



# Trends in Creative Youth Development Programs

## Denise Montgomery

Throughout the U.S., thousands of creativity-based out-of-school time (OST) programs combine principles of positive youth development with immersion in the creative process. Many of these programs refer to their work as *creative youth development* or CYD. According to the Creative Youth Development National Partnership (Montgomery, 2019):

*Creative youth development* is a recent term for a longstanding theory of practice that integrates creative skill-building, inquiry, and expression with positive youth development principles, fueling young people's imaginations and building critical learning and life skills.

CYD is a diverse field. Programs include a constellation of creative disciplines and genres,

including film making, sound engineering, styles of dance from step to modern to *ballet folklórico*, an array of two- and three-dimensional visual arts from comic book design to photography to sculpture, graphic design, game design, playwrighting, theatrical production, music performance and composition, journalism, music performance and composition, and creative writing.

CYD programs share characteristics common among programs that embrace positive youth development, including setting high expectations, encouraging positive risk taking, embracing youth leadership, and engaging young people in contributions to their communities and work for social justice. The basic formula of CYD is the combination

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**DENISE MONTGOMERY** is founder and principal of CultureThrive, a consulting practice focused on arts-based youth development. Her research has been covered by National Public Radio, *The Washington Post*, and *Youth Today*. Montgomery is lead author of *Something to Say: Success Principles for Afterschool Arts Programs From Urban Youth and Other Experts* and a contributing author to *Youth Development Principles and Practices in Out-of-School Time Settings*.

of a holistic approach to positive youth development with hands-on creative inquiry. The creative process at the heart of CYD programs contributes to tremendous, often transformative, personal growth for participants (Heath, Soep, & Roach, 1998; Hughes & Wilson, 2004). The National Summit on Creative Youth Development (2014) proclaimed:

As young people create their own work in the arts, humanities, and sciences, they build the personal, social, and intellectual capacities they need to succeed in school, career, and life. And as they experience the creative process over an extended period, they learn that they can use it to express their own identities, understand and change the world around them, and connect to the greater human experience. (p. 1)

Creativity-based programs take place in a variety of settings and contexts, including:

- Nonprofit organizations with a primary focus on CYD
- Programs in arts organizations, such as museums
- Programs embedded in youth development organizations
- School-based OST programs
- Community parks and recreation programs
- Other community contexts, such as programs for court-involved or incarcerated young people

In recent years, the heterogeneous field of CYD practice has codified characteristics of high-quality CYD through a series of frameworks, including those offered by the Boston Youth Arts Evaluation Project (2012); Mass Cultural Council (n.d.); Gutierrez and Spencer (2008); and Montgomery, Rogovin, and Persaud (2013). These frameworks, which support shared understanding of CYD, can help programs strengthen practice and improve quality, thereby increasing engagement and supporting more positive outcomes for youth.

At the same time, CYD program practices are continuously in development. CYD practitioners are committed to engaging in ongoing reflection and refinement, to actively responding to young people's leadership, and to reflecting and being connected with their communities.

Drawing on the youth devel-

opment literature, CYD-specific literature, and a decade of primary research, in this landscape analysis I discuss five current trends in CYD program development. Since 2011, I have conducted in-depth interviews with more than 100 CYD practitioners, funders, program participants, and program alumni as well as experts in afterschool, the arts, and adolescence. I have done site visits at over 40 organizations providing CYD programs in more than 20 communities throughout the U.S. My colleagues Peter Rogovin and Neromanie Persaud and I, in a study for the Wallace Foundation (Montgomery et al., 2013), identified 10 Principles of High-Quality Out-of-School Time Arts Programs, which have been widely used in the field. From 2016 to 2018, I served as the inaugural director of the Creative Youth Development National Partnership, where I led an 18-month process with over 600 stakeholders to garner input that I synthesized into the CYD National Partnership's *National Action Blueprint* (Montgomery, 2018b). This article is based on a landscape analysis conducted for Americans for the Arts (Montgomery, 2019), supplemented by subsequent interviews and site visits and by continued involvement in CYD conferences, webinars, and initiatives such as Create Justice.

To frame the observations and insights from my research, I first summarize the historical foundation of CYD programming development and the underlying research. Following discussion of the five trends, I make recommendations for the field and for researchers.

