



Essential Components of LA's Youth Centers

A youth development center serves as a safe place for young people to spend their out-of-school hours creatively, productively, building supportive peer relationships and connecting to caring adults. This "home away from home" is often the only space in youth lives where they experience safety – physical, emotional and psychological, receive the guidance of consistently supportive adults, are surrounded by a positive space to interact with their peers, can heal from trauma or addiction, and are connected to the resources they need to move their lives forward toward academic, career, and personal success.

A successful youth center is designed in collaboration with the youth it will serve. Youth are involved from the ground up, in every aspect of the development of the center and its programs. They have a primary voice in decisions related to the design of the physical space and its offerings and governance. It is founded in the principles of Youth Development, with the goal of preparing young people for success, utilizing and building on their strengths, based in inclusiveness and characterized by opportunities and discovery that promote a sense of belonging, usefulness, and power.

Youth Centers Are Safe Places for Youth During Out-of-school Hours, that are:

- Open 24/7, 365 days a year, 2pm – 10 pm M-TR and 2pm – midnight F-S during the school year, and 2pm – 10 pm M-TR and 2pm – midnight F-S;
- Free for all participants;
- Based on expectations of mutual respect, tolerance and celebration of all cultures, identities and ethnicities;
- Youth, parent and community–led in governance, program design and implementation, with a special emphasis on developing youth leaders in the running and evaluation of their centers;
- Staffed by caring adults -- including coaches, artists, educators, intervention workers / peacebuilders, MSW therapists, nutritionists, occupational therapists, job developers, transformative justice coordinators, and community volunteers;
- "Owned" by communities, with access and inclusion for parents and other family members for inter-generational programming and supports for youth caregivers; and
- Connected to and supportive of families and communities in order to strengthen the environments youth depend on.

Each of LA's Youth Development Centers should include a quality and comprehensive array of services and resources, including, at a minimum, (but not limited to):

After-school and Summer Day Camp Programs

- Comprehensive after-school and summer programs, 2-6pm during the school year, and 8am – 6pm during school holidays and summer months for 6-12 years olds that include homework help, academic enrichment, sports and recreation, arts and field trips, plus counseling and family supports as needed.

Academic Support for 13-24 year olds

- Tutoring and remediation
- Skills building and enrichment in specific skills areas (such as robotics, creative writing, media)
- A-G instruction, requirement guidance and scheduling/planning assistance (8th grade and up)
- College counseling, application support and campus tours
- Computer literacy and support including daily access to computers and internet



Job and Career Preparation

- Internship development and placement
- Certification programs in specific careers
- Job resume building and interview preparation
- Job application support and job readiness
- Entrepreneurship training and youth-run businesses and cooperatives
- Individual job and career counseling and planning
- Building the portfolio of documents needed for particular careers
- On-site after school and summer jobs, as well as coordination of after school and summer jobs programs for that area, including recruiting, training and supervising work and internship sites, as well as recruiting, interviewing and placing youth employees

Arts

- Expressive, visual and performing arts
- Therapeutic arts
- Mural making, including development of public art within the center and in surrounding community
- Marketable skills training
- Connections to and internships with LA's media, television and film industry

Trauma Informed

- Staff, volunteers and youth participants would be trained in trauma, its impacts, and healing strategies
- All youth, staff, volunteers and community members would have access to healing arts such as meditation, and mental health counseling (individual, group and family)
- Supports and peer mentorship for youth and their families living with or recovering from illness, violence, death and separation (with an emphasis on reaching out to and working with children of incarcerated parents, families who have suffered street or police violence and homicide, youth and families without housing, youth and families in foster care, families separated by deportation)
- Case management as needed for youth and families with additional referrals to resources and services

Life Management and Nutrition

- Healthy Relationships
- Family Planning and Healthy Sexuality
- Child Development and non-violent parenting
- Financial management
- Drug/alcohol education, harm reduction and referral to treatment
- Health maintenance: healthy foods available and healthy cooking classes, meals daily for all participants, daily exercise classes and opportunities, gardening / urban farming
- Other city and county agencies should be urged to co-locate essential services – such as health clinics, workforce development, food and nutrition programs, and mental health clinics – within youth development centers.



Transformative Justice (TJ), Violence Prevention and Peacebuilding / Intervention Training

- Transformative justice establishes a culture of inclusion, respect, safety and equity (building fairness and inclusion of all racial and ethnic groups, nationalities, genders, sexual orientation, physical and mental capabilities, religious and income groups).
- Transformative justice develops the skills of youth, staff and other community members in team building, creation of climates of respect and safety, conflict mediation and problem solving, de-escalation of violence, and techniques to defuse bullying, harassment, disrespect, inter-group, inter-ethnic and inter-neighborhood violence. TJ engages students and others in circles aimed at building relationships and trust, and addressing problems such as truancy, fights, bullying, theft, intoxication, vandalism, weapons and failure to follow school, youth center or community directives and norms without resorting to suspension, expulsion, ticketing and/or arrest. In addition, youth and staff learn skills that they can use to improve relationships and solve conflicts outside of schools and youth centers – in their own homes, in the workplace and on the street.
- The culture and practice of transformative justice should inform and be integrated into the practice and activities of every youth center, ensuring that all staff, volunteers and youth and family participants understand and use transformative justice to promote respect, appreciation and team success; to build relationships and understanding; and to address conflicts and repair harm.
- Intervention workers / peacebuilders are in the best position – in terms of relationships, skills and training – to coordinate transformative justice efforts at youth centers and in other settings. But all staff should become competent in this skill, and youth, volunteers and community members should receive training and experiential learning as well.
- Youth centers would be responsible for training and mentoring the next generation of transformative justice practitioners, including intervention workers.

Leadership and Civic Engagement

- Opportunities to make a difference, experience oneself as a leader contributing to school, community and government improvement
- Training for experiential learning for youth and youth development workers in direct action organizing, public policy advocacy and legislative processes, research, electoral politics, and movement history
- Connection to other youth and adults engaged in social, educational, racial, environmental, economic, food justice work, contributing to the building of coalitions, networks and movements of youth and other community leaders working for change
- Youth designed and youth-led community improvement, research, organizing and advocacy projects