

# Cultivating Connections

## Empowering Youth through Experiential Education And Community Service



## A Youth Risk Behavior Prevention Program Manual

By

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## Forward

This manual is intended to be a reference document, to assist in either the operation of similar prevention programs, or to assist those who wish to establish a youth - focused prevention program using experiential education programming as its basis.

Although many forms of experiential education prevention programming exist, the underlying theory of how youth who engage in *'learning by doing'*, and who are provided with opportunities to use acquired knowledge and skills to successfully address real-world tasks, also develop skills that help them avoid risk behavior initiation. With this in mind, regardless of the specifics of any individual experiential education-based prevention program, the mechanics of developing, operating, and evaluating effective prevention programs, as contained within this manual, should be applicable to your program.

This manual was prepared with the assistance of Glenwood Research, a research and evaluation consulting company located in Maine – [www.glenwoodresearch.com](http://www.glenwoodresearch.com).

Critical Thinking

Empathy

Introspection

*The three critical elements of all Youthlinks  
Programming*

## Introduction

### What Is Youthlinks?



**Youthlinks** is a nonprofit organization providing community service learning and enrichment programs for youth ages 11-17 throughout the mid-coast portion of Knox County Maine. Our programs offer area youth opportunities to learn skills, build self-esteem, develop leadership ability, cultivate responsibility and connect—to their peers, to adult mentors, and to their communities.

Youthlinks offers a wide variety of activities in four program areas to serve a diverse population of youth with varying interests. These activities all have certain core components in common:

- They are all process-oriented, so that youth focus not only on the task at hand, but also their own growth and learning;
- They all offer individual attention and flexibility;
- They provide youth with mentors;
- They all encourage youth to take the lead in some way, developing their own critical thinking and leadership skills; and,
- Rather than simply providing a safe, separate place for teens, our programs actively engage youth in their communities, helping them to learn and practice ways in which to be valuable, contributing and healthy community members.

## Cultivating Connections

Cultivating Connections is one of a number of youth-focused prevention programs offered by Youthlinks. Cultivating Connections is a year-round program that provides youth with opportunities to learn and apply knowledge and skills to real-world issues of hunger; to study hunger issues; learn craft, culinary and horticultural skills; give back to their community through service; and spend time with adult mentors from outside of the family.



Our 4,000 square-foot garden provides over 2,000 pounds of food each year to local food banks, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters.

Cultivating Connections is an *experiential* education program, meaning it provides for youth to learn by engaging in *hands-on* education. Programming is provided during out-of-school-time hours, and it uses the experiential education model as a method for delivering skills and knowledge designed to strengthen resiliency in middle and high school-age youth.



We provide our youth with opportunities to use newly acquired horticultural skills and knowledge to complete relevant community service projects like investigating local hunger issues, growing and preparing food for distribution, making contact with and providing food to local food banks, soup kitchens and individuals in need. Cultivating Connections participants also learn about nutrition and food preparation through cooking classes; they learn about sustainable agriculture and environmental conservation through active gardening; and they learn about gardening as a commercial enterprise through the operation of a produce stand.

Cultivating Connections provides participants with opportunities for positive community engagement and structured use of leisure time. It promotes individual creativity; development of occupational skills; and provides youth with positive peer role models, as well as opportunities to be peers to younger youth. The program also provides participants with additional positive adults in their lives. These attributes have all been identified within prevention literature, and are often referred to as either 'protective factors' (Hawkins, Catalano, et al.) and / or 'developmental assets' (Search Institute, Developmental Asset Framework).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Search Institute, 40 developmental assets, 2004. Avail at: <http://www.search-institute.org/>

## Why Was the Program Initiated?

According to a study by the Nellie May Foundation, national data suggests that middle school-age children are much more likely to be in self-care and less likely to be in supervised arrangements than younger school-age children. Twenty-four percent (24%) spend more of



their time home alone than in any other setting (Capizzano, Tout & Adams, 2000)<sup>2</sup>. More than one third of children in this age group spend some time caring for themselves each week as either a primary or secondary arrangement. The study notes the proportion increases with age: twenty-three percent (23%) of 10-year-olds spend some time caring for themselves compared to 44% of 12-year-olds (Capizzano et al., 2000)<sup>3</sup>.

Researchers suggest these figures probably underestimate the true number of latchkey children in this country because parents are often reluctant to report that their child is home alone. Smaller scale studies have found a much higher proportion of unsupervised 10 to 12 year olds—in some cases, over 60% (Dwyer et al., 1990; Hedin, Su & Hannesen, 1981; Mulhall & Stone, 1996; Williams & Fosarelli, 1987; Youngblade & Harris, 1986)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Miller, B. Critical Hours: Afterschool Programs and Educational Success. Nellie May Education Foundation. May, 2003. Avail at: [http://www.nmefdn.org/uimages/documents/Critical\\_Hours.pdf](http://www.nmefdn.org/uimages/documents/Critical_Hours.pdf), p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 34

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

Self-care for both children and adolescents has been linked to: increased likelihood of accidents and injuries, lower social competence, lower grade point averages (GPAs), lower achievement test scores, and greater likelihood of participation in delinquent or other high risk activities such as experimentation with alcohol, tobacco, drugs and sex.<sup>5</sup>

According to the Maine Youth Drug and Alcohol Use Survey (MYDAUS),<sup>6</sup> the lives of Knox County, Maine youth are characterized by the presence



of multiple risk factors, which are known, through research, to contribute to youth engagement in unhealthy behaviors like alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, along with delinquency, sexual experimentation, and other behaviors known to cause physical and emotional harm. MYDAUS reports Knox County youth have the highest prevalence in

Maine for a number of risk factors, including:

- Youth believing that laws and norms are favorable to drug use
- Youth maintaining a low commitment to school
- Youth maintaining attitudes favorable to drug use, and attitudes favorable to antisocial behavior
- Youth holding intentions to use drugs, and
- Youth believe there are rewards for antisocial behavior.

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<sup>5</sup> Kerrebrock, N., & Lewit, E.M. (1999). Children in self-care. *Future of Children*, 9(2): 151-160.  
Colwell, M.J., Pettit, G.S., Meece, D., Bates, J.E., & Dodge, K.A. (2001). Cumulative risk and continuity in non-parental care from infancy to early adolescence. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 47(2): 207-234.  
Patten, P. & Robertson, A.S. (2001). Focus on after-school time for violence prevention. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.  
Synder, H.N., & Sickmund, M. (1999). Juvenile offenders and victims: 1999 national report. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs. In: *Making the Case: A Fact Sheet on Children and Youth in Out-of-School Time*. National Institute on Out-of-School Time Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, January 2004. Avail at: [http://www.niost.org/publications/Factsheet\\_2004.pdf](http://www.niost.org/publications/Factsheet_2004.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/bds/osa/data/mydaus/index.htm>

## Underlying Theory

### Risk Factors

Cultivating Connections is based in the Social Development model of prevention (Hawkins, Catalano & Miller, 1992). This model suggests a causal link between adolescent high-risk behavior initiation and certain characteristics, conditions and beliefs, found within the social domains of self, peer, family, school and society. These causal conditions have been described as *risk factors*. There appears to be general agreement among researchers and others who work with youth that many are known to engage in behaviors that are likely to lead to physical and/or emotional harm.



