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# THE CROSSOVER YOUTH PRACTICE MODEL (CYPM)

*The Protective Potential of Prosocial Activities:  
A Review of the Literature and  
Recommendations for Child-Serving Agencies*

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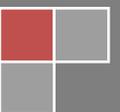
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## Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM)

The Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM) was developed by the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) at the Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy to improve outcomes for youth who are dually-involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The model uses a research- and strength-based approach to assist child welfare, juvenile justice, and related agencies in adopting policies and practices that better address the needs of these youth and improve their life outcomes. The term “crossover youth” refers to all youth who have experienced some form of abuse or neglect and who engage in delinquent behaviors, regardless of their involvement in the systems. Over one hundred jurisdictions in twenty-one states across the country have implemented the Model. Crossover youth in CYPM jurisdictions have demonstrated improvements in social connections, education and behavioral health status, legal outcomes, and recidivism rates when compared to crossover youth that did not experience the CYPM (Wright, Spohn, & Chenane, 2017; Haight, Bidwell, Seok Choi, & Cho, 2016; Herz & Fontaine, 2013). This brief, which reviews the protective potential of prosocial activities, is the fifth in a series that addresses various issues faced by crossover youth and the systems that serve them.

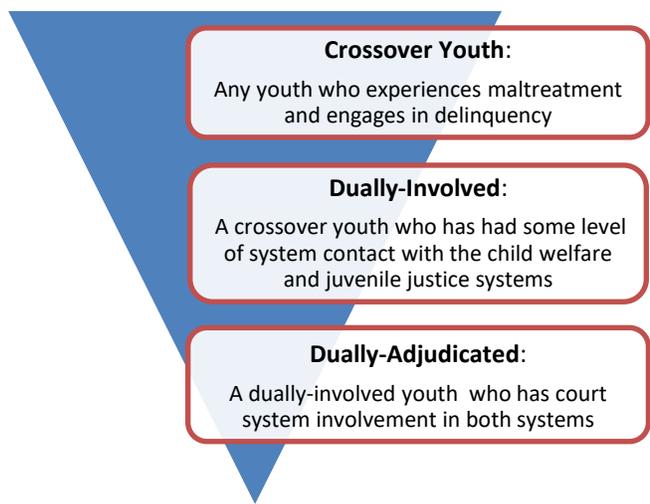


Figure 1: Definitions

## Prosocial Activities and Crossover Youth

Children and adolescents in the United States typically have six to eight hours of “free time” each day that is not devoted to chores, work, school, or sleep (Larson & Verma, 1999). How a youth and his or her family occupy that time — by playing sports, reading novels, making art, or engaging in other after-school activities — has a direct impact on that youth’s day, from the amount of free time remaining to the friends and adults they see. These extracurricular activities<sup>1</sup> are part of the typical maturation process for young people and offer both risk and protective factors (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). In this regard, some of these extracurricular activities can be considered “prosocial,” as they may protect youth against the risk of delinquency, substance use, or other antisocial behaviors (National Research Council, 2013; Lam, 2012; Xue, Zimmerman, & Caldwell, 2007).

In the child welfare system, the opportunity for prosocial activity is a critical component in the system’s focus on the well-being of children and adolescents (Biglan, 2014). However, for youth involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, participating in these normal childhood activities may be difficult or simply not a priority as compared to safety and permanence. A lack of parental support, strained financial resources, and the availability of activities in institutional or placement settings all contribute to these difficulties. Because of the many challenges these youth face, including high rates of mental health and substance use issues, poor educational outcomes, and a lack of positive adult relationships, this population is in a position to gain significant benefits from the protective factors prosocial activities provide (Herz, Lee, Lutz, Stewart, Tuell, & Wiig, 2012).

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the terminology used in this brief, please see the section below “Defining Prosocial Activities” for a brief discussion of how this concept is defined in the literature and the terms and definitions adopted by the CYPM.

Systems that focus on ensuring access to prosocial activities for crossover youth take advantage of valuable opportunities to support a reduction of delinquency and recidivism (Herz, et al., 2012).

To support this focus, this issue brief provides a comprehensive literature review on prosocial activities and, using examples from the CYPM, discusses ways in which jurisdictions can support involvement in these activities. The literature review was guided by two research questions:

1. In what ways, if any, are prosocial activities related to and influencers on delinquent behavior or positive youth development?
2. Are all prosocial activities equal in their effect on youth, or are some activities associated with higher risk/protective factors?

Part I of this brief addresses the first question, reviewing the various literature on activities, delinquency, and positive youth development to define the potential pathways or mechanisms through which these elements are related. Part II explores the second question, reviewing the literature on specific types of prosocial and extracurricular activities, including sports, art, religion, mentoring, and after-school activities. In Part III, the brief discusses how jurisdictions can support youth participation in prosocial activities using the CYPM as a model. Finally, Part IV presents the example of two CYPM jurisdictions that have prioritized prosocial activities and utilized various strategies to encourage participation among crossover youth.

## Defining Prosocial Activities

Practitioners and researchers often refer to “prosocial activities” when discussing the experiences of youth, but the term is rarely defined in a thorough or practical sense. A review of the literature presents varying definitions of the concept of “prosocial”. Xue, Zimmerman, & Caldwell (2007), for example, broadly define prosocial activities as any activity “associated with organized groups that can help children and adolescents develop skills.” With this definition, it is the structure of the activity (organized and in groups) and the intended outcomes (skill development) that make an activity prosocial. In contrast, researchers such as Eisenberg and Mussen (1989) and Bierhoff (2002) more narrowly define prosocial activities as specific, voluntary actions that are intended to help others. Using this definition, some studies, such as those from Eccles and Barber (1999) and Barber, Eccles and Stone (2001), consider prosocial to be a specific category of activities in which a youth can participate, in contrast to sports, arts, school involvement, and other categories of activities. Examples of activities that these authors consider prosocial include church groups and volunteering. Lam (2012) and Siu, Shek, and Law (2013) offer a different perspective, discussing the concept of prosocial involvement in relation to the notion of prosocial norms. These are the “standard and clear

### Protective Factors

Protective factors are the strengths all youths and their families have that help them succeed in difficult times. Having a strong sense of self, self-regulation skills, positive peers, and a positive school environment are all examples of protective factors that can serve as a “buffer” from delinquency and other risky behavior (Development Services Group, 2013). Young people with multiple protective factors will be better equipped to respond to negative experiences, such as maltreatment or system involvement, than youth with few protective factors. Conversely, risk factors such as substance use and poor academic performance can contribute to the increased likelihood of delinquency. Prosocial activities are one way that child-serving agencies can support the development of protective factors and promote resiliency and self-sufficiency among system-involved youth.

beliefs which point to the shared expectations of behaviors in society that are considered healthy, ethical, culturally desirable, and appropriate” (Lam, 2012). Therefore, prosocial activities are those that help an individual develop and understand prosocial norms.

This issue brief and the CYPM adopt a broader definition of “prosocial,” similar to those of Xue et al., (2007); Lam (2012); and Sui, Shek, & Law (2013). By this definition, prosocial activities refer to those activities that offer children and adolescents a structured and organized means to develop new skills, grow supportive relationships, and become aware of and understand social and moral norms. These can include, but are not limited to, activities such as: sports, arts programs, mentoring programs, and religious activities. This broad definition reflects the benefit of participating in an activity that offers opportunities for personal and social growth, notwithstanding a youth’s intention to help others. Because of the social cost of antisocial behavior (e.g., the financial cost of services or public safety concerns), positive personal benefits stemming from prosocial activities can have ancillary social benefits as well.

This issue brief will also use the term “extracurricular activity” to refer to any activity that occurs outside of a traditional academic curriculum (e.g., classes in math, science, literature, social studies). Extracurricular activities do not need to be structured and can occur within the school setting or in the community and home. These activities may also include certain elective academic classes such as art, music, or woodshop that may not be available as in-school opportunities in all jurisdictions. Not every extracurricular activity meets the definition of prosocial outlined above and can refer to such unstructured acts as watching television, reading a book, or spending time with friends. The next section will, in part, discuss why some activities fit this definition for prosocial activities while others may have no impact or even increase risk factors for system-involved youth.