## Historical Foundation

CYD as a field has grassroots and community-based origins. In the U.S., tuition-free community-based youth arts programs trace their origins to the settlement house movement of the 1890s and early 1900s (Montgomery, 2016; Starr, 2003). In 1892, a few years after founding the influential Hull House in Chicago, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr created the first community school of the arts. This community arts school bore hallmarks of CYD: It engaged young people in program design, empowered them to connect with and express cultural identity through the arts, encouraged original self-expression, and hosted performances and exhibitions (Addams, 1912; Montgomery, 2016; Starr, 2003). By 1914, youth and adults were participating

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in arts programs in nearly all of the 400 settlement houses in the U.S. (Rabkin, Reynolds, Hedberg, & Shelby, 2011). In 1937, what is now the National Guild for Community Arts Education was founded as an outgrowth of this community-based arts programming. The guild's mission is to advance and support lifelong learning opportunities in the arts, including afterschool arts programs and CYD programming specifically (Montgomery, 2016).

The philosophies of education pioneer John Dewey contributed to the theoretical underpinnings of CYD. In emphasizing the ways experience shapes learning, Dewey also recognized the transformative power of the arts and their ability to raise consciousness of social and political issues (Clements, 2013; Dewey, 1934). Dewey's revolutionary espousal of experiential learning is imprinted in CYD program practices.

Local arts agencies have championed OST youth arts programs for decades. The local arts agency movement took hold in the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s, resulting in the formation of the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies. Many members of this association led afterschool programs designed to support what have come to be identified as CYD outcomes. This work continues under the leadership of Americans for the Arts with the support of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (Montgomery, 2016).

Roots of CYD also sprang from living rooms, churches, and community centers as people of color shared their artistic and cultural heritages with youth in their communities (Montgomery, 2018a). Often informal in nature, these practices are an essential part of the DNA of creative youth development.

Another key period in the evolution of the field of CYD was the late 1980s and 1990s, when the U.S. experienced a wave of programs started primarily by artists (Montgomery, 2016). These program founders, who were committed to social justice, frequently cited the influence of progressive educator and activist Paulo Freire. His seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) continues to influence OST generally and CYD specifically.

In 1996, *Coming Up Taller: Arts and Humanities for Children and Youth at Risk* (Weitz, 1996) raised awareness of CYD and made the case for arts- and

humanities-based youth development programs. Then, in 1998, Americans for the Arts, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, illustrated how CYD can partner with education, juvenile justice, and social services organizations toward shared goals in the *YouthArts Handbook: Arts Programs for Youth at Risk* (Farnum & Schaffer, 1998), a forerunner to CYD's growing collaboration across allied youth sectors.

Meanwhile, influenced by the Search Institute's pioneering Developmental Assets for Youth (1997), CYD practitioners, like OST professionals generally, rejected the deficit orientation implicit in the labeling of some young people as being "at risk." Embracing positive youth development, they shifted toward an assets-based approach, which recognizes that all young people have unique strengths.

Around the same time, Shirley Brice Heath shared her insights from a decade of field research on OST programs, revealing that young people in arts-based programs experienced greater cognitive and linguistic development than youth in other types of programs, such as athletics (Heath & Roach, 1999; Heath, Soep, & Roach, 1998). Meanwhile, CYD practitioners contributed to and reflected the holistic view of youth development noted by Eccles and Gootman in their milestone publication *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (2002). As in other areas of youth work, CYD programs manifested a growing awareness that young people need a range of personal and social assets, as well as life skills and knowledge, in order to realize their potential.

A groundbreaking 2011 article by John Kania and Mark Kramer on collective impact highlights broad cross-sector collaboration in efforts to effect large-scale social change. This idea has influenced the social sector generally and CYD particularly. *Setting the Agenda* (Stevenson, 2014) cites as the first of five strategic priorities for the CYD field "building collective impact to improve youth outcomes." The 2014 National Summit on Creative Youth Development, which focused on collective action, was an important milestone for the coalescing field of CYD. Summit participants jointly authored *Collective Action for Youth: An Agenda for Progress Through Creative Youth Development* (National

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Summit on Creative Youth Development, 2014), which shares a vision for providing young people with access to high-quality CYD programs and identifies strategic priorities to achieve this vision. Another outgrowth of the Summit was the 2014 formation of the Creative Youth Development National Partnership, a collective impact initiative to advance the field. The Partnership comprises the National Guild for Community Arts Education, Mass Cultural Council, and Americans for the Arts.