Some known examples of risk factors include: extreme economic deprivation, having peers who engage in high risk behavior, neighborhood disorganization, availability of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, poor and inconsistent family management practices, family conflict, academic failure, low degree of commitment to school, peer rejection in early grades, and alienation and rebelliousness (Hawkins, et. al., 1992). These and other risk factors have been shown to act as *precursors* to adolescent high-risk behavior initiation. There does not appear to be a one-to-one relationship between any single risk factor and a negative outcome. Instead, risk factors appear to exist on multiple levels, and every negative outcome has several risk factors in common (Minard, 2002).

Stevens & Griffin, (2001) suggest that youth who engage in risk behaviors have been found to engage in multiple high-risk behaviors rather than a single risk behavior. Typical combinations found include: use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, sexual activity, and forms of physical aggression.

Youth begin to engage in these risk behaviors by age 11 or earlier, and do not appear to be engaging on an experimental level, but instead in combinations of behaviors throughout their teenage development. Stevens and Griffin found that youth engagement in risk behaviors appears to increase at key points, which they call 'vulnerable periods', during teenage development. These vulnerable periods usually coincide with significant life events like moving from grade school to middle school, and again from middle to junior and/or senior high school.

## **Protective Factors**

The Social Development theory also suggests that the negative impact of many known risk factors can be successfully modified or mediated in youth by so-called *protective factors*. Protective factors are defined as activities, conditions and/or characteristics that *modify or mediate against risks that cannot be changed by intervention* (Hawkins, Catalano & Miller, 1992). Examples of protective factors that have been shown to be effective in preventing risk behavior initiation include: changes in community norms; modifications to family management practices; warm family environments; and strengthened resiliency (Hawkins, Catalano & Miller, 1992). Protective factors appear to be the building blocks of resilience, where development of resilience depends on multiple transactions between the individual's internal and environmental protective factors (Minard, 2002).

Among the protective factors identified by Cultivating Connections is the development and strengthening of individual resiliency characteristics in participant youth. Again, both Hawkins et. al. identify resiliency as a protective factor, and Search identifies certain resiliency characteristics as assets.

## Resilience



Resiliency is described as a balance between stress and adversity – between risk factors on the one hand and protective factors on the other. It is described as one’s ability to cope under stressful conditions. Werner and Smith, (1992) refer to resilience as *self-righting tendencies that move children toward normal adult development under all but the most persistent adverse circumstances.*<sup>7</sup> A number of researchers studying children classified as resilient generally describe resiliency within the context of three kinds of phenomena, namely: good developmental outcomes despite high-risk status; sustained competence under stress; and an ability to recover from trauma. Researchers have found a consistent relationship between stress and psychological and behavioral problems in children and adults, including depression, anxiety, suicide, health problems and antisocial behavior (Smith & Carlson, 1997).

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<sup>7</sup> Werner, E. & Smith, R. (1992) *Overcoming the Odds: High Risk children from birth to adulthood.* Ithica, NY. Cornell University Press, p202.

There is general agreement in the literature that not all resilient children successfully avoid risk behaviors. Further, there is also agreement that not all non-resilient children will engage in risk behaviors. However, there appears to be general agreement among prevention scholars that children exposed to high levels of risks are better prepared to demonstrate less risk behavior initiation if they possess characteristics associated with resiliency.

Both Hawkins (1992) and Werner, (1995) have identified a number of behavioral characteristics found within resilient children. These include:

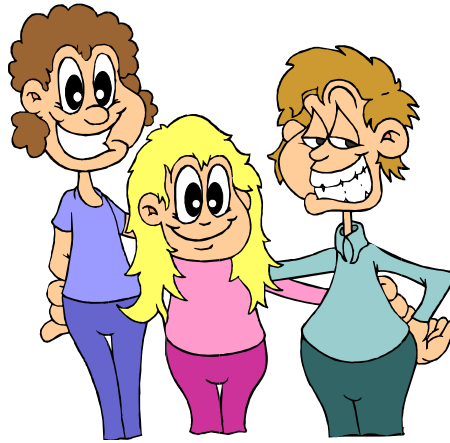
- Decision-making competency
- Participation in alternative, healthy activities
- A strong sense of self-esteem
- Maintaining healthy beliefs
- A positive social orientation
- Possessing clear standards for behavior
- Positive relationships with teachers
- A sense of purpose and future
- Maintaining positive peer relationships

The National Mental Health Association also includes the following in their list of characteristics of resilient children:

- Good coping skills
- Interest in and success at school
- Healthy engagement with adults outside the home
- An ability to articulate their feelings
- Help and support from immediate and extended family members

## Family

Much of the research on resiliency appears to agree that the family is the primary provider of skills and opportunities to build resilience (Healthy Families, 1998; Winfield, 1994; Pisapiaq, J., Westfall 1998; Grothberg, 1999). However, researchers have found that



sometimes, children from families where resilience is not fostered also possess resiliency characteristics.

In these instances, and on further investigation, they were able to identify the presence of one or more adults, other than the parent(s), who were able to provide the child with all, or a number of the resilience-building opportunities identified above. As a result, researchers have concluded that although the family is the primary provider of resiliency opportunities for youth, others, such as extended family members, or other caring adults, can effectively provide youth with resilience-building opportunities (Werner, 1995).

Based on these observations and findings, it appears that prevention programming can be designed to foster resilience, thus strengthening a key protective factor for risk behavior initiation. This is not to suggest, however, that enhancing children's capacities is easy. Werner notes that the fact of individual variations among children suggests that any attempt at fostering resiliency will have varying effects, depending on the internal resources of the recipients (Werner, 1998). She also notes that programs that pursue the objectives of helping youth enlarge their repertoire of problem-solving and social skills, and which in turn enhance a child's sense of self-efficacy and self esteem appear to work best in the context

of an organized and predictable environment that combines warmth and caring with a clearly defined structure and the setting of explicit time limits.