**“It was the center of her life, and she lost that”**

In 2011, Rachel\* was living at a juvenile detention facility in a specialized housing unit for crossover youth separate from the facility’s general population. Shay Bilchik, director of the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, met Rachel at one of the facility’s town hall forums for system-involved youth and the adults in their lives.

“She understood exactly why she had to be taken away from her parents. She understood the abuse and the negative situation at home,” Shay recalled. “What she didn’t understand was why the experience afterwards was so bad.” Like so many maltreated youth, Rachel moved between foster families and group homes outside of the community in which she had grown up. In addition to the persistent placement changes, the new rules and expectations of being in *The System* made it difficult for Rachel to stay in touch with her friends and contacts from her old community. All of the new changes in her life also made it difficult for her to do one of her favorite activities: playing sports.

“She just wanted to play lacrosse,” continued Shay, “She was a lacrosse player. It’s what she loved doing. It’s where she formed her friendships. It was the center of her life, and she lost that.” Without her family, friends, and now her favorite activity – something that was a central component of her identity – the sense of normalcy and stability of her life was gone. Despite having otherwise low risk factors and no prior history of delinquency, Rachel began acting out. For the first time in her life, she started getting in trouble at school and spending more time with a rougher crowd. Prior to coming to the detention center, Rachel was charged as an accessory to a robbery.

When Shay remembers Rachel, he thinks about her love of lacrosse and how systems can make life harder for young people in unintended ways. No one can say that Rachel’s life would have been different if she was able to keep playing lacrosse. Yet, even with the significant challenges and instability in Rachel’s life, lacrosse may have been one simple way to help her feel familiar, in control, and hopeful for her future.

\*Names have been changed to protect privacy. Story as told by Shay Bilchik.

**I. The Protective Potential of Prosocial Activities**

For crossover youth, the protective factors associated with prosocial activities may serve as an important counterweight to the risk factors associated with childhood maltreatment and delinquency. Involvement in prosocial activities has been associated with improved education outcomes, reduced delinquency, improved behavioral health outcomes, enhanced positive social relationships, identity development, and civic engagement (Peck, Roesner, Zarrett, & Eccles, 2008; Mahoney, Larson, Eccles, & Lord, 2005; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000; Larson, 1994 as cited in Larson, 2000). This section will discuss the mechanisms through which prosocial activities may support these protective factors and relate to youth development and delinquent behavior. Practitioners and policy makers should consider these findings when evaluating local extracurricular programs as potential activities for system-involved youth.

**Normalizing Adolescence**

Perhaps the simplest way that engagement in prosocial activities can benefit system-involved youth is by providing a sense of normalcy for young people in difficult environments. Normalcy, in this setting, is defined as “age- and developmentally- appropriate activities and experiences that allow children and youth to grow” (Pokempner, Modcai, Rosado, Subrahmanyam, 2015). Activities that support normalcy are ones typically associated with adolescence (e.g., playing sports, seeing friends, going on dates, having a job, joining clubs) that help a young person develop a sense of who they are and how they want to engage in the community around them.

System-involved youth may have fewer family or community connections from which they can draw resources and support in difficult times. Activities supporting normalcy help youth develop a social network of coaches, adults, employers, and peers that comprise an important support structure for youth to rely upon on a daily basis and in times of need. This support may come in the form of advice, study partners, someone to play with, a temporary housing option, a money lender, or other necessities when needed. With these support structures in place, young people are in a better position to achieve permanency and become self-sufficient as they grow out of adolescence (Compas, Hinden & Gerhart, 1995). Prosocial opportunities for system-involved youth should be encouraged and facilitated whenever possible, as a means of developing these support structures. Unfortunately, system involvement often results in the opposite situation, constructing legal or structural barriers that make it burdensome or even impossible for these youths to participate in prosocial activities and other normalcy experiences. This can cause youth to feel “different” or “socially excluded” from their peers when they are unable to participate in these activities (Pokempner, et al., 2015).

The normal activities associated with growing up, whether it is learning to drive a car, taking trips, or dating, are all associated with some level of risk. Sports injuries, car accidents, and even dating violence are all potential, if unlikely, outcomes. For most young people, they and their families assume these risks after reasonable consideration. Child-serving agencies and placement providers, however, are understandably risk-averse when it comes to the safety and protection of their clients. Responding to these challenges, the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 requires states to adopt a reasonable and prudent parenting standard to support normalcy for foster care youth. This standard is “characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain a child’s health, safety, and best interests while at the same time encouraging the child’s emotional and developmental growth, that a caregiver shall use when determining whether to allow a child in the care of the caregiver to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities” (Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014). In addition to implementing the reasonable and prudent parenting standard, the Act requires states to develop training sessions for caregivers and foster parents and set liability limits in the implementation of this standard.

While many of the law’s requirements were fully implemented in September 2015, states must continue to monitor and support their child welfare agencies’ commitment to normalcy through training and technical assistance opportunities. Agency staff should work with caregivers to ensure that they understand this standard and consider the concept of normalcy when caring for young people. In this regard, prosocial activities can be provided to system-involved youth with limited liability to the agency or risk to the youth’s safety. By facilitating youth participation in these activities, agencies are helping these young people develop a sense of normalcy in a challenging situation that can have far-reaching implications on a youth’s permanency and other life outcomes.

### **Leisure Time**

Another explanation for the protective qualities of extracurricular activities is that they keep youth engaged during free time when they otherwise could be engaged in delinquent behavior. Barnes, Hoffman, Welte, Farrell and Dintcheff (2007) refer to this as the “idle hands are the devil’s workshop’ philosophy of the occurrence of deviant behavior.” This theory asserts that, if the youth is sufficiently engaged in time-consuming activities, they will have difficulty finding the time or opportunity to engage in delinquent behavior. Agnew and Petersen (1989) are critical of this theory, however, noting that even high-level offenders may only spend a few hours a year on delinquent activity, and that “few adolescents are so heavily involved in leisure activities that they cannot, if they so desire, find the time for delinquency.”

While limiting free time may have some impact on delinquency and risky behavior, it is too simple to suggest that the presence of free time in and of itself is a risk factor of delinquency. How that youth chooses to occupy their time outside of school and structured activities is also important. Barnes et al. (2007) studied the connection between various leisure activities and the likelihood of several “problem behaviors,” which included delinquency; sexual activity; and tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug use. Some of the activities that most encapsulate the notion of “free time” had no observed impact on delinquency. Time spent watching TV, for example, had no impact on the aforementioned problem behaviors. Time spent relaxing alone was positively associated with drug use and sexual activity but had no significant association — positive or negative — with delinquency. Only unsupervised time spent with peers was significantly and positively associated with all five-problem behaviors. This finding is in line with those of other researchers, including Osgood and Anderson’s (2004) finding that unsupervised time with peers while simply “hanging out” is a significant contributor to risky behavior in adolescence. This research indicates that the “idle hands” philosophy is not a sufficient explanation of delinquent behavior. Even when youth are participating in extracurricular activities, there is little evidence that increasing the length of time spent engaging in these programs is the key to positive outcomes (Cross, Gottfredson, Wilson, Rorie, & Connell, 2010; Simpkins-Chaput & Weiss, 2004). After-school activities, therefore, need to do more than simply fill a youth’s time in order to have a direct prosocial impact.

Despite this research, there are still identifiable benefits to occupying a youth’s time with extracurricular activities. Adolescence is a period of intense psychosocial development in which a young person is highly responsive to the environment and stresses around them (Ferrer, 2016). “If we expose our young people to positive and supportive environments, they will flourish. But if the environments are toxic, they will suffer in powerful and enduring ways” (Steinberg, 2014 as quoted in Ferrer, 2016). For youth who experience these toxic environments at home or in their community, extracurricular activities may provide a much needed respite for a few hours each day.