Few CYD publications have been based on direct research with youth, a disconnect with CYD's core value of amplifying youth voice. One exception is *Something to Say: Success Principles for Afterschool Arts Programs From Urban Youth and Other Experts* (Montgomery et al., 2013), which provides insights on tween participation and engagement in OST arts programs garnered from direct research with tweens and teens.

Three recent works examine CYD and arts programming in settings outside dedicated CYD programs. *Room to Rise: The Lasting Impact of Intensive Teen Programs in Art Museums* (Linzer & Munley, 2015) documents how deep engagement with art museums had enduring impact on program participants. *Partnering With Community Arts Organizations: A Pathway to a High-Quality Club Experience* (Montgomery & Rogovin, 2017) shares detailed best practices of how Boys & Girls Clubs in rural, suburban, and urban areas partnered with local arts organizations to provide skills-based arts programs. *Designing for Engagement: The Experiences of Tweens in the Boys & Girls Clubs' Youth Arts Initiative* (McClanahan & Hartmann, 2018) details lessons learned from the implementation of the 10 Principles of High-Quality Afterschool Arts Programs (Montgomery et al., 2013) in a multiprogram OST environment. The insights shared in these reports are useful contributions to afterschool providers who seek to develop high-quality, creativity-based youth development programs.

Another resource for youth development students and practitioners is the second edition of the textbook *Youth Development Principles and Practices in Out-*

*of-School Time Settings* (Witt & Caldwell, 2018). The addition of a chapter on CYD in this edition (Montgomery, 2018a) shows that CYD is growing in prominence in the field of youth development.

Finally, the CYD National Partnership's *National Action Blueprint* (Montgomery, 2018b) maps strategies and actions for advancing CYD that include implications for program development. The blueprint is providing a framework for local collaborations such as the San Diego Creative Youth Development Network.

The field of CYD has evolved alongside the field of youth development, with both growing in sophistication and nuance of practice. CYD programs and stakeholders have many publications and tools on which to draw to learn about CYD, deepen practice, and improve program quality. Meanwhile, practitioners in this dynamic field continue to pose questions and test approaches to refine programming.

## Key Trends

Resolved to help young people thrive, CYD programs work to support youth in navigating not only ordinary stages of development and identity formation but also such challenges as school violence, individual and community trauma, and poverty. At the same time, CYD programs strive to help young people develop the life skills, knowledge, and supports necessary to realize their potential and successfully transition into adulthood.

As I have worked with CYD programs and interviewed CYD program staff, administrators, youth participants, and funders, I have

observed five key trends in the ways the field is evolving to help programs meet those goals:

1. Holistic approaches that evolve as needs grow
2. Collaboration across sectors
3. A new generation of program staff and leaders with new approaches
4. Scaling by depth
5. Creative career pathways

## **Holistic Approaches That Evolve as Needs Grow**

CYD programs are holistic; they concern themselves with the entirety of young participants' lives, including emotional and social well-being, mental health, safety,

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and basic life needs. Recognition that healing can occur through artmaking and creative expression is widespread. Beyond that, holistic program practices and approaches to support services vary across CYD programs. Some programs use restorative circles; others employ mindfulness techniques; and others, such as RiverzEdge Arts in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, have systems by which young people can readily access one-on-one support from program staff. During a site visit, I observed that RiverzEdge participants, on arrival, indicated how they were doing on a scale of 1 to 5. They knew that, if they chose 1 or 2 or had several days of 3s, an artist mentor would connect with them individually to learn more and offer support.

The staff at RiverzEdge typifies CYD program staff members in their commitment to caring and supportive relationships with youth. According to Jennifer DiFiglia, MSW, chief program officer at LEAP New York City, CYD program staff seek:

to connect with students in a safe and positive way to reflect on news, community issues, personal and growing up issues that can inform the artistic responses in young people ... a space to feel safe, talk, and listen without judgement or having to “ask” for it. (personal communication, May 29, 2018)

In the wake of social and political turbulence in the U.S. and increases in anxiety and depression among young people, unprecedented numbers of CYD participants are turning to program staff for types of support that artistic staff members may not be equipped to provide. To address these needs effectively and responsibly, many programs refer participants to local social service providers with which the programs have built relationships. Other programs have social workers on staff. Another model is that of Mosaic Youth Theater of Detroit, which assigns an artistic staff lead and a social services staff lead to every production, proactively embedding professional social and emotional support within young people’s artistic experiences.

