student and staff surveys, staff interviews, classroom observations, and school administrative data.

**Evaluation of the Creating Pathways to Prosperity in Delaware Initiative (Rodel, 2018–2021).** RTI is evaluating statewide efforts to scale career pathways and expand work-based learning opportunities available to high school students. RTI is also exploring factors that account for student and employer engagement, documenting critical insights and lessons learned for improving students' college and career readiness, and identifying elements that are critical to sustain.

**Feasibility of Evaluating Biopsychosocial Indicators of Stress Reactivity in At-Risk Adolescents to Inform Self-Regulation Interventions (National Institutes of Health, 2018–2019).** This study is testing whether wearable biosensors can be used to study associations between physiological activity and stressful experiences in middle school students. In the long term, these methods would be used in mindfulness interventions to improve stress management.

**New Skills for Youth National Program Evaluation (JP Morgan Chase, 2016–2020).** RTI is evaluating a national effort to expand and strengthen career-focused education programs through grants to 10 states through the New Skills for Youth initiative. The mixed-method evaluation includes annual site visits, surveys, and the analysis of career pathways data.

**Evaluation of the Teen Leadership Curriculum Implementation in Greenville County Schools (Greenville Public Schools, 2016–2018).** Greenville County, South Carolina, is using leadership training to help high-needs middle school students stay engaged in school and academically on track until high school graduation. The training emphasizes the development of positive skills like decision making, goal setting, and conflict resolution. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the quality of implementation and provide formative feedback to schools to improve program delivery. This project uses developmental evaluation, teacher and administrator interviews and surveys, and facilitated student activities and student work analysis.

**Mindful Coping Power (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2015–2017).** The goal of this intervention development was to infuse mindfulness practices in the school-based, evidence-based Coping Power preventive intervention designed to prevent substance use and aggression among fifth graders.

**Evaluation of the Collaborative Partnership for Excellence in Youth Development (United Way of the Greater Triangle, 2013–2016).** RTI was the evaluator for Youth Thrive, an initiative in Wake County, North Carolina, that focuses on building organizational capacity to promote youth development and compiling local data sources for use in making decisions about youth services. The evaluation involved surveys with youth and youth service providers and interviews with local stakeholders.

**Random-Assignment Evaluation of Paid Mentoring: Process, Outcome, and Cost-Effectiveness (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2009–2014).** RTI partnered with Big Brothers Big Sisters to describe how paying mentors impacts recruitment, retention, and mentor/mentee interactions and to test whether youth with paid mentors have different outcomes than youth with volunteer mentors.

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