## Experiential Education

Experiential Education has been defined as:

- Learning that is based on active doing.
- A systematic use of adventure activities and other "action events" designed to change the way people feel, think, or behave (Experientia, 1998).<sup>8</sup>
- A philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values (Association for Experiential Education)<sup>9</sup>.

Several related categories of social competencies have been linked through research to the benefits of multi-age, experiential learning, and include: increased pro-social behaviors such as nurturing others, sharing and cooperation, inclusion and friendship behaviors, leadership, creative problem-solving, team-building, and conflict resolution.<sup>10</sup> In addition, personal characteristics have been associated with experiential learning,

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<sup>8</sup> Tangen Foster, J. & Tangen-Foster, L. The Caring Capacity: A Case for Multi-age Experiential Learning. Moscow, Idaho Electronic Green Journal, December 1998. Special Issue 9. avail at: <http://egj.lib.uidaho.edu/egj09/foster1.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.aee2.org/customer/pages.php?pageid=47>

<sup>10</sup> NSEE Foundations Document Committee. Foundations of Experiential Education December 1997. Avail at: <http://www.nsee.org/found.htm>

including: innovation, independent thinking, and attention to detail, flexibility, self-motivation and dedication. Experiential education has been recognized as a method for strengthening individual skills associated with resiliency. Several related categories of social competencies have been linked through research to the benefits of multi-age, experiential learning including increased pro-social behaviors such as nurturing others, sharing and cooperation, inclusion and friendship behaviors, leadership, creative problem-solving, team-building, and conflict resolution.<sup>11</sup>

According to Case, experiential learning promotes student observation, data collection and discovery to drive continual analysis, problem-solving and learning.<sup>12</sup> It also requires that young people examine their emotions and values to meet challenges and solve problems. In addition, experiential education utilizes inductive reasoning, taking a specific issue or problem and helping young people understand its broad application. Experiential learning connects students directly to employers, community groups and society in general, to result in opportunities to engage with community, which *underscores the relationship between experiential learning and improving society*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> NSEE Foundations Document Committee. Foundations of Experiential Education December 1997. Avail at: <http://www.nsee.org/found.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Case, J. In Experiential Education: Just What Do We Mean? Delivered at the American Youth Policy Forum September 27, 1996. Avail at: <http://www.aypf.org/forumbriefs/1996/fb092796.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Such "skills" are not generally developed through standard educational curricula, but appear to grow naturally through interaction with others and participation in real-world activities, such as work or community service.<sup>14</sup>

A common thread among experiential programming of all kinds is that it provides real-world experiences in the presence of real consequences for a person's actions, a need to set goals, an opportunity to experience trial and error, and the experience of both delegating and responding to authority.<sup>15</sup>

Experiential education, also known as 'cooperative learning strategies' due to their emphasis on cooperation and work within team settings has been shown to increase pro-social behavior and to enhance children's ability to take others' points of view. In contrast, children who are competitive and whose parents emphasize competition are less empathic than their peers (Kohn, 1990). Cooperative learning in the school setting involves placing students in small groups where group learning is of central importance and students are not only responsible for their own learning but for the learning of others as well (Leming, 1993b). This approach increases academic achievement, acceptance of students of other races and ethnic origins (Leming, 1993b), mutual concern among students, and positive social attitudes and behavior (Leming, 1993a).

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<sup>14</sup> Cunningham, M. In *Experiential Education: Just What Do We Mean?* Delivered at the American Youth Policy Forum September 27, 1996. Avail at: <http://www.aypf.org/forumbriefs/1996/fb092796.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

## Experiential Education and Resiliency - What is the Connection?

In the case of Cultivating Connections, experiential education is delivered in the form of hands-on learning of horticultural skills. In addition to its focus on horticulture, Cultivating Connections focuses on fostering high expectations for personal performance, a strengthened sense of purpose, self-empowerment, and development of a strong sense of personal responsibility.

Although there is little research on experiential education and risk behavior prevention, indications are it can be used in prevention programming. According to the Channing Bette company,<sup>16</sup> contractor to the U.S. – DHHS Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), protective factor theory requires there be ***opportunities*** for young people to be involved in their families, schools and communities in meaningful, developmentally appropriate ways—to make a real contribution, and to feel valued for their efforts and accomplishments.

Experiential educational programming can provide such opportunities. In summary, research on experiential education and outcomes appear to support the use of this methodology to strengthen key resilience characteristics in youth participants. Since resilience is also identified as a 'protective factor' to risk behavior initiation, experiential education programming therefore appears suitable to risk behavior prevention programming.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.channing-bete.com/positiveyouth/pages/rpfactors/rpfactors.html>

## Prevention Program Characteristics

There are certain themes appearing repeatedly in the literature that suggest characteristics of successful prevention programming focused on strengthening resiliency - (Beardslee & Podorefsky 1988; Cowen et al., 1990; Garmezy, 1991; Lipsitt, 1991; Norman & Turner, 1991; Rhodes & Brown, 1991). Three of the most commonly cited, and their practice implications are:

■ **A relationship with an adult**--not necessarily a parent--who can serve as a positive role model. Programmatically, this relationship might be enhanced through some form of mentoring effort. It also might be achieved through attempts to improve parental functioning, especially in the adult's capacity to serve as a role model and conveyer of ATOD no-use norms.

It could also involve helping students to develop talents and abilities that not only enhance self-esteem but also garner them positive attention from the adults in their environment.

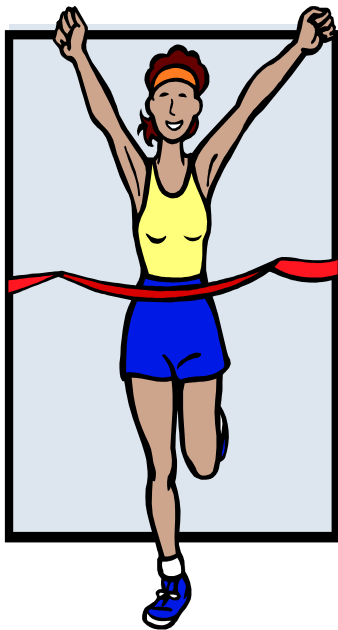
■ **A realistic locus of control**, which can be encouraged through problem-solving activities in which students are helped to analyze situations for what is realistically within their control, what options in such situations are open to them, and how they can make good choices.

Such activities can include helping youth avoid blaming themselves for situations that are beyond their immediate control, and helping them engage in adaptive distancing from negative influences in their environment - whether these be people, places, or substances.

## ■ Participation in a positive, pro social structure.

Participation can be facilitated by providing youth with a place to belong; to share culturally relevant myths, ceremonies, and rituals; and to develop a sense that their lives have a purpose, direction, and meaning (Zunz & Turner, 1993).