### Positive Peer Associations

Prosocial activities should connect youth to positive peers in a supervised environment. As noted by Barnes et al. (2007) and Osgood and Anderson (2004), unsupervised time with peers is associated with several risky or problem behaviors in adolescence, including delinquency. While friendship and connection to peers are both a normal part of growing up and should be supported, practitioners and policy makers need to be aware of the potential side effects of unsupervised and unstructured contact with high-risk peers. Research on adolescent development and criminology calls this phenomenon “peer contagion,” which is defined as “a mutual process that occurs between an individual and a peer and includes behaviors and emotions that potentially undermine one’s own development or cause harm to others” (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011). One mechanism of peer contagion that has gained traction among adolescent development researchers is deviancy training:

*Deviancy training occurs when a peer displays antisocial behavior or talks about it and other peers positively reinforce that behavior by smiling or giving verbal approval and high status to the first peer. A youth observes this norm and then engages in similar talk or behavior, which is also reinforced. Soon, the youth is drawn into the peer culture and becomes more deviant (Dodge, Dishion, & Lansford, 2006).*

Deviancy training can occur when youth of varying risk levels are grouped together, allowing these youth to reinforce and normalize their behavior. Peer contagion occurs in both everyday settings (e.g.,

in the classroom, during leisure time with friends) and in treatment settings in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Juvenile correction settings are environments that are particularly conducive for peers to bond over their delinquent histories and learn new forms of delinquent behavior. For child welfare-involved youth, peer contagion in group homes appears likely, as well. Youth in these settings have more reported contact with delinquent peers and are more likely to engage in problem behavior than their peers placed with foster families (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011; Leve & Chamberlain, 2005). Strategies for combating peer contagion include reducing the use of group placements, increasing supervision during treatment, avoiding groups of high-risk youth, avoiding mixing low-risk youth with their high-risk peers, and involving youth in prosocial activities (Utah Criminal Justice Center, 2010).

The research of Eccles & Barber (1999) investigates how extracurricular involvement is associated with certain peer characteristics. The researchers surveyed 1,259 10th and 12th graders from Michigan about their participation in different activities, risky behaviors (i.e., drinking, skipping school, and using drugs), academic outcomes, and peer group characteristics. Their findings support the research on peer contagion and positive peer relationships outlined above. Table 1 shows the relationship between a youth’s type of extracurricular involvement and the characteristics of their peer group. A plus sign (+) or negative sign (-) indicates whether it was more or less likely that the peers of a youth who participated in an activity exhibited a characteristic compared to the peers of youth that did not participate in that activity. A star (\*) indicates no significant difference in peer characteristics.

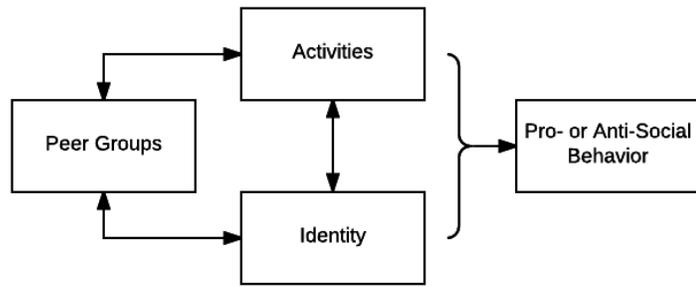
Table 1: Peer Characteristics by Extracurricular Activities <sup>2</sup>	Planning for College	Doing Well in School	Drinking Regularly	Using Drugs	Skipping Class
Church and Volunteering	+	+	-	-	-
Sports Teams	+	*	+	*	*
Performing Arts	+	+	-	-	*
School Involvement	+	+	*	*	*
Academic Clubs	+	+	*	*	*

Source: Eccles & Barber (1999)

Involvement in these extracurricular activities was largely associated with having a peer group that was more likely to exhibit positive academic characteristics. There was largely no difference or reduction in the risky behavior for the peers of youth that participated in these activities. Only student athletes were more likely to have friends that drank regularly than those students that did not participate in team sports (Eccles & Barber, 1999). A 2007 study of urban youth reinforces the findings of Eccles & Barber (1999) and extends it further, indicating that involvement in prosocial activities reduced the likelihood both of having friends who engaged in antisocial behavior and of personally participating in delinquent behavior (Kaufmann, Wyman, Forbes-Jones, & Barry, 2007).

<sup>2</sup>As discussed above, Eccles and Barber classify Church and Volunteering Activities as being prosocial. The name of this category was therefore changed to avoid confusion in the definition of “prosocial.” Examples of school involvement activities include cheerleading and student government. Examples of academic clubs include the chess club or debate team.

Appropriately designed activities can counteract the peer contagion effect by connecting youth with positive friends and adults in a structured and supervised environment. An important element of these prosocial activities is the disaggregation of at-risk youth to allow this population to be positively influenced by their peers. Inappropriately structured activities, such as unstructured and unsupervised time at recreation centers or at after-school programs that target high-risk youth, may further aggregate at-risk youth and increase the impact of peer contagion.



**Figure 2: Activities, Peers, and Social Identity as Contributors to Pro/Antisocial Behavior**

### Developing Social and Group Identity

Beyond the structural elements that contribute to risk or protective factors (e.g., how much free time they occupy, the level of adult supervision, the peer groups they assemble), extracurricular activities can also have an impact on a young person’s sense of identity and place in the social structure of their environment (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001). “Jocks”, “Band Geeks,” “Theater Kids,” and “Gamers,” are all examples of social labels and identities that arise from different activities. These identities help youth develop a sense of belonging among their peers. Social identities and peer groups can contribute to changes in the way that youth interact with their environments, from the way they dress to their proclivity for risky behavior (Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007; Barber, Stone, Hunt, & Eccles, 2005; Newman & Newman, 2001; Eccles & Barber, 1999). It is also likely that these social identities contribute to the perceptions of youth held by the adults in their lives, including decision makers in child welfare and juvenile justice cases. For example, recent media attention has questioned whether or not a young person’s status as a “student athlete” can result in lighter sentences in the criminal justice system (Gagnon & Grinberg, 2016). While there is scant research supporting this theory (Benedict & Klein, 1997), it is not implausible that other social and group identities could have an influence, either positive or negative, on important decision makers.

The previously mentioned research of Eccles & Barber (1999) and Barber, Eccles, & Stone (2001) investigated how extracurricular involvement contributes to social identity and how these identities can be predictive of risky behavior and future academic and personal outcomes. In surveying Michigan 10th and 12th graders about their peers, academic outcomes, extracurricular activities, and risky behavior, the authors also asked the students about their perceived identity groupings. For identity groups, students could select from the five stereotypical archetypes presented in the popular movie *The Breakfast Club*: the Princess, the Jock, the Brain, the Basket Case,<sup>3</sup> and the Criminal. The results of these surveys indicate that the types of after-school activity a young person participated in was associated with different identity groups. Not surprisingly, the most significant association was between participation on sports teams and self-identification as a Jock. The Princess group was overrepresented in the performing arts and school-involved activities, and the Brain identity was overrepresented in church and/or volunteering activities. The Criminal and the Basket Case groups had low participation in every activity with the exception of team sports and performing arts, respectively (Eccles & Barber, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> While the archetypes of the Brain, Criminal, Jock and Princess have descriptive names, even for those who have not seen the film, the Basket Case is less self-explanatory. In the film, the character who embodies the Basket Case is characterized as being withdrawn or feeling like an outsider, while also exhibiting artistic strengths. In more modern terminology, this young person may describe him or herself as being “alternative.”

These identities were also associated with differing risk and protective factors. As the name indicates, students who identified as the Criminal were more likely to exhibit risky behavior in high school. Among 12th graders, Criminals, Jocks, and Princesses were more likely to drink alcohol and Jocks and Criminals were more likely to regularly get drunk. Criminals were most likely to skip school while Brains were least likely to do so. Criminals were also the most likely to use marijuana and hard drugs. However, these identity categories were not significantly associated with how much a youth liked school, and, while Brains were the most likely to have a high grade point average, there was little difference in this category among Princesses, Jocks, Basket Cases and Criminals (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Barber et al. (2001) used these same social categories to track students' life outcomes two and six years following high school graduation. Their findings reflect the potential long-term impact of adolescent activities, peer groups, and social identity. Brains were most likely to graduate from college, followed, in order, by Princesses, Jocks, Basket Cases, and Criminals. Basket Cases, on the other hand, reported the highest level of social isolation, followed by Princesses, Brains, Criminals, and finally Jocks. Basket Cases also reported the lowest self-esteem of all the identities.