Many CYD practitioners have sought specialized training to guide them in their work with young people who have experienced trauma. As trauma-informed practice has grown among organizations that work with young people, Shawn Ginwright has reminded practitioners of the importance of assets-based approaches, putting forth *healing-centered engagement* as a practice that centers culture as a key feature of well-being (Ginwright, 2018). An example of healing-centered engagement in a CYD program is provided by

Alchemy, Inc., in Akron, Ohio, which engages young African-American men in African drumming and the interpretation of mythological stories.

In optimizing their holistic approaches, some organizations are concerned about keeping creativity at the center of the work and not becoming too clinical. Furthermore, staff who support healing for youth must heal themselves and must routinely restore themselves (Ginwright, 2018). An example of self-care for program and administrative staff comes from RYSE Center in Richmond, California. This youth development and CYD program closed its doors for a week in August 2019 to support the well-being of its staff (RYSE Center, 2019). The reasons outlined in the excerpt on this page from the RYSE Center’s announcement will be familiar

### RYSE Center Restoration Week Announcement

For over a decade RYSE has been relentless in our pursuit of justice and radical love for young people in our community. We have centered our work on being responsive to the explicit needs of youth and centering healing practices for our members, their families and the larger community....

The cumulative toll of persistent, atmospheric trauma ... creates a persistent cycle of organizational anxiety and hyper-vigilance. The impact is that a staff that loves this work is moved to a point of just “getting through” or “getting by.”... Each day that we aren’t addressing this toll we’re becoming more rigid, getting physically and emotionally sick, and leaning into scarcity when what we need is to stay responsive, patient, compassionate, and holding abundance and love at our core....

We are here in the deepest service to young people, and that means we must show up with our full authentic selves. Our young people deserve that. Our young people see and feel our love, and also understand the toll on us individuals and on the RYSE system. Taking a day off or giving ourselves a day for self-care is not enough, because it is not just about one person or one program. RYSE has always been about our collective care and liberation....

RYSE is enacting a week of restoration for staff to rest, reflect, grieve, and recharge mind, body, and spirit. *What this means in practice is that the organization will be closed to members and the larger community. We will not be responding to emails or calls until we return on August 26th....* This is a week to reimagine a new way of existing that allows us to be whole, healed and in deeper service to ourselves, our community and our collective liberation. (RYSE Center, 2019. See the full announcement at <https://rysecenter.org/blog/restorationwk2>).

to many CYD and OST programs and community-based organizations.

Restoration weeks like the one held by RYSE are not yet a trend. However, during a webinar presenting the trends outlined in this article (CYD National Partnership, 2019), co-presenter Cristy Johnston Limón, executive director of Youth Speaks in San Francisco, California, noted that CYD practitioners are expressing interest in addressing the need for self-care proactively, not only through individual measures but also in program design and organizational operations.

### **Collaboration Across Sectors**

The importance of cross-sector collaboration is highlighted in the CYD National Partnership's *National Action Blueprint* (Montgomery, 2018b):

As allied youth fields such as juvenile justice, health and wellness, and workforce development increasingly take a youth development approach, leaders in these sectors and movements are building awareness and recognition of the ways in which CYD aligns with and supports mutual goals. CYD programs and organizations are forming cross-sector partnerships and alliances as strategies to connect with more young people, build engagement, and diversify and grow funding.

The blueprint calls for the CYD field to work across allied youth sectors at the local, regional, and national levels. To that end, it presents a matrix of areas of alignment across sectors (Montgomery, 2018b).

Individual CYD organizations have worked across sectors from the beginning. However, for the CYD field as a whole, cross-sector collaboration is in an early stage. The number of success stories is growing, as I've learned from recent conversations with CYD leaders. For example, in Massachusetts, more funding for CYD is coming from the state's corrections budget than from the arts budget. In Los Angeles, the Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network garnered \$2 million in funds from the L.A. County corrections budget in a single budget cycle. Fourteen CYD partner organizations are now working with detained and court-involved youth under this grant.