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has suggested that effective prevention programs:



- Address multiple domains; specifically, environment, family and personal risk factors
  - Are not one-time interventions - they provide for follow-up and continued contact with participants
  - Are comprehensive - they target multiple risk factors, and are not singularly focused on one problem area
  - Are long-term in scope - they continue to work with participants in developmentally appropriate ways
  - Balance risk and protective factors
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- Require community support and involvement
  - Is age and gender appropriate (NIDA, 1997).

## How It All Began



Cultivating Connections started simply, as a small community garden plot in 1997. In 1998, the garden expanded, making use of the neighboring Rockland District High School property. That year, youth

participants lead by Youthlinks' staff (known at the time as Community Service Project) grew, and donated 654 pounds of vegetables to soup kitchens and food pantries within the community. The original intent of the program was to provide local food banks and soup kitchens with fresh, organic produce while giving youth meaningful community-service volunteer opportunities.

A partner in "Plant a Row for the Hungry", the garden now includes 4,000 square feet of flower and vegetable beds as well as a greenhouse. The garden has been featured in the *Kids Gardening Newsletter*, on the National Gardening Association's website, and in the newsletter of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). The program is also affiliated with the Cooperative Extension's Master Gardener program. Since 1999, over 9,000 pounds of fresh produce have been grown and donated to local food banks, soup kitchens and food distribution programs.

As the garden and the organization grew, the program was continuously modified to result in increased numbers of opportunities available to youth to learn new skills and knowledge, and to provide participant youth with a more meaningful experience. The program has evolved from a community garden providing youth with an opportunity to volunteer, to a comprehensive experiential education program designed to nurture youth to be healthy, resilient, community-minded adults.

### **What Do We Do; and How Do We Do It?**

Using the research supporting the Social Development model, Cultivating Connections seeks to measure change in resiliency skills and characteristics, subsequent avoidance of harmful out-of-school time activities, a delay in the initiation of participant alcohol, tobacco or other drug (ATOD) use as compared to State of Maine samples of school-age youth, and the avoidance of other known risk behaviors. In summary, the program attempts to build experiential skills, and provide youth with opportunities to engage in meaningful community activities. Use of these skills during community service will lead to strengthened resilience skills, which in turn will lead to less risk behaviors.

The program has identified the following prevention strategies to be used in their programming:

Education Strategies – meaning - Instructional approaches that combine social and thinking skills to enhance individual abilities, attitudes, and behaviors inconsistent with substance abuse and other kinds of delinquent behavior.

Communications Strategies – meaning - strategies that work to influence community norms, attract community support for other program efforts, reinforce other program components, and keep the public informed about program progress.

Collaboration Strategies – meaning - community coalition building and interagency collaboration activities designed to build resiliency skills; and used to coordinate prevention.

More specifically, the project has identified the following skills/activities, known through literature to act as protective factors to risk behavior initiation by youth:

- Participation in alternative pro social, productive activities during out-of-school time
- Engagement in activities that result in the development of a sense of responsibility
- Engagement with positive, pro social peers
- Provision of additional caring adults in the lives of participant youth
- Fostering a positive sense of community
- Strengthening individual self-esteem and confidence
- Developing a personal, and positive sense of the future
- Strengthened bonding to academics
- Acquisition and strengthening of team-building, goal-setting and appropriate group behavior skills

## Cultivating Connections - Program Activities

Beginning in the fall of 2005, Cultivating Connections programming included five (5) primary activities, each with a specific curriculum including learning objectives and engagement activities. The five primary activities include: Community Gardening, Walk on the Wild Side, Soup Kitchen, Cooking, and Market Gardening.

Participation in these program activities provides youth with opportunities to gain knowledge, learn new skills, and use these skills to complete community service.

Cultivating connections operates on a year-round schedule during out-of-school time hours. The year is subdivided into four program sessions of fall, winter, spring and summer. Each season is broken into program sessions of from 8 to 12 weeks in duration.

## Community Gardening



The Community Gardening program brings people together to grow food for the hungry while providing youth with the opportunity to learn about a wide array of issues from nutrition, to sustainable agriculture, and community. The produce grown in the garden is donated to local food banks and soup kitchens. Roughly 1,500 pounds of fresh, organically grown produce are donated each year.

Through participation in this program youth:

- Provide a service to the community
- Apply basic principals of organic gardening
- Examine hunger issues
- Apply solutions to address hunger issues
- Work effectively within a group to communicate and complete projects

## Walk on the Wild Side

Walk on the Wild Side fosters youth development through exploration and exposure to new experiences. It focuses skill attainment and learning within the natural outdoor setting, and includes hiking, plant recognition, and outdoor skills.



Through participation in this program youth:

- Apply communication and safety skills in an outdoor setting
- Organize individual and group responsibilities to complete tasks
- Demonstrate good introduction and communication skills
- Identify varied characteristics of specific ecosystems
- Respect the natural setting by practicing *leave no trace* principles
- Work as a team to complete a service project

## Soup Kitchen



Soup Kitchen provides youth the opportunities to learn about hunger in the community, how to cook and serve a large meal, and how to work well with a team.

The group meets weekly to examine hunger issues, and to identify ways they can help to alleviate hunger. In addition, the group runs the soup kitchen one Saturday per month - planning, cooking and serving a meal to up to 30 guests.

Through participation in this program youth:

- Practice good introduction and communication skills
- Understand hunger issues
- Identify local food agencies
- Work with others to develop and implement a service project
- Practice kitchen safety
- Manage a budget

## Cooking

The Cooking programs take three forms focusing on a). Cultural cuisine, b). Cooking with fresh, organic produce, or c). Preparing healthy snacks. In all three, youth gain skills and knowledge related to cooking and nutrition.

Through participation in these programs youth:

- Follow instructions to complete a task
- Work as a group to prepare a meal or snack
- Apply safety concepts to cooking projects
- Describe the benefits of healthy eating
- Manage a budget



## Market Gardening



The Market Gardening program introduces youth to both gardening and running a business. Youth sell vegetables and flowers harvested from the community garden at a program sponsored, road-side farm stand.

Through participation in this program youth:

- Apply a plan for a respectful work environment
- Comprehend various business roles
- Identify effective marketing strategies
- Develop a business plan
- Demonstrate effective communication skills
- Work as a team to determine individual and group responsibilities

## **General Operating Procedures and Methods**

### **Operating Hours**

Cultivating Connections programming is offered to middle and high school-age youth during school in our Classroom Connections program; after-school; on Saturdays; and throughout the summer.

The “walk on the wild side” program is offered on an in-school basis as an adjunct to alternative education curriculum. Science, geography, teamwork and leadership skills are emphasized in this outdoor classroom setting.