This use of *Breakfast Club* identity markers suggests a noteworthy relationship between a young person's voluntary activities, social groups, and identity. Eccles and Barber (1999) indicate that there may be, at the very least, a predictive relationship between a youth's activities and his or her peer group and sense of identity, even if a causal relationship is not clear. While an after-school activity may introduce a young person to his or her peer group, it is equally likely that a youth is drawn to that activity because it is popular among their existing peers. Figure 2 above illustrates a relationship in which activities, peer groups, and identity are mutually reinforcing and contribute to pro- or antisocial behavior. Practitioners working with young people must be mindful of how certain activities can contribute to more or less risky friend groups and social identities. Additionally, practitioners should be aware of how a youth's behaviors or identity may draw them to, or be impacted by, certain activities. Youth who struggle with alcohol use, for example, may want to avoid team sports, which is associated with participants and peers who drink more regularly.

### Adolescent Development and Skill Building

Thus far, this review has discussed several pathways through which extracurricular activities are associated with delinquency and other risk or protective factors. These pathways encompass both discrete ways in which activities impact a youth's life (e.g., a youth's free time or the peers they see on a regular basis), as well as more intangible ways (e.g., does the activity help a youth feel normal or contribute to a sense of identity). More broadly, however, is the way that these activities, and the risk/protective factors that come with them, may contribute to the development of emotional and social skills during an intense period of personal growth.

Adolescence is a critically important time in the growth of a young person. It is a time of intense physiological, cognitive, and psychosocial growth, second only to early childhood (Ferrer, 2016; Steinberg, 2014; Stiles & Jernigan, 2010). The changes that occur during this time are far reaching in many areas of a youth's life. The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine's Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth's report *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (2002) summarizes some of the major life developments that occur during adolescence:

*Probably most dramatic are the biological changes associated with puberty. These biological transitions are linked to changes in sexual interest, as well as to changes in both cognitive and physical capacities and emotional well-being. There are also major social changes associated with both school transitions and shifts in the roles that*

*adolescents are expected to assume as they mature. Finally, there are major psychological changes linked to increasing social and cognitive maturity.*

This period of rapid change provides both opportunities and risks. The emotional and social skills that a youth builds through the course of adolescence, if developed and nurtured, may be a protective factor against delinquency and other high-risk behavior. Conversely, failing to capitalize on this period of intense development and growth may over time increase the risk of negative outcomes. Prosocial activities are one way to capitalize on the opportunities of this period. While family life, schools, peers and other factors contribute to the development of these skills, time spent engaging in leisure activities is also important. Extracurricular activities may serve “as an opportunity for young persons to learn and develop competencies that are largely neglected by schools (Mahoney et al., 2005).” Supporting a youth’s involvement in prosocial activities can supplement the skill building and development that is occurring in other settings.

Research suggests that engagement in extracurricular activities can enhance adolescent development of personal and social skills (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Participation in organized activities is associated with several positive psychosocial adjustments, including lower levels of depression and anxiety, higher self-efficacy and willingness to strive for long-term goals, and higher self-esteem (Mahoney et al., 2005). The Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth’s (2002) report concluded that “continued exposure to positive experiences, settings, and people, as well as opportunities to gain and refine life skills” can support the enhancement of a youth’s physical, intellectual, social, and psychological and emotional development. While organized activities can support development in these domains, they must be appropriately conceived, organized, and implemented to do so. The Committee’s report identified eight features as being critical for supporting positive youth development, listed with the Committee’s corresponding descriptors below (The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002):

- **Physical and Psychological Safety:** “Safe and health-promoting facilities; practice that increases safe peer group interaction and decreases unsafe or confrontational peer interactions.”
- **Developmentally Appropriate Structure:** “Limit setting; clear and consistent rules; firm-enough control; continuity and predictability; clear boundaries; and age-appropriate monitoring.”
- **Supportive Relationships:** “Warmth; closeness; connectedness; good communication; caring; support; guidance; secure attachment; and responsiveness.”
- **Opportunities to Belong:** “Opportunities for meaningful inclusion, regardless of one’s gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disabilities; social inclusion, social engagement and integration; opportunities for socio-cultural identity formation; and support for cultural and bicultural competence.”
- **Opportunities to Develop Social Values and Norms:** “Rules of behavior; expectations; injunctions; ways of doing things; values and morals; and obligation for service.”

- **Opportunities to Develop Self-Efficacy:** “Youth-based; empowerment practices that support autonomy; making a real difference in one’s community; and being taken seriously. Practices that include enabling; responsibility granting; and meaningful challenge. Practices that focus on improvement rather than on relative current performance levels.”
- **Opportunities for Skill Building:** “Opportunities to learn physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional and social skills; exposure to intentional learning experiences; opportunities to learn cultural literacies, media literacy, communication skills, and good habits of mind; preparation for adult employment; and opportunities to develop social and cultural capital.”
- **Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts:** “Concordance; coordination; and synergy among family, school, and community.”

Programs and extracurricular activities that are not deliberate in offering these opportunities and factors may miss the chance to bolster adolescent development and may even have harmful outcomes. These types of programs may be disruptive or unstructured, opening youth up to connect with peers who can reinforce negative or antisocial behavior. To facilitate positive adolescent growth, communities should support a wide option of programs and activities that are developmentally appropriate and deliberately work to offer opportunities for emotional, social, and intellectual growth.

Figure 3 depicts the relationship between prosocial activities and the factors that support positive youth development and prevention opportunities. There is no singular mechanism by which these activities have a positive impact on youth. Rather, it is the combination of ancillary outcomes associated with these activities (i.e., normalcy, social connections, identity development, leisure time, and skill building) that contribute to a youth’s development. As the next section will discuss, individual prosocial activities may not be sufficient interventions for delinquency alone. Rather, the positive effects of these activities are likely magnified when offered in combination with more traditional psychosocial treatment. Child-serving agencies should approach prosocial activities as a means of supporting the social and behavioral goals of a youth’s case plan and traditional treatment strategy.

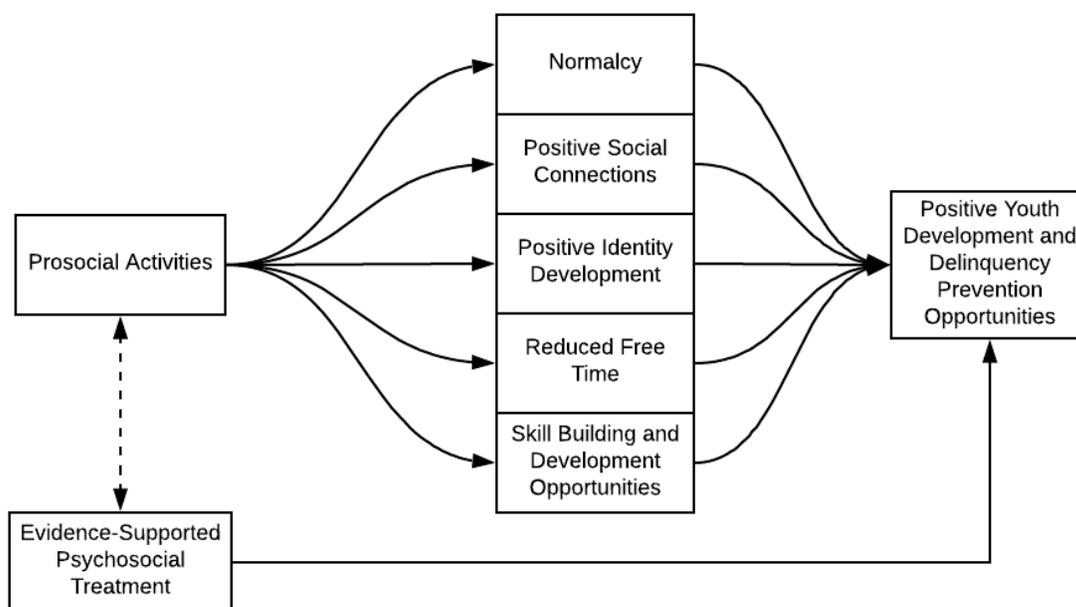


Figure 3: How Prosocial Activities Support Positive Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention

## II. What the Research Says About Different Activities

Not all extracurricular activities provide the same level of protective factors to youth. In fact, some activities may contribute to detrimental outcomes and antisocial behavior. Mahoney, Stattin and Lord (2004) summarize the research on the social and structural makeup of various extracurricular activities for youth: “Beneficial out-of-school activities tend to be structured in that they are rule-bound and goal oriented, emphasize conventional skill building, feature adult supervision and guidance, and provide a context of belongingness and positive peer relationships.” Alternatively, unstructured out-of-school activities, such as participation in community recreation centers, may be associated with higher levels of substance use, antisocial attitudes, and involvement with an adverse peer group (Mahoney et al., 2005). This section will review the literature on specific categories of extracurricular and organized activities, focusing on the associated risks and benefits of each type.<sup>4</sup>

### After-School Recreation

After-school recreation programs, unlike the more focused extracurricular activities discussed below, can be characterized by their heterogeneity. These programs offer a comprehensive array of activities including games, sports, music, field trips, homework help, and community service (Kremer, Maynard, Polanin, Vaughn, & Sarteschi, 2015; Halpern, 1999). These programs grew, in part, from a belief that youth need a safe place to go after school in the face of growing urban crime and more working parents leaving kids unsupervised at home (Mahoney, Parente, & Zigler, 2009). Therefore, skill building and adolescent development is not an inherent goal of these programs, although many do emphasize opportunities to engage at-risk youth (Kremer et al., 2015). The YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, and community recreation are popular examples of these programs.

The literature on the prosocial impact of these programs is mixed. Some evaluations of Boys and Girls Clubs, for example, show improvement among participating youth related to academic achievement,

<sup>4</sup> These categories (after school recreation, mentoring, sports and athletics, arts, and religious activities) were selected due to their inclusion in the CYPM Research Component Handbook. This handbook is the foundation of the CYPM evaluation process designed to demonstrate the system- and case-level changes in communities implementing the CYPM.

substance use, and other prosocial behaviors (Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Ferrari, 2003; St. Pierre, Mark, Latreider, & Campbell, 2001). These improvements were identified in youth participating in unstructured activities as well as more targeted prosocial programming. On the other hand, a meta-analysis of 24 program evaluations by Kremer et al. (2015) finds insignificant evidence that after-school recreation programs on the whole improve school attendance or externalized behavioral problems among at-risk youth. A similar meta-analysis by Taheri & Welsh (2015) finds no significant impact on delinquency prevention. Programs that are unstructured (i.e., community recreation centers) may even attract youth with tendencies towards antisocial behavior as they seek an escape from the adult supervision of school and home, thus creating an environment for peer contagion to take hold (Mahoney et al., 2004).

There are some important lessons to take from this research. In response to the findings in their meta-analysis, Kremer et al. (2015) write, “After school programs are expected to affect numerous outcomes, but attempt to do so without being intentional in the program elements and mechanisms they implement.” The authors discuss the need for programs that utilize evidence-based theories of change to support positive youth outcomes. Moreover, while delinquency prevention may be too lofty a goal for after-school recreation programs, those that specifically focus on developing social competency may be successful in reducing problem behavior (Gottfredson, Soulé, & Cross, 2004 as cited in Taheri & Welsh, 2015). Based on the findings of this research, practitioners looking for after-school recreation opportunities for the system-involved youth they serve should seek out those with sufficient adult supervision as well as some level of targeted programming for prosocial improvements.

## **Mentoring**

Mentoring programs connect youth to non-family adult mentors who can provide supports similar to those of a parent. For child-welfare involved youth, mentors can provide important emotional and social support, guidance and instruction, and even financial assistance that the youth’s parents are unable or unwilling to provide (Jekielek, Moore, Hair & Scarupa, 2002). A meta-analysis of 73 evaluations of mentorship programs supports the “effectiveness of mentoring for improving outcomes across behavioral, social, emotional, and academic domains” (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). These benefits appear to be consistent across the age of the mentee, the age of the mentor, and the format (one-on-one or group settings), suggesting that multiple types of mentoring programs can support youth development (DuBois et al., 2011). However, as with other prosocial activities, structure still matters. Mentoring programs are more successful when they are community-based, match youth and mentors based on similar interests, target at-risk youth, and continue for over one year (Lawner, Beltz, & Moore, 2013; DuBois et al., 2011). Youth that had only brief contact with a mentor actually present lower levels of confidence and self-worth (Jekielek et al., 2002). For these youth, their brief relationship with a mentor likely leaves them feeling abandoned once again by the adults in their lives.

A 2002 report by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) lists mentoring as one of four promising intervention strategies to reduce youth violence. However, the CDC does note that, while the research around mentoring programs is promising, there is still limited data to support their level of effectiveness and that “more rigorous and systematic evaluations are still needed” (Thornton, Craft, Dahlberg, Lynch, & Baer, 2002). DuBois et al. (2011) agree that few studies have explicitly reviewed the impact of mentoring on delinquency. Those that do, however, suggest that mentoring programs are “potentially promising crime-prevention approaches” (Sullivan & Jolliffe, 2012). Therefore, even though mentoring programs appear to support multiple protective factors for at-risk youth, their

function as a delinquency prevention tool has not been reviewed with the same level of rigor. Nevertheless, mentoring emerges from the literature as a promising prosocial activity for at-risk or system-involved youth.

## Sports and Athletics

The National Federation of State High School Associations (2017) estimates that 7.9 million high school students participate in sports programs across the country. Despite the popularity of these programs, the extensive research of their prosocial impact is mixed. Several studies have correlated sports participation with physical, emotional, and social development and improved self-confidence (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2007; Donaldson & Ronan, 2006). However, other researchers have noted negative correlations in these areas, potentially reflecting poorly designed programs that are too serious or competitive and otherwise lack enjoyment (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2007). In regards to academic achievement, college attendance, and college graduation, the impact of athletics is similarly mixed (Hwang, Feltz, Kietzmann, & Diemer, 2016; Rasberry, Lee, Robin, Laris, Russell, Coyle, & Nihiser, 2011; Taras, 2005; Barber et al., 2001). While students who play sports may be more likely to attend college after high school, college graduation rates suggest that this may be a short-term effect (Barber et al., 2001; Eccles & Barber, 1999).

The specific relationship between athletics and delinquent behavior is similarly inconclusive. Veliz and Shakib (2017) find that involvement in sports is associated with lower levels of serious crime in schools, potentially due to an increase in school pride and connections to peers. Agnew & Peterson (1989) indicate that non-competitive sports (e.g., swimming, jogging, bike riding, etc.) are associated with reduced delinquency, but Begg et al. (1996) identify an increased risk of delinquency with similar activities. In regards to participating in team and/or competitive sports, a review of the literature largely reveals no significant association between playing sports and delinquency and in some instances may even be associated with an increased risk of delinquency (Gardner, Roth, Brooks-Gunn, 2009; Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Sabo, & Farrell, 2006; Begg et al., 1996; Agnew & Peterson, 1989). Explanations for this increased risk of delinquency vary. It may be that certain contact sports tolerate and normalize violent behavior or that the adulation of athletes by their peers contributes to an increased social status and feelings that athletes are above the rules of the community (Kreager, 2007; Miller et al., 2006). Additionally, student athletes are more likely to have friends that exhibit risky behavior (See Table 1), recalling the aforementioned peer contagion effect on delinquency (Gardner et al., 2009; Eccles & Barber, 1999).

Research by Garner et al. (2009) does find that students engaged in sports still have lower rates of delinquency than youth that do not engage in any extracurricular activities, even if their odds of delinquency are higher than youth involved in other, non-athletic activities. While sports might not be a strong delinquency prevention activity, it is possible that combining sports with other prosocial activities and treatments can serve as a delinquency prevention method. One program that appears to do this well is “Becoming a Man – Sports Edition” (BAM), a combination of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and “non-traditional sports,” which include boxing, wrestling, archery, and other non-team sports. These activities encourage participants to apply what they learned in CBT sessions about self-control and methods of properly channeling their aggression (Prochaska, 2014). In a randomized-control study of “medium-risk” students in Chicago Public Schools, students that participated in BAM showed a 36-44% reduction in violent crime and other arrests during the year they participated in the program (Heller, Pollack, Ander, & Ludwig, 2013). BAM’s success suggests that sports specifically structured to improve “social-cognitive skills” (e.g., conflict management,

emotional regulation), with oversight by trained coaches and mentors and in combination with matched, evidence-based treatments, can be effective in preventing delinquent behavior.

