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'5 C's' of youth development help make well-rounded kids



Your Turn
Shelby Pedersen
Guest columnist

Over the summer at ICAN, we spent a lot of time analyzing the program curriculum we are offering our youth members.

We have to keep a careful balance in what we offer — having enticing activities that will attract youth to attend ICAN (and keep them coming once they do), and our evidence-based prevention programs that will teach youth life skills to break the culture of poverty that so many of them are living in.

It can be very challenging to address such a wide variety of needs without trying to be too many things to too many people. We must address their academic needs, we need to stay current with STEAM activities and we want to offer

exciting recreational activities too.

Recently, we took the extra step to define our youth activities into five program categories, helping to provide further clarity around what we offer and how that fits into our mission to provide free, comprehensive programs that empower youth to be productive, self-confident and responsible members of the community.

Our five categories closely follow the "5 C's of Positive Youth Development Model," which is a nationally recognized youth-engagement model that focuses not on "fixing" behavior problems, but building and nurturing all a child's beliefs, behaviors, knowledge, attributes and skills.

The result should be a healthy and successful childhood, leading to a healthy and successful adulthood.

These categories are a benefit to all

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parents who are trying hard to raise emotionally balanced and well-rounded kids.

The 5 C's of Positive Youth Development (according to the NE Department of Health & Human Services) include:

- Connection:** A feeling of safety, structure and belonging; positive bonds with people and social institutions.
- Confidence:** A sense of self-worth and mastery; having a belief in one's capacity to succeed.
- Character:** Taking responsibility; a sense of independence and individuality; connection to principles and values.
- Competence:** The ability to act effectively at school, in social situations, and at work.
- Contribution:** Active participation and leadership in a variety of settings; making a difference.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is the entire system of support (school, home, community) that builds upon the strengths of youth and recognizes the risky behavior they may exhibit.

PYD involves youth as active agents — adults and youth work in partnership.

Civic involvement is a big component of PYD and works best when every element of the community is involved (school, home, community).

ICAN has incorporated the 5 C's of Youth Development and PYD in a number of ways. We offer a structured play model that encourages youth to practice real life skills through play.

- ¶ We offer hands-on learning that provides unique experiences and reinforces skill building.
- ¶ We emphasize staff and volunteers being strong role models for youth.
- ¶ Youth participate in community service projects — they not only participate in the activity, they help come up with what they are going to do and plan the components as well.
- ¶ Finally, youth have an opportunity each Friday to choose a recreational activity they would like to participate in. These activities range from soccer to karate, to "Girls Circle" which fosters self-esteem and helps girls maintain authentic connections with their peers.

If you are interested in learning more, visit engage.youth.gov.

Shelby Pedersen is CEO of ICAN: Positive Programs for Youth in Chandler.

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