The “community gardening” program has been implemented in a variety of settings and circumstances. To help youth understand and appreciate the historical context of various plants, and how the plants have adapted to changing environmental conditions over time, a variety of hardy vegetables with a long history of being cultivated in Maine are the focus of the history garden. Both history and health classes have benefited from this program.

In another setting, youth in a science class designed their own small garden plots, using the produce to provide healthy snacks for the school. They also sponsored a community harvest supper, incorporating the rest of their garden produce into the homemade soup that was served.

## **Staff hours**

Program managers are scheduled on a 40 hour work week; Monday through Friday, from 9:30 to 5:30. Some evenings and Saturdays are required as needed, usually for program-sponsored Social gatherings; youth hosted family parties; program open houses held to introduce new and potential participants to the program; and special workshops



## **Participant hours**

Programming is generally offered from 3:30 to 5:30, Monday through Friday. Throughout the year, one time events and special supplemental project activities will be offered on weekends.

Occasional parent meetings are scheduled to encourage parent involvement, the staff work additional night and weekend hours for the following events:

## **Recruitment**

Generally, enrollment is offered on a First come -first served basis. Program personnel engage in active recruitment prior to the start of each program session. TO accomplish this they arrange visits to local middle schools, where youth can talk with staff during their school lunch hour, and they receive program catalogues.

At the end of each school year, staff visits with the 5<sup>th</sup> graders in the area elementary schools since they will be eligible to participate as they move to middle school. At these sessions they make formal presentations on offered programming.

Other recruitment activities include mailings and press releases. Mailings are sent to any youth on the program's mailing list, as well as to pediatricians, local social service agencies working with youth, and to Maine Department of Corrections officials. On average, the department of corrections will make ten (10) referrals per year to the program.

Waiting lists are developed when enrollments meet maximum participant ratios and there are still more youth interested in joining. The waiting lists are activity specific – if 12 programs run in a session, 3 may have slots available while the others have waiting list. If program staff is aware of enrolled youth who will not be able to fulfill their commitments, they may drop that child and allow one from the waiting list to join. In general, a child is on the waiting list for just one 8 to 12 week session. After that time, he/she can join in during the next new session. Staff calls wait-listed youth to as the new session approaches.

Sometimes parents will contact the program to request enrollment of their child. Parents usually learn about us from word of mouth, through other youth, by reading our weekly press releases, or from their placement on our mailing list.

### **Waiting List**

We attempt to accommodate every child with interest in our programming. However, we also recognize the need to honor our staff to participant ratio. Therefore, if a session is full, the child is placed on waiting list.

For Department of Corrections referrals, the issue is community service hours. The courts may sentence an offending youth to community service and needs a placement. In these instances we often can accommodate the requests, and include these youth in our community service projects. However, even in these instances, the choice of program activity is always left with the participant. No youth is ever forced to participate in an activity that is not of his or her choosing.

### **What is the ideal Staff to Youth ratio?**

The ideal participant to staff ratio will vary based on the individual activities offered, but a general rule of thumb is 1 staff to 6 participants.

### **Contractual Obligations Participants**

The Program executes a set of documents with each child and his/her parents. These include: House Rules; a Responsibility contract; Parental Permissions; and a general Participant Information Form. (Copies in Appendix)



For youth who continue in programming, from session to session, at the first meeting of each session staff review the program rules and guidelines and ask youth to re-commit to their original contracted obligations to the program. They are, as a group, also provided an opportunity to add new rules to guide the operation of that session.

## Parental Permissions

Parental Permission slips include: a blanket release; a publicity release; medical information such as allergies, medications, and emergency contact information; and a testing consent form. At the start of each session, a new registration form must be completed with parent signature. This is required so that staff may keep abreast of any changes in participant medical information, or their program interests.

## Staffing

Staffing consists of the Youthlinks Program Director who oversees Cultivating Connections programming in addition to its other programming. Cultivating Connections has a full-time Program Director and three Program Managers who deliver curriculum.



The Program Director provides supervision and evaluates program staff performance, maintains program budgets, ensures program staff meet organizational goals, assists in the creation, management and evaluation of program activities, oversees scheduling and publicity of youth program activities, coordinates youth outreach activities, coordinates volunteer outreach, recruitment, coordination, and recognition activities, assists with securing funding for program activities, and manages, evaluates and reports the results of grant-funded programs.

Program Managers develop and implement program descriptions and curricula, coordinate, manage and facilitate program activities, recruit youth participants and adult volunteers and assist with program evaluation, fundraising and publicity.

### Staff Qualifications

The program Director of ACOG typically looks for individuals who:

- Demonstrate an interest in working with youth
- Demonstrate a working understanding of child development
- Preferably hold a Bachelor Degree
- Have experience working with youth
- Can demonstrate skills to facilitate activities with youth
- Demonstrate an ability to be a team player
- Demonstrate positive role model qualities
- Demonstrate an interest in community service.



Over time, it has become clear that staff:

- Must be experienced in setting boundaries, providing structure, and allowing flexibility; and
- Perhaps most importantly can make the connections between program activities / lessons being delivered and the targeted life skills identified by the program for strengthening.

## **Program Use of Volunteers**

A Volunteer Committee does exist, and it works on the recruitment and management of adult volunteers. Sometimes adults are recruited specific to needed tasks – like local bank employees who can help teach kids about finances, and financing businesses.

We also partner with local service organizations like the Rotary Club, which provides volunteer mentors. These individuals mentor youth, provide supports to participant youth, and work with youth to identify and design meaningful community service projects. These adult mentors may be needed for just one visit (presentation) or may remain active in the program for an 8 to 12 week session.

We also collaborate with the County Extension Service – Master Gardener program, which also provides adult mentors to our programming. In addition, community organizations served by our programming, like the local food pantries and area land trusts also get involved to design community service activities.

## **Characteristics of an Effective Program Director**

When asked to describe the characteristics / qualities needed to successfully engage youth and manage this type of programming, Cultivating Connections staff suggested a Director must be:

Resilient, Flexible, and a creative thinker

- ➔ Good communicator
- ➔ Being both a 'big picture' and a detail-oriented person
- ➔ Strong management and budgeting skills

- Skilled at development and fund-raising
- An ability to set behavioral boundaries
- Good listening skills
- An understanding of adolescent behaviors
- Ability to deal with difficult and often sensitive events
- Collaboration skills / community oriented
- Have knowledge of risk behavior motivations in youth; resiliency theory and practice; and prevention “best practices”
- Have an ability to move science to service – bringing theory to actual practice.