## Arts

Art programs allow youth to express themselves artistically via visual or performing arts (Agnew & Peterson, 1989). Participation in art programs, particularly those that meet in groups, has the potential to encourage youth development in several ways: 1) helping young people gain confidence through learning new skills; 2) creating an environment where it is acceptable and safe to share feelings; 3) encouraging risk-taking among supportive peers and mentors; and 4) exposing youth to productive feedback and insight into how they are seen by themselves and others (Horowitz, 1980).

A great deal of the research on the prosocial implications of art is in the form of art therapy evaluations. These evaluations suggest that art therapy is generally, but not uniformly, effective in improving social skills, behavior problems, self-esteem, and other psychosocial factors (Reynolds, Nabors, & Quinlan, 2000). Art therapy seems particularly effective in improving self-esteem and coping mechanisms among victims of abuse and trauma. In a study of juvenile justice-involved girls, a population characterized by high rates of post-traumatic stress (Dierkhising, Ko, Woods-Jaeger, Briggs, Lee, & Pynoos, 2013), art therapy was found to raise participants' self-esteem, self-awareness, and social connections (Hartz & Thick, 2005).

Community- and school-based arts programs, without the formal therapeutic component, are similarly promising in their impact on prosocial development. Among young children, community-based and culturally relevant art programs can enhance self-esteem and social skills, and art instruction in schools may help students visualize the impact of prosocial and antisocial actions (Wright, Alaggia, & Krygsman, 2013; Bickley-Green, 2007; Mason & Chuang, 2001). As with other prosocial activities, art programs appear particularly impactful when their structure and curriculum targets specific academic, social, or behavioral improvements (Rapp-Paglicci, Stewart, & Rowe, 2011; Heath & Roach, 1999; Hamblen, 1993). More specifically, art programs that target delinquency prevention appear to be promising approaches for mitigating youth violence (Kisiel, Blaustein, Spinazzola, Schmidt, Zuker, & van der Kolk, 2006; Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003; Heath & Roach, 1998 as cited in Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003). While art as a delinquency prevention tool could benefit from further research, the existing literature suggests that it is a promising prosocial activity for at-risk or system-involved youth.

## Religious Activity

Religious activities, which may include worship services, studying religious text, or faith-based camps, have an intuitive connection to prosocial growth. The religious teaching of empathy and forgiveness, as well as the community and social presence of religious institutions, would all seem to have a protective effect on religious young people (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). Indeed, religious youth are associated with increased prosocial behavior and altruism, lower levels of substance use, and positive peer connections (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Salas-Wright, Vaughn, Hodge, & Perron, 2012; Furrow, King, & White, 2004; Marsiglia, Kulis, Nieri, & Parsai, 2005). While early research on the subject identified no connection between religion and delinquency (Hirschi & Stark, 1969), subsequent evaluations find a consistent, albeit modest, association between religion and a reduction in delinquency (Johnson, De Li, Larson, & McCullough, 2000). Religion may even affect the types of delinquency youth engage in when they do break the law. A study of older youth and young adults admitted to an Arkansas Department of Corrections boot camp discovered that religious

inmates were less likely to carry weapons, sell or use illicit drugs, and commit violent crimes prior to arriving at the boot camp (Benda, 2002).

There is no straightforward explanation for why religion and delinquency may be associated. While some researchers point to the moral teachings of religion, others emphasize the social connection and cultural capital that comes with religious participation (Koenig et al., 2001; Smith, 2003; Johnson, Jang, De Li, & Larson, 2000). Several scholars have proposed that it is the religious context of the community that matters, not necessarily personal religious devotion (i.e., a religious youth is protected from delinquency only in religious communities and not in similar secular communities), but others have contested this theory (Stark, Kent, & Doyle, 1982; Chadwick & Top, 1993). One theme in the literature is that religious devotion or religiosity is a better predictor of prosocial behavior and delinquency prevention than participation in religious activities (e.g., Elifson, Peterson, & Hadaway, 1983). This means that simply going to church does not seem to have the same prosocial benefit for youth that are nonbelievers.

In terms of programs that systems can provide, there is some evidence that religious interventions in correctional institutions, such as Bible study and religious mentoring for inmates, have a modest and beneficial impact on recidivism (Sumter, 2006; Johnson, 2004; Johnson & Larson, 2003). Unfortunately, the research on the impact of these programs in the juvenile justice population is scant. One evaluation of faith-based programs for youth in a Texas Youth Commission correctional facility found that while there was no significant difference in recidivism rates, program participants were typically rearrested on less serious charges than non-participants (Walsh, 2009). More research on religious interventions for the juvenile justice population is needed before their impact on delinquency and recidivism can be assessed with confidence. The child welfare and juvenile justice systems are not in a position to affect a youth's religiosity or spirituality, nor should these systems push synagogue, church, mosque, or other religious activity attendance/participation on youth who do not express a belief. Rather, systems should be prepared to facilitate their religious engagement if the youth expresses an interest. This may mean ensuring access to religious services for youth in custody or considering cultural and religious appropriateness in placement decisions.

### **How to Choose an Activity – Is it SAFE?**

This review of the literature presents a complex relationship between extracurricular activities, prosocial opportunities, and delinquency. While some activities appear more promising (i.e. mentoring, art, religion) than others, each present their own opportunities and risks. There is no clear evidence that any extracurricular activity is the “silver bullet” for preventing delinquent behavior or recidivism. Rather, activities appear more effective when paired with other evidence- or research-based child welfare and juvenile justice services, enhancing their protective and prosocial potential.

How does one know which individual program will have the most prosocial potential? Durlak & Weissberg (2007) recommend programs that are SAFE: sequenced, active, focused, and explicit. SAFE programs “[offer] a sequenced set of activities to achieve skill objectives...use active forms of learning...[focus] on developing personal or social skills... [and target] a specific personal or social skill.” In a recent meta-analysis of after-school programming, only SAFE programs yielded significant personal and social skill development among participants (Durlak, Weissber, & Pachan, 2010). Identifying programs that meet the criteria for SAFE is a useful starting point for anyone assessing potential activities for at-risk or system-involved youth.

## Questions to Ask When Considering Extracurricular Activities

Agency staff should seek to maintain or encourage involvement in prosocial activities. This may involve considering a variety of community programs and activities. Asking the following questions will help evaluate the prosocial nature of an extracurricular activity and its potential role in a youth's case plan.

- What does the youth like to do? Does this activity allow that youth to explore his or her interests? How does this activity fit with the youth's perceived identity?
- Is there a risk of harm for this youth? If so, is the risk greater than any reasonable and prudent parent would allow for a youth that is not system-involved?
- How much of the youth's leisure time will this occupy?
- How structured is this activity? Are there many opportunities for "down time," or will the youth be busy with tasks and actions?
- What is the level of adult supervision at this activity? How long is the youth supervised and what is the staff/participant ratio?
- Does this program target high-risk youth, or does it accommodate a diversity of youth and risk levels?
- What are the goals of this activity? Is this activity targeting a specific outcome (e.g., learning new skills, improving education outcomes, making new connections with positive adults)?
- Does this activity comply with the eight features of positive youth development identified by the Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth? (see page 12)
- Is this program SAFE (sequenced, active, focused, and explicit) as described below?
- What are the barriers for participating? Are there any eligibility, cost, or transportation issues that need to be addressed? Will participation interfere with other aspects of the youth's case plan?

### III. What the CYPM Recommends

The CYPM is a research- and strength-based approach to supporting the unique needs of crossover youth and the systems that serve them. At the core of the Model are the principles of multi-system collaboration and the empowerment of youth and families to be active partners in their cases. One of the intended outcomes of the Model is enhanced child well-being through positive youth development and prosocial opportunities for system-involved youth. Figure 4 depicts how elements of the CYPM support this outcome. By enhancing coordination across systems and developing an understanding of a family's specific needs and desires, child-serving systems are better able to support a youth's involvement in prosocial activities. This section discusses some specific considerations and practices for jurisdictions that wish to improve prosocial involvement for crossover youth. These considerations include activities specifically prescribed within the Crossover Youth Practice Model, as well as promising opportunities and solutions to common issues identified by CYPM authors and consultants working with CYPM jurisdictions across the country.

