

**SPOTLIGHT FOR JUNE/JULY 2006:****GROWING UP IN A NEW COUNTRY:
A FOCUS ON POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WITH REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS**

Belta and Tiru, two sisters from a war-ravaged West African country, now live in Portland, OR, and dream of someday working as medical professionals. Assessments indicate that their reading and math skills are around a 7th grade level, below their current placements in 10th and 11th grade. Together with a West African staff member from the "Young Woman's Equity Project" at the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), these sisters have each developed a "Youth Plan" with concrete educational and career goals, desired outcomes and a timeline for achieving their goals. IRCO staff work with the girls and their family to meet their desired goals, including participation in Portland's Summer Youth Employment program and the opportunity to work in one of Portland's government offices. Both girls are now on their high school Honor Roll, they enjoy extracurricular activities such as basketball and choir, and they are active participants in IRCO's youth programming. IRCO staff feel confident that, given the opportunity, these girls can realize their dreams. [1]

As this story demonstrates, thoughtful and innovative programming like that of the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization in Portland, OR, can make a significant difference in the lives of newcomer youth like these two West African sisters.

To aid in the development of and enhance existing programming for newcomer youth, BRYCS is pleased to announce our new resource, [*Growing up in a New Country: A Positive Youth Development Toolkit for Working with Refugees and Immigrants*](#), available here on the BRYCS Website as a PDF download on Monday, June 5th. This toolkit is a companion and follow up to our earlier release, [*Raising Children in a New Country: A Toolkit for Working with Newcomer Parents*](#).

The BRYCS Positive Youth Development Toolkit is designed to assist refugee-serving agencies in establishing effective youth oriented programming. To this end, the Toolkit includes the following:

- A brief **Overview** of the positive youth development framework and how it applies to newcomer youth;
- A series of "**Toolboxes**" with resources relating to the following stages of programmatic development:
 - Background on Positive Youth Development;
 - Assets and Needs Assessment;
 - Program Planning;
 - Program Design;
 - Youth Leadership / Empowerment
 - Afterschool;
 - Mentoring;
 - Employment;
 - Fundraising resources;
 - Program implementation materials;
 - Program evaluation resources;
 - Thirteen "Promising Practices" descriptions of programs across the U.S. currently serving newcomer youth.

The field of "Positive Youth Development" (PYD) has developed over the last several decades as a contrasting approach to youth programming focused on problems or deficits. Where some youth programming may have focused on activities for youth to avoid (such as gang involvement, early pregnancy, delinquency), PYD programming typically emphasizes strengths or assets to be encouraged and developed in young people.

In a time of growing diversity in society...stereotypes of youth of color as 'at risk' remain widespread. The public, media policy makers, and researchers too often focus only on the problems these young people face, leaving a gap in knowledge and dialogue about the strengths of young people across all racial/ethnic groups. [2]

In fact, rather than seeing risks, some authors have identified particular assets arising from the experiences of migration and the integration of two cultures. Some of these strengths include:

- **Values**, such as the importance of family and community;
- **Bilingualism**;
- **Migration-related maturity**, which can develop into confidence and leadership;
- **Balancing two cultures**, which can help develop flexibility and insight;
- Strong **religious heritage** providing moral guidance. [3]

In examining the common themes in positive youth development theory and practice, we observed that certain elements have particular resonance in working with newcomer youth. From these observations we developed the following list of “**ideal elements**” in programming for newcomer youth:

- Engage refugee community leaders, families, and youth in the program;
- Recruit bilingual and bicultural staff;
- Support family relationships;
- Provide socialization, safety and security;
- Support academic and educational achievement;
- Include adults as role models and mentors;
- Advocate for and with refugee students.

We also identified several challenges that may be more pronounced in working with newcomer youth. Such challenges may include:

- Transportation arrangements;
- Developing and retaining bilingual and bicultural staff, and developing multilingual materials;
- Creating effective outreach methods for newcomer communities;
- Selecting a target population.

Many capable agencies across the country are engaged in creative and vital programming for refugee and immigrant youth. We have highlighted the work of thirteen such agencies in the “Promising practices” section of the Toolkit.

We introduce this new Positive Youth Development Toolkit with the hope that it will enable more agencies around the U.S. to develop culturally competent programming for refugee and immigrant youth, building upon their inherent strengths and addressing their specific needs. We welcome your feedback regarding this new toolkit and appreciate additional examples of creative newcomer youth programming occurring around the country. Feel free to contact us at: info@brycs.org

More resources on Positive Youth Development can be found in this month's [featured search](#). The featured search lists the most up-to-date and useful resources on this topic available for free download.

FOOTNOTES:

- 1 - For more information about IRCO, see this month's “[Promising Practices](#)” [Sidebar](#) article. The sisters' names have been changed here to protect their anonymity.
- 2 - Search Institute (November 2003). “Unique Strengths, Shared Strengths: Developmental Assets Among Youth of Color,” *Insights & Evidence*, Vol. 1, No. 2. p. 1.
- 3 - Adapted from: Maud Easter and Dina Refki, “Creating Successful Programs for Immigrant Youth,” *ACT for Youth Upstate Center of Excellence: Practice Matters* (December 2004): 1-2, <http://www.cwig.albany.edu/IWcreatingssuccessful.pdf> ; and Michael C. Rodriguez, Diana Marrobel, and Francisco A. Billarruel, “Research Realities and a Vision of Success for Latino Youth Development,” in *Community Youth Development: Programs, Policies and Practices*. Francisco A. Villarruel, Daniel F. Perkins, Lynne M Borden, Joanne G. Keith, eds. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 53-61.