### **Professional Development**

Funds for ongoing staff professional development are budgeted annually. Staff is expected to pursue continuing education and development based on topical areas of interest they identify. Part of their ongoing supervision is a review of staff professional development progress.

### **Ongoing Reflection**

Each year, the previous year’s programming is assessed in terms of how well it engaged youth, and was able to deliver targeted learning objectives. Staff, upon reflection, will suggest modifications to programming for the upcoming session to improve upon prior experience, to keep things fresh, to try new things, and to meet changing community needs. For example, after the garden session in 2005, a decision was made to down-size the garden plot because it was challenging to maintain

it at its current size. By downsizing, staff believes it will still work well as a teaching tool, but provide them an opportunity to enhance the quality of the programming.

Certain activities however, remain constant. One such activity was identified by staff as the development of healthy life skills. Within each program activity, opportunities are identified to provide youth with responsible roles, decision-making, consequences, and community service.

## Curriculum

Cultivating Connections has identified the strengthening of resiliency characteristics through participation in horticultural related experiential education and community service as its method for delivering risk behavior prevention programming. More specifically, the program has designed a curriculum to address the following:



- Community opportunities for involvement
- Bonding to society norms and institutions
- Self-esteem
- Social skills
- Positive personal characteristics
- Connection to peers, community
- Provision of positive adult role models
- Personal responsibility
- Leadership skills
- Goal setting

- Creative problem-solving
- Confirming personal values
- Development of life vision

The program maintains, and continually updates a written curriculum. The curriculum follows a standard format which begins with the overall objectives for program; and objectives for each included program activity.

In addition, every session meeting has a set of learning objectives and activities designed to meet them. Within every activity / meeting is a 'brief' – which is an opportunity for staff to introduce the activity, like team building or making introductions, and discuss the targeted skills. Participants then move to the actual session activity in which they participate in hands-on learning of the identified skills, and are provided with opportunities to practice them.

Each activity session ends with a debriefing – an opportunity for youth to reflect upon the application of their newly acquired skills and knowledge to their everyday life. The debriefing is also used to help transition to the next planned session – participants learn what is coming up in the next session.

### **Participant Contact Hours**

The five primary activities of Cultivating connections include: Community Gardening, Walk on the Wild Side, Soup Kitchen, Cooking, and Market Gardening.

■ **Community Gardening** – offered three times each year, in the spring, Summer and Fall sessions; a total of 32 weeks; 52 program contact hours.

■ **Walk on the Wild Side** – offered in all four sessions; a total of 44 weeks; 110 program contact hours.

■ **Soup Kitchen** – offered in all four sessions; a total of 44 weeks; 132 program contact hours.

■ **Cooking** – offered during all four sessions; a total of 26 weeks; 52 program contact hours.

■ **Market Gardening** – offered during the summer session; a total of 8 weeks; 16 program contact hours.

### **Curriculum Themes and Supports**

Consistent / repetitive themes and activities within all Cultivating Connections programming include:

- Critical thinking
- Empathy
- Introspection

These themes are reinforced through the delivery of key life skills (social skills) such as problem solving; decision-making; and critical thinking; engagement in community service; and reflection.

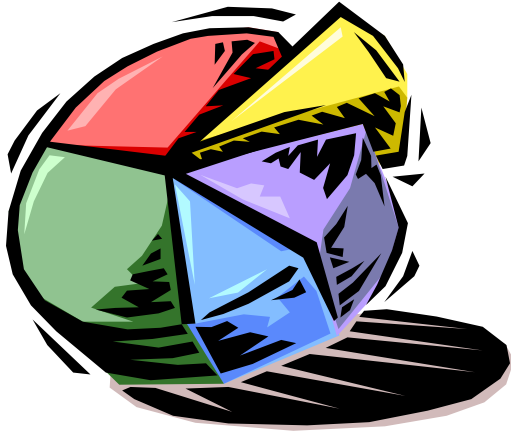
The following chart identifies program activities utilized to meet program goals around strengthening individual resiliency skills and characteristics.

Curriculum Content	Protective Factors Targeted
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Community Gardening</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ participation in community service projects</li> <li>➤ plan and maintain a community garden</li> <li>➤ identification of community hunger needs</li> <li>➤ identify and engage with community hunger relief resources</li> <li>➤ apply solutions to address hunger issues</li> <li>➤ develop food distribution networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●</li> <li>● Community opportunities for involvement</li> <li>● Community rewards for involvement</li> <li>● Bonding to society institutions</li> <li>● Self-esteem</li> <li>● Social skills</li> <li>● Positive personal characteristics</li> <li>● Connection to peers, community</li> <li>● Provision of positive adult role models</li> <li>● Personal responsibility</li> <li>● Leadership skills</li> <li>● Goal setting</li> <li>● Creative problem-solving</li> <li>● Confirming personal values</li> <li>● Development of vision</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Walk on the Wild Side</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Participation in community service projects</li> <li>➤ teaching hiking protocols to other participants</li> <li>➤ plan, lead, and manage a safe group hikes</li> <li>➤ demonstrate characteristics of social responsibility</li> <li>➤ participation in community service projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Community opportunities for involvement</li> <li>● Community rewards for involvement</li> <li>● Bonding to society institutions</li> <li>● Self-esteem</li> <li>● Social skills</li> <li>● Positive personal characteristics</li> <li>● Connection to peers, community</li> <li>● Provision of positive adult role models</li> <li>● Personal responsibility</li> <li>● Leadership skills</li> <li>● Goal setting</li> <li>● Creative problem-solving</li> <li>● Confirming personal values</li> <li>● Development of vision</li> </ul>

Curriculum Content	Protective Factors Targeted
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Soup Kitchen</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Plan a well-balanced meal for a large group of people</li> <li>➤ Purchase, prepare (cook), and serve a complete dinners</li> <li>➤ Identify foods that promote physical health benefits</li> <li>➤ Opportunities to be a project team leader</li> <li>➤ Opportunities to develop plans and goals as part of a team</li> <li>➤ Participation in community service projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Community opportunities for involvement</li> <li>● Community rewards for involvement</li> <li>● Bonding to society institutions</li> <li>● Self-esteem</li> <li>● Social skills</li> <li>● Positive personal characteristics</li> <li>● Connection to peers, community</li> <li>● Provision of positive adult role models</li> <li>● Personal responsibility</li> <li>● Leadership skills</li> <li>● Goal setting</li> <li>● Creative problem-solving</li> <li>● Confirming personal values</li> <li>● Development of vision</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Market Gardening</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Plan, build and manage a commercially viable produce market stand</li> <li>➤ Harvest flowers and vegetables</li> <li>➤ Opportunities to practice different business roles</li> <li>➤ Opportunities to develop plans and goals as part of a team</li> <li>➤ Participation in community service projects</li> <li>➤ Customer communication</li> <li>➤ Managing finances</li> <li>➤ Public relations tasks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Community opportunities for involvement</li> <li>● Community rewards for involvement</li> <li>● Bonding to society institutions</li> <li>● Self-esteem</li> <li>● Social skills</li> <li>● Positive personal characteristics</li> <li>● Connection to peers, community</li> <li>● Provision of positive adult role models</li> <li>● Personal responsibility</li> <li>● Leadership skills</li> <li>● Goal setting</li> <li>● Creative problem-solving</li> <li>● Confirming personal values</li> <li>● Development of vision</li> </ul>