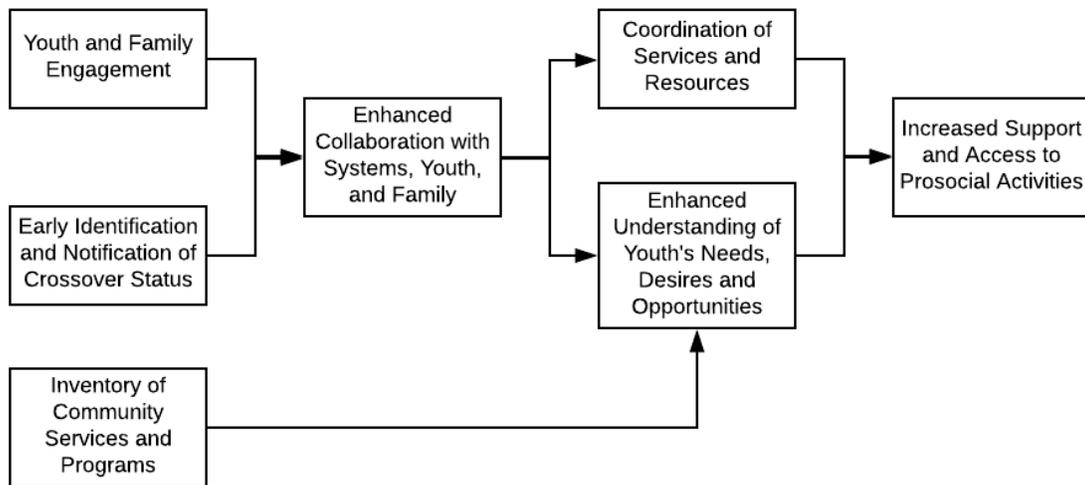


Figure 4: How the CYPM Supports Participation in Prosocial Activities

### Discuss Prosocial Opportunities as a Team

As stated above, the CYPM anticipates that implementation of the Model will result in an increase in positive youth development and prosocial opportunities for crossover youth (Stewart, Lutz, & Herz, 2010). This is achieved, in part, through a strength-based teaming process to identify the youth's extracurricular interests and the opportunities and resources needed to facilitate participation.

1. At family<sup>5</sup> team meetings, caseworkers and probations officers should periodically check in with youth, asking them about the current extracurricular or prosocial activities that bring them enjoyment. These activities should be supported as an opportunity to preserve normalcy during a disorienting period in a youth's life.
2. If a youth is not engaged in any prosocial activities, workers should interview these youth about the types of activities they enjoy in their leisure time. Workers should have an inventory of programs available in the community and make recommendations to the family about potential prosocial opportunities. When discussing potential activities, workers should consider the factors discussed above that make certain programs prosocial, including their structure, level of supervision, intended goals, and learning opportunities.
3. Agency staff, families, and placement providers should explicitly discuss the financial costs of participating in these programs. Many structured activities have significant equipment, travel, or other associated costs for participants. Should these costs exceed the Title IV-E, foster/kinship care monthly stipends or other supports provided to caregivers, the treatment team should explore options that allow funds to be blended or braided to support these activities.

### Ensure Continuity of Activities Across Placement and School Transitions

Additionally, the CYPM teaming process around charging decisions, case planning, and court recommendations provides more opportunities for crossover youth to remain in their communities and reduces the likelihood of education and placement instability (Herz & Fontaine, 2013). Keeping

<sup>5</sup> In keeping with the principles of the CYPM, the use of the word "family" in this section includes birth parents, kin caregivers, foster families, group home providers, fictive kin, and other trusted individuals committed to the wellbeing of the youth.

youth in a stable environment allows them to remain involved in their current prosocial activities and maintain positive social connections with coaches, mentors, and other caring adults.

1. If a new placement is necessary, the workers, placement providers, and youth should attempt to continue involvement in existing extracurricular activities. This will likely involve providing transportation to the youth's home school or community. If this is not possible, the parties should make a plan to ensure that the youth is enrolled in new activities as soon as possible.
2. In keeping with the goals of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, agencies should provide foster parents and caregivers with guidelines for when they can or cannot independently approve a youth's participation in extracurricular activities (see Washington State's Department of Social & Health Services "Caregiver Guidelines for Foster Childhood Activities" for an example of such a document. Available at: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/SESA/publications/documents/22-533.pdf>). While these guidelines should be in keeping with federal and state law, they should also include recommendations specific to the risk and court requirements of juvenile justice-involved youth.
3. Students that switch schools as a result of a placement change may be shy or uncomfortable in their new environment. The child welfare and juvenile justice agencies should be in touch with these schools and share as much information as is legal and appropriate on these youths' particular situations. Educators may need to provide additional encouragement and support to these students to get them to participate in after-school programs (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012).
4. Schools should be flexible about enrollment requirements for youth experiencing academic instability who wish to participate in extracurricular activities. Certain district requirements may prevent students from joining certain team sports or other programs in the middle of the year. These policies negatively impact students who may be forced to transition schools and districts multiple times. Bureaucratic rigidity should not prevent system-involved youth from benefiting from the protective factors these activities offer.

### **Develop Clear Incentives and Punishments Related to Prosocial Activities**

If systems accept the protective and preventive qualities of prosocial activities, then these activities must be considered a form of treatment for system-involved or at-risk youth. While no system would ever make a young person earn the right to participate in treatments such as substance abuse counseling or family therapy, many juvenile facilities and child-serving agencies require youth to earn the "privilege" of prosocial activities. A common mechanism for this is motivational programming such as points and level systems (Mohr, Martin, Olson, Pumariega, & Branca, 2009). In these systems, youth earn more "points" for good behavior and can move up to different privilege "levels" that allow more freedom and activities. These systems also punish bad behavior by docking points and restricting access to that youth's desired programs. Unfortunately, these incentive and punishment strategies are not always clear to the youth involved. If they are not explicitly tied to a youth's actions in a way that is clear, logical, and fair, the youth may perceive them as arbitrary and malicious. These programs, rather than encouraging engagement in more positive behaviors, can reinforce a youth's distrust and disconnect from the adults and the systems that serve them, (VanderVen, 2009; VanderVen, 1995; Mohr et al., 2009).

In some of these programs, more complex activities — such as sports, art, woodshop, and other skill building opportunities — require a youth to be at a “higher level,” while watching TV or hanging out with peers are acceptable “lower level” activities. If the youth finds it too difficult or even impossible to access the prosocial activities they want, they can become satisfied with more leisurely or solitary activities that do not provide sufficient protective factors. Youth denied access to more engaging prosocial activities will instead learn to “be happy by newly discovered pleasures of daydreaming, dozing, or the proud planning of future revenge” (Redl, & Wineman, 1957 as cited in VanderVen, 2009).

Jurisdictions that want to benefit from the positive preventive and protective factors of prosocial involvement should treat these activities as a youth’s right, not as a special privilege to be doled out by child welfare or juvenile justice workers. Any punishments or corrective action needed to address a youth’s behavior should make every reasonable effort to preserve participation in these activities. The Youth in Custody Practice Model (Umpierre, Dedel, Marrow, & Pakseresht, 2016), the Sanctuary Model (Bloom, 2005), and the Collaborative Problem Solving Model (Greene & Ablon, 2006) all provide enhancements and alternatives to traditional point and level systems that address youth behavior without restricting prosocial opportunities.

#### **IV. Perspectives from the Field**

Polk County, Florida and Lucas County, Ohio are two jurisdictions that have partnered with CJJR to implement the CYPM. As discussed above, an important goal of the CYPM is positive youth development and increasing prosocial opportunities for crossover youth. Both Polk County and Lucas County worked to improve opportunities for crossover youth to participate in prosocial activities as part of their efforts to implement the CYPM and in the years following the Model’s launch. Polk County exemplifies how a jurisdiction can establish prudent parenting to support activities that promote normalcy in crossover and non-crossover youth. Lucas County demonstrates how a culture change that prioritizes staff time and agency funds can support access to prosocial activities for at-risk and current crossover youth.