### **A New Generation of Program Staff and Leaders with New Approaches**

A new generation of CYD leaders and program staff are working in new ways, often outside of traditional nonprofit structures, to advance their CYD missions and associated social justice work. Many of these skilled and adept 21st century leaders are alumni of CYD programs. Many are, like the majority of program participants, people of color.

As I've learned in interviews and site visits, this new generation is rejecting current structures in nonprofit administration and leadership, bringing fresh approaches to the work. Young creative professionals in CYD tend to be entrepreneurial. As digital natives, they are adept at combining digital platforms with on-the-ground experiences to generate excitement, participation, support, and adoption of a new flavor of CYD, one that is relevant and moving. Unwilling to perpetuate the status quo—the exhausting pursuit of funding that is largely unavailable to community-based organizations—these new CYD leaders are taking steps to function independently of philanthropy.

For example, CYD teaching artist Jenay “Shinobi Jax” Anolin cofounded Mix'd Ingrdnts, a for-profit dance company, and spearheaded formation of Mini Mix'd, a girls' dance program that furthers young women's artistic development and supports CYD outcomes such as positive adult and peer relationships.

This Oakland, California, group secures funding from multiple sources, including grants, competitions, and fee-for-service performances at business events. The young dancers in Mini Mix'd crowdfund each year so they can train with other dancers across the country. In 2019 Anolin supported Mini Mix'd girls in hosting their first Youth Summit weekend of performances, workshops, and dance battles with free participation for all youth under 18.

Other CYD staff members are collaborating within and outside of their organizations to create peer-led pop-ups that crowdsource funding and host fee-for-service cultural events. These projects fuel CYD professionals' creative passions in a way that is of great value to their organizations and to program participants, who are inspired by seeing their mentors

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make things happen in the community. Artists and organizers are paid for their work on these cultural events; their involvement thus supplements the modest salaries they earn as educators and administrators. These creative happenings may exist outside of formal CYD organizations, while tapping into leaders' networks for resources and expertise. For example, Oakhella in Oakland, California, began as a micro music festival and is now an event production company using digital assets to celebrate local culture and civic engagement in ways that are fresh, fun, and energetic. One of Oakhella's founders is Bijou McDaniel, a staff member at Youth Speaks, a San Francisco-based CYD organization. Such projects are a manifestation of the creativity, openness, and community connections of teaching artists, CYD administrators, program participants, and alumni.

In an example of creative funding, James Halliday, executive director of A Reason to Survive (ARTS) in National City, California, secured fee-for-service contracts with a city government, a private company, and a school district. ARTS has made substantial progress toward Halliday's goal to have 50 percent of the budget come from earned revenue. Importantly, the contracts are mission driven and involve students in projects such as creative placemaking.

Leaders like Anolin, McDaniel, and Halliday are the vanguard in CYD. Programs, organizations, and the field as a whole stand to benefit from their disruptive innovation.

### ***Scaling by Depth***

Recognizing that trusting relationships and high-level skill building require deep levels of engagement, CYD practitioners and organizations are choosing to invest substantial time and resources in individual young people. In the tension between quality CYD practice and a desire to serve young people who do not otherwise have access to CYD programming, they are leaning toward quality. Efforts by CYD programs to “scale up”—to serve significantly larger numbers of youth or to expand their geographic range—have been limited, largely because of concerns about program fidelity, lack of capital, and the need for authentic connection to the local community, which is a hallmark of strong CYD program practices.

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Many of the CYD programs I've explored have elected to go deeper and are exploring program practices in support of that approach.

For example, David's Harp Foundation (DHF) in San Diego, California, has responded to young people's desire to remain involved after their participation ends by creating internship programs. Young people who are up to 22 years old train to become artist mentors for newer participants in the DHF media production program. These homegrown mentors not only fulfill the demand for ongoing involvement but also meet DHF's need for qualified teaching artists who have both technical skills and a commitment to the DHF community.

Although they are growing in their awareness of CYD, public and private funders alike continue to press for increases in numbers of youth served and lower costs per young person. CYD applicants can be penalized in competitive grants processes for choosing to scale by depth.