Curriculum Content	Protective Factors Targeted
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Cooking</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Identify foods that promote physical health benefits</li> <li>➤ Opportunities to be a project team leader</li> <li>➤ Opportunities to develop plans and goals as part of a team</li> <li>➤ Participation in community service projects</li> <li>➤ Purchase supplies and prepare meals or snacks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Community opportunities for involvement</li> <li>● Community rewards for involvement</li> <li>● Bonding to society institutions</li> <li>● Self-esteem</li> <li>● Social skills</li> <li>● Positive personal characteristics</li> <li>● Connection to peers, community</li> <li>● Provision of positive adult role models</li> <li>● Personal responsibility</li> <li>● Leadership skills</li> <li>● Goal setting</li> <li>● Creative problem-solving</li> <li>● Confirming personal values</li> <li>● Development of vision</li> </ul>

## Program Evaluation



Ongoing evaluation is conducted to:

- Confirm participant behavioral changes targeted by programming
- Accumulate participant outcome results on behavioral and resiliency variables
- Provide Youthlinks staff with information to support continuous improvement activities

### Process Evaluation

Process evaluation activities investigate how the program operates in comparison to how it proposed to operate. Primary research questions will include:

- Is the intervention being delivered as intended?
- What is the exposure level to the intervention?
  - a. How many of the sessions do youth, on average, attend
  - b. While attending a session, how often, on average, do youth attend each scheduled weekly meeting?
  - c. Are there notable variations in exposure levels?
- Are there barriers to delivery of the programming?
- Do session variations in activities appear to impact attendance and/or efficacy?
- What is the average annual participant rate of attrition?
- How do participants (youth, parents, mentors & staff) perceive the program?

- What do the youth think is the intention of the intervention?
  - a. What do they find most meaningful about the programming?
  - b. What would participants want to see changed about the programming?
    - i. About the operations?
  - c. Does the program meet participant / parent expectations?

## **Outcome Evaluation**

Outcome evaluation activities are designed to test program efficacy – was the program able to achieve the intended impact on the participants. For Cultivating Connections, the primary impacts (outcomes) are: 1). A demonstrated change in horticultural skills; and 2). A measured change in characteristics of resiliency.

The primary research questions for Cultivating Connections are:

- ➔ Does participation in 'Cultivating Connections' result in a gain in horticultural knowledge?
- ➔ Does participation in 'Cultivating Connections' result in engagement in community service by participant youth?
- ➔ Does participation in 'Cultivating Connections' result in a self-identified commitment to ongoing community service among participants?

- ➔ Do measured gains in horticultural knowledge, and observed engagement in community service programming demonstrate measured change in participant resiliency and other targeted skills and characteristics?
- ➔ Does participation in Cultivating Connections result in less use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs by program participants when compared to other Maine and national samples of youth?

### **Outcome Evaluation Methodology**

The outcome evaluation relies on data collection and analysis. Data collected includes:

1. Selection of appropriate variables – inclusion of measures around horticultural skills; and measures of resiliency
2. Staff interviews (questionnaires)
3. Staff observations
4. Youth questionnaires
5. Parent questionnaires
6. Youth interviews (focus groups)

## Instrumentation

In order to gain insight into program outcomes, a number of scales were developed and are administered at regular intervals.



### Session Tests

Glenwood Research worked with program staff to develop individual session tests, designed to assess whether key learning objectives were achieved. Each test included the unique learning objectives established for that activity. These tests are administered by instructors using a pre test (prior to instruction), and post test (after instruction delivery) design. Instructors use test results to develop modifications to curricula where warranted.

An example of one of these session tests is for the session entitled: Walk on the Wild Side. Test variables for this activity include:

1. Know and be able to explain safe hiking protocols
2. Teach safe hiking protocols to others
3. Correctly define "low impact" hiking
4. Plan, lead, and manage a safe group hike
5. Identify available public hiking trails in the community
6. Correctly identify natural habitats (settings) of certain species of animals and plants
7. Describe to others what they need to bring for equipment and supplies when hiking
8. Complete basic first aid if required on a hike

Each variable is accompanied by a 4 point scale and participants are asked to tell us whether they believe they **can** or **cannot** do the following activities or tasks. Answer choices provided are:

Not at all	A little	Pretty well	Very well
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## **Experiential Education Attainment**

Glenwood worked with program staff to develop a set of overarching questions that attempted to assess participant change in skills and knowledge, in general, as opposed to individual session learning objectives. Staff members were asked to identify the collective set of learning objectives for the entire Cultivating Connections programming. Since not all participants choose to participate in all the activities offered each session, there was a need to develop some method for assessing broader program learning objectives. For example, where the Community Garden curriculum is interested in knowing whether participants learned how to “plan and maintain a garden that produces healthy plants and vegetables” among other gardening-specific skills tested, the program-wide experiential education test sought to determine how well participants learned to:

- Identify other organizations that provide service in the community
- Volunteer service to other organizations
- Understand and explain why they volunteer
- Communicate with adults outside of their family
- Work with others to complete a project
- Listen, then use information to complete a project
- Gather information they needed to make responsible decisions
- Resolve disagreements with people in non violent ways
- Respect and accept others even when they seem different to them
- Avoid harmful behaviors even when their friends are engaging in them
- Try new things without fear of failing
- Identify and ask for help from a responsible adults

The experiential skill test is administered using a post test / pre test design, which is only administered at year-end. Confirmation for this post test / pre test design was accomplished by piloting the instrument first as a pre test administered at enrollment, followed by a post test at year-end. We found youth generally overestimated their knowledge and skill levels at program entry; and it wasn't until they experienced the curricula that they realized how little they knew upon entry. Therefore we went to the post test / pre test method. These questions are presented like:

You have been involved at Youthlinks for awhile now, and we are interested in knowing what you have learned. Please read each of the following and tell us how well you can do each **now**. Then, think back to before you were in the program, and tell us how well you could do each **before** you participated in the program.

a. Identify other organizations that provide services in my community

<b>Now</b> , I can do this	Very well	Pretty well	A little	Not at all
<b>Before</b> I came to Youthlinks I could do this	Very well	Pretty well	A little	Not at all

Prior to administration of the scale, staff take time to explain the concept of post/pre and review examples of the questions to help participants understand the format. We found that taking this time to explain the format of the scale was important, and resulted in an improved understanding by the youth about the scale.