##### **Prudent Parenting - Polk County, Florida**

As part of the CYPM, jurisdictions collect information on crossover youths’ participation in several activities, including art, religion, mentoring, after-school activities, and sports. According to data collected within the first two years of implementing the Model, Polk County reported a 25-percentage point increase in the number of crossover youth participating in these activities after the CYPM’s launch in their community. Like most CYPM jurisdictions, Polk County focused on engaging in multi-disciplinary teaming and coordinating their assessment processes. These coordinated processes helped workers consider the needs and strengths of their crossover youth more holistically, including opportunities for youth to engage in prosocial activities.

The 2010 implementation of the CYPM in Polk County preceded statewide efforts to address access to positive youth development and prosocial activities for foster youth. In 2013, prior to the passage of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act and its ensuing requirements, Florida developed a statutory definition of “prudent parenting” for all foster parents and group home staff. The statute limits the liability of caregivers and establishes that dependent children are “entitled” to participate in “age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment and social activities” (*Florida Statutes* § 39.4091).

Prior to the implementation of this statute, it was particularly burdensome for youth in group homes to experience positive youth development and participate in prosocial activities. Most of these homes provided group activities that would require case managers to sign permission slips. Knowing that any additional activities would have to be approved by a case manager or probation officer, most youth did not bother to ask for permission, feeling like their workers would just say no or that it would take too long to get a decision (M. Jiles, personal communications, March 10, 2015). Youth in these circumstances expressed frustration that their caseworkers or probation officers may be making these decisions based on preconceived notions of the youth and not current behavior. After the prudent parenting statute was implemented, caregivers were empowered to make these decisions based on their own relationships and experiences with the youth in the group home. In addition, group homes started to offer more independent activities based on a youth's interest and responsibility. These activities included, but were not limited to, overnight stays with friends, going to the mall, joining sports teams, and participating in other after-school activities.

While the changes following the statute applied to all children in foster care, the distinction between crossover youth and non-crossover youth was most apparent when it came to setting curfews. The increased collaboration between probation, group home, and child welfare workers – supported by the CYPM protocols – meant that probation officers were more receptive to the recommendations of group home staff and willing to relax curfews. In addition, crossover youth appeared more motivated to comply with their probation officer's requirements if it allowed them to engage in prosocial activities with their peers who were not involved with probation (M. Jiles, March 10, 2015).

Involvement in foster care can cause youth to feel different or removed from the normal experiences of their peers (Pokempner, et al., 2015). Crossover youth, with the added involvement of the juvenile justice system, may feel further removed from the experiences of typical adolescents. Effective implementation of a prudent parenting standard, enhanced by the teaming and collaboration built into the CYPM, allows more opportunities for crossover youth to engage in positive youth development and prosocial activities.

### **Prioritizing Prosocial Activities for Crossover Youth – Lucas County, Ohio**

Lucas County, Ohio implemented the CYPM in January of 2012 and has since served over 130 youth dually involved with Lucas County Children Services (LCCS) and Lucas County Juvenile Court (LCJC). According to the most recent publicly available data, 69 youth participated in the program in 2015 with 31 cases successfully terminating in LCJC (Lucas County Juvenile Court, 2016). Lucas County's CYPM reform efforts focused on youth and family engagement, access to and engagement of resources, and youth and parent satisfaction, all of which support an interest and focus on prosocial opportunities.

Since implementing the CYPM, the Juvenile Court has been providing support and opportunities for prosocial activities to dually-involved youth and foster care youth who are at risk of crossing over into the juvenile justice system. Caseworkers and probation officers can request money from a dedicated fund to support positive activities for youth and their families. These can include general activities such as trips to the movies, bowling, and other community events with the youth, their family, and even foster parents. Using this money, the Juvenile Court is supporting opportunities for families to spend time together in a fun and stress-free environment. While this fund has existed for many years, the LCJC has been proactively encouraging LCCS caseworkers to use this money to support the participation of crossover youth in these activities (D. K. Hodges, personal communication, June 5, 2017).

In addition to supplying financial resources, Lucas County has developed relationships with local organizations to provide prosocial activities for their youth. Through a partnership with Toledo Museum of Art, crossover youth have participated in a variety of art classes such as glassblowing and art appreciation. A local art studio and hotel have offered to display the youths' finished artwork, providing youth with a specific task to work towards of which they can be proud. Crossover youth are also able to participate in the Community Integration and Training for Employment program. This program connects court-involved youth to such activities as boat building, the Build-a-Bike Program through the Toledo Bike Co-Op, and urban gardening through the Toledo Botanical Garden (Lucas County Juvenile Court, 2016). When community programs are not available, the Court has developed or funded its own activities. Recently, the court has started chess clubs at the County's treatment facilities and has funded a trauma-responsive yoga training. The Court's Misdemeanor Services Department has also organized community basketball events for youth that want to participate in sports (Hodges, 2017).

Even with these activities and funding available, agency staff recognize that crossover and other system involved youth may be hesitant to participate. Caseworkers and probation officers try to match youth with activities that meet their needs and interests. When necessary, the assigned caseworkers attend these activities with youth to help them feel more comfortable participating. If families or workers are unable to attend, agency staff try to find other caring adults or mentors who can support that youth. By devoting staff, time, and financial resource to ensuring young people have access to and support in these activities, the LCJC and its partners are signaling their commitment to the involvement of their youth in positive youth development and prosocial activities.

Lucas County has invested in strength-based, educational, and fun opportunities to brighten the lives of their court-involved youth, many of whom have experienced some level of trauma. While court-involved youth previously had access to these programs, since launch of the CYPM the LCJC has emphasized these resources and opportunities to LCCS caseworkers for crossover and non-crossover youth. This approach has allowed Lucas County to take advantage of potential preventive, protective, and prosocial benefits for their system-involved youth.

## Conclusion

Prosocial activities offer youth the chance to learn new skills, nurture positive relationships, and achieve a sense of normalcy in what is a very difficult period in their lives. While the relevant literature does not clearly indicate that prosocial activities alone can reduce the risk of delinquency and recidivism, prosocial activities may introduce and support a host of factors that help protect against negative outcomes. These benefits are particularly heightened when combined with evidence-based treatment practices for high-risk or system-involved youth. However, not every positive youth development or after-school activity provides the same level of prosocial opportunity. Indeed, some activities have been shown to increase antisocial behavior and delinquency rates in youth. Thus, parents and service providers should take conscientious measures to ensure that the activities pursued are deliberately structured to support positive development in at-risk youth. While there is some debate as to the structures that best facilitate prosocial behavior, the SAFE standard, promoting activities that are sequenced, active, focused, and explicit, provides a useful rubric.

With these benefits in mind, it is clear that system-involved youth should have the same opportunity to engage in prosocial activities as their non-crossover peers. To support these opportunities, the

CYPM recommends that agency staff incorporate prosocial activities into youth treatment plans, working with individual youths and their families to identify desirable and appropriate activities in the community. Additionally, agencies and community organizations must be flexible and adaptive to a crossover youth's changing circumstances, particularly when a youth undergoes a school or placement change.

Polk County, Florida and Lucas County, Ohio are two jurisdictions that have prioritized access to prosocial activities. In Polk County, this focus developed from a statewide push towards promoting "normalcy" for system-involved youth. By coordinating across their respective systems, probation officers, child welfare staff, and group home workers have developed an understanding of how to employ the new prudent parenting standard for crossover youth, a group with more unique and complex needs and constraints than the general child welfare or juvenile justice populations. Similarly, Lucas County has supported prosocial activities for crossover youth by 1) enhancing its case planning across child welfare and juvenile justice, 2) offering financial support to a wider population of system-involved youth, and 3) contacting community organizations and stakeholders to develop structured, skill building programs.

Communities such as Polk and Lucas Counties, are taking important steps to broaden their responsiveness to system-involved youth. By taking advantage of the protective and preventive supports available in their communities, jurisdictions that support prosocial activities are encouraging an array of positive developments in their at-risk and system-involved youth. For some youth, this may make a difference beyond what any researchers or practitioners could measure or anticipate.

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