### ***Creative Career Pathways***

CYD programs are increasingly working to establish organized supports and networks to prepare participants for careers in creative industries, from film and television to fashion and video game design. Strategies include providing paid apprenticeships, internship programs, opportunities to interact with creative professionals, and scholarships, as well as hiring staff who are practicing creative professionals. Some programs have partnered with high schools or alternative high schools to provide programming and internships focused on creative industry careers. Another avenue is support for college and career readiness. As participants develop technical skills, they also gain knowledge and skills to help them succeed academically and socially in college or training programs and then in their careers.

For example, artworxLA is working with education, workforce development, and creative industry partners in Los Angeles toward shared goals, with a particular emphasis on creative career pathways. Exemplifying cross-sector partnership that leads to diversified and expanded funding in addition to positive outcomes for youth, artworxLA was awarded a multiyear \$550,000 grant by the U.S. Department of Labor for its work

on creative career pathways (artworxLA, 2016). In another example, A Reason to Survive (ARTS) will launch its Creative Futures Fellowship in partnership with a local school district in 2021. The program, which spans two years for each cohort of high school students, builds career pathways by offering work-based learning opportunities in creative careers such as product design and architecture.

## Recommendations for the Field of CYD

These key trends suggest ways the field of CYD can support and accelerate innovation. Because CYD and OST share so many needs and opportunities, these recommendations largely apply to both fields. CYD programs and practitioners can:

- Build and connect with local and regional peer learning networks. The *National Action Blueprint* (Montgomery, 2018b) calls such networks “an effective way for practitioners and other CYD stakeholders to support and learn from each other.”
- Build awareness of the value of CYD and of scaling by depth. CYD champions and funder allies should address how blunt grant application measures of cost per youth and number of youth served can thwart effective program practices.
- Participate in or initiate collective impact initiatives to benefit youth and communities.
- Collaborate with other CYD stakeholders, including youth, to merge the various frameworks of CYD program practice to provide greater clarity for practitioners.
- Share the CYD frameworks with the larger OST field so that program leaders who are unfamiliar with CYD or who are interested in strengthening the quality of their creativity-based programming can benefit from these tools.
- Champion the innovations of the new generation of CYD program staff and leaders as they break new ground.
- Address knowledge gaps with the active input of practitioners and youth. CYD practice is nuanced in ways that people who work with young people every day are best able to illuminate. Including youth perspectives will strengthen CYD research and increase the usefulness and efficacy of recommendations.
- Prioritize youth involvement in regional and national dialogues about program development, just as young people are already initiating programs and sharing decisions with adults in individual exemplary CYD programs.

## Recommendations for Further Inquiry

The CYD field is ripe for additional research as the field is coalescing, gaining attention, and continuing to innovate. The recommendations below are largely applicable to OST generally. Both academic researchers and CYD professionals conducting practice-based action research can:

- Explore ways to provide effective and responsible support to young people through holistic program practices and social services while maintaining a focus on creative practice. Research can also help to identify and share program practices that remove barriers and reduce stigma for young people seeking support.
- Build and amplify methods for CYD program staff to heal and care for themselves in order to make possible their ongoing work with youth.
- Identify and share emerging approaches to cross-sector collaboration, including candid discussion of the challenges of partnering across sectors and identification of strategies for addressing these challenges.
- Invest in experimental approaches to cross-sector collaboration.
- Explore how to reach more young people with high-quality CYD programs through partnerships with youth development organizations, community centers, libraries, museums, and other places interested in arts- and creativity-based programs.
- Refine and share best practices for transitioning program participants and alumni into leadership and staff roles.
- Examine the conditions that make peer learning networks effective forums for professional development.
- Explore how to intentionally build creative career pathways into program models.

CYD programs are dynamic; by nature, they are in a perpetual state of program development. In order to support program development effectively, the field must build professional development capacity and provide multiple ways for practitioners and stakeholders to engage with and learn from one another. Young people must be actively engaged in deliberations about practice at all levels and in research on CYD program practice.

## Acknowledgment

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## How to Find CYD Programs

To find local or regional CYD programs, you can contact your state or local arts agency or the Creative Youth Development National Partnership ([www.creativeyouthdevelopment.org](http://www.creativeyouthdevelopment.org)). Another approach is an Internet search using the term *creative youth development* and the locale.

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