## Resiliency



Glenwood introduced a resiliency test it developed for use with other experiential education-based prevention programs for youth. The scale is based on the work of two researchers, Schwarzer & Jerusalem, who developed two scales Glenwood, found to be of considerable interest. The two scales are called: Self-Efficacy; and Pro-Active Attitude.

The Self-Efficacy scale aims at a broad and stable sense of personal competence to deal efficiently with a variety of stressful situations. Often referred to as coping skills, the self-efficacy scale addresses optimistic self-beliefs of the type we rely on to cope with a variety of difficult demands in life (Schmitz & Schwarzer, 1999).<sup>17</sup>

The Proactive Attitude scale measures personality characteristic that have implications for motivation and action. It measures beliefs in the potential of changes that can be made to improve oneself and one's environment. This includes various facets such as resourcefulness, responsibility, values, and vision. Intelligence, courage, and strength, for example, reside within and allow goal setting and persistence. The proactive individual takes responsibility for his or her own growth, focuses on solutions for problems and is driven by values. Proactive individuals have a vision, and will create meaning in life by striving for ambitious goals.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (2004). Generalized Self-Efficacy scale. Avail at: [http://www.fu-berlin.de/gesund/skalen/Language\\_Selection/Turkish/General\\_Perceived\\_Self-Efficac/general\\_perceived\\_self-efficac.htm](http://www.fu-berlin.de/gesund/skalen/Language_Selection/Turkish/General_Perceived_Self-Efficac/general_perceived_self-efficac.htm)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Glenwood combined the two scales to create a single instrument. Test questions were re-assigned on a random basis. When administered, sub scale mean scores for Pro Active Attitude and Self-Efficacy are calculating. We also calculate a combined score, which we refer to as the participant's *resiliency score*.

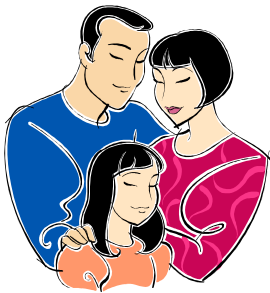
The resiliency scale is administered to youth, new to Cultivating Connections upon their entry to the program. It re-administered to all participants at the end of the program year. At the year-end administration of the scale, it is combined on a single instrument a long with the '*experiential education attainment*' questions.

The resiliency scale is presented like the following:

Here are some questions about how you feel about things in general. Please circle the answer that best reflects how you feel today.

a. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.	Not at all True	Barely True	Moderately True	Exactly True
b. If someone opposes me, I can find the ways and means to get what I want.	Not at all True	Barely True	Moderately True	Exactly True

### Parent Observations



Program staff developed a scale for administration with parents of participant youth. The scale contains questions that closely parallel the participant experiential education scale questions, and asks parents to tell us if they have observed any change in their child on these variables since they began to participate in Cultivating Connections programming.

### **ATOD Use Test (Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug)**

In order to meet Maine Office of Substance Abuse (OSA) expectations around substance prevention results, questions were added to the resiliency test for use at program entry and after one year of participation to assess substance use by youth. These questions were taken directly from the most current version, 2004 Maine Youth Drug and Alcohol Use Survey (MYDAUS), used by OSA for state-wide testing of school-age youth. By using questions from the MYDAUS, both program personnel and OSA can compare results for Cultivating connections youth to selected samples of Maine youth. This provides some comparability of program observations to state observations of youth of similar age, grade and gender.

The evaluation design is sometimes referred to as 'triangulated', meaning a number of different avenues are used to generate program outcome observations and findings.

## Process and Outcome Variables

The following chart contains the process and outcome variables identified for evaluation.

Activities / Skills & Strengths	Process/ Outcome	Measure(s)	Respondent
Knowledge gain of horticultural skills / management skills	Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth demonstrate measured change in skills, knowledge and horticultural confidence</li> <li>Youth engage in gardening activities</li> </ul>	youth
Commitment to and engagement in community service activities	Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognition of importance of community service</li> <li>Demonstrated participation in community service</li> <li>Engagement with other social service programs</li> <li>Recognition of community needs</li> </ul>	youth
Strengthened sense of personal responsibility	Process / outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accepting / conducting project planning and management responsibility</li> </ul>	youth
Provision of additional caring adults in the lives of participant youth	process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledgment / recognition of caring adult(s)</li> </ul>	Youth mentors parent
Strengthening individual resiliency	outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measured change in Self Efficacy and Pro-Active attitude</li> </ul>	youth
Strengthened bonding to academics	Process / outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School attendance</li> <li>School grades</li> <li>School attitude</li> <li>Post Secondary educational plans</li> </ul>	Youth parents
Effective communication and inter-personal skills in their relationships with both peers and adults.	Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff observations; participant self-reports; parent reports of improved family communication</li> </ul>	Staff Youth Parents
ATOD behavior avoidance	Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reports of reduced (no) ATOD use</li> </ul>	youth
Improvements in social skills, goal setting, teambuilding, and appropriate group behaviors	Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstration of learned skills</li> </ul>	Youth Parents Mentors Staff

## Some final thoughts for your consideration

- Use a parent contract – to reinforce their commitment
- Make sure both parents receive copies of the program schedule (especially where parents don't live together).
- Make and maintain boundaries for yourself and your staff - it is stressful yet tremendously rewarding work. Working ahead of time to establish boundaries will lead to less heartache down the road.
- Staff need to remain flexible, and should always be on the look-out for opportunities to reinforce curriculum learning points. We call these “unplanned teachable moments”.
- Staff needs to be ready to modify the curriculum depending on the needs of participants (e.g., someone had a fight at school, a friend is seriously ill, parents are fighting, etc.) Staff can become skilled at taking the presenting problem and incorporating it into the existing curriculum. Taking that information and showing how it related to curriculum expectations such as problem solving, active listening, and self-esteem is a skill worth developing.
- For experiential education to be effective, participants need time to process and reflect on how their new skills and knowledge can be used in positive ways.
- Be ready to learn much about yourself in addition to helping youth learn about themselves!

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## **Appendices**

**Permissions / Releases**

**House Rules**

**Responsibilities of Youth and Parents (Program Contract)**

**Youth Information / Interests Form**

**Instrumentation**

Session Tests

Participant Pre Test

Participant Post Test

Parent Survey