



**A Chance In Life**

# **The Path to Self-government Through Positive Youth Development**

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## **Introduction**

This paper intends to look at the core ideology of Self-government, in concert with a well-researched modality of program development and evaluation called Positive Youth Development (PYD), and the convergence of the two models as a unified modern-day identifier of markers for success, and as an evaluative framework for A Chance In Life.

A Chance In Life, historically known as The Boy's and Girl's Towns of Italy, has continuously operated since its founding in 1945 by Monsignor John Patrick Carroll-Abbing. Initially it served as an alternative for classic orphanages for the orphaned, unaccompanied, poverty stricken, and vulnerable children in post-World War II Italy (Our Story A Chance at Life, 2021). The programs began because Monsignor Carroll-Abbing found that the children placed in orphanages would end up continuously back on the streets or in vulnerable circumstances because they were independent prior to being placed and were placed in settings controlled by authority figures in which they lost their developed independence (Our Story A Chance at Life, 2021). What began as a small program in Italy grew into its currently offered programming in over 8 countries (Bolivia, Columbia, Ethiopia, Guatemala, India, Italy, Peru, and the United States).

The historical model that The Boys and Girls Towns of Italy developed was one based in Self-government. The model's main tenets were: that youth take responsibility for running their own communities, every child was encouraged and supported to become an active and creative participant in their own town, children met regularly to develop their own by-laws and elect their own leadership, each youth was considered to be a "citizen" of their town and thus could be

elected to leadership roles including becoming a mayor, judge, secretary, and other defined roles in the community (Our Story A Chance at Life, 2021).

The Self-government model began with the concept of youth entering the towns with contribution to the community as a core ideology. This ideology was the primer to the success of the programming and the success of the participants (Moffett, 2021). Moffett (1995) a leader of the program for 15 years, expanded on the factors leading to the contribution of community that the Self-government model exemplified by evaluating observed growth in participants under the concepts of: appropriate striving, personal causation, locus of control, perceived self-efficacy, and most importantly agency. These aforementioned factors allowed the participating youth to become agents in their own development (Moffett, 2015) which aligned with the instinctive origination of the need for the participating youth to be driven by their own self-direction in partnership of the experience community in unison with the development of their peers.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a relational developmental approach to adolescent needs identification. It evolved from adolescent developmental theory by comparative psychologists in the 1950's (Lerner, 2005). PYD served as a response to the normalized pathology projecting singular problem focused adolescent interventions (Lerner, 2005). This meant problems were identified with pathology bound internally in the youth, if you fixed that, you cured the singularly presenting issue. Historically, adolescent interventions were based on the problematization or deficits in the presumed character of an adolescent. PYD evolved into a systematic evaluative tool and theoretical grounding for how to implement and evaluate participant growth from a strengths-based model that did not problematize the youth but viewed them as bound with possibility and growth. The core framework of modern PYD is conveyed by the five C's model of positive characteristics which include, competence, confidence,

connection, character, and caring/compassion (Fig. 1). The belief of the PYD model is that the five C's culminate in the expression of contribution mainly in the form of civic engagement (Silbereisen & Lerner, 2007). The five C's evolved as markers specifically for the evaluation of a youth's capacity to engage in a system as an "ideal adult" (Silbereisen & Lerner, 2007).

The Self-government model has been integrating the outcome of PYD's ideal since its formation, they just never teased out the functional framework of what nuances and factors, in a measured sense, led to the programs immense successes and positive outcomes. The marrying of these two models seems like a match made in heaven.

In the next sections we will look at the relationship between and the core ideologies of Self-government, and PYD, and how the two models converge as a unified modern-day identifier of markers for success, and as an evaluative framework for the modern-day organizations sense making of what makes the Self-government model successful and where targeting developments and improvements can be implemented to fit the structure of each country's specific programming.

The sections following this introduction will be: The Self-government model, the PYD model, the convergence of the two models and a paradigm shift for Self-government, data and measurement, and conclusions.

## **Self-government Model**

Since its founding in 1945 by Monsignor John Patrick Carroll-Abbing, the Self-government model has been the core framework of program development and function. The motto, "Insieme oggi per costruire il mondo di domani." (Together today to build the world of tomorrow) was a way in which the intentionality of community participation, and involvement in the development and functioning of the day to day led to a sense of ownership for the town citizens (Moffett, 1995). A former Mayor of the village in Rome, Claudio Di Biagio (2021) said he felt, "I was not one of many, I could contribute to the life of others, to the community and the outcomes of the village."

A notable feature of the Self-government model was the fact that youth developed their own constitutional governmental system that evolved to include an entire financial system that included a tax system, savings accounts, fines, unemployment insurance. They had a judicial system with citizen judges, trials, penal codes, their own version of the bar exam with lawyers and public defenders, commissioners of public works, a sanitation and labor department, all run and led by youth citizens (Moffett, 1995).

Moffett (1995) discussed that the Self-government model allowed youth to become agents in their own development, with measured success in propiate striving, personal causation, locus of control, perceived self-efficacy, and most importantly agency. Moffett (1995) stressed that factors that led to the development of these attributes was bound in the dissipation of a sense of internalized marginality and growth in an innate sense of belonging through personal engagement and the building of an intentional community that the youth felt a budding sense of reinforced ownership in (Moffett, 1995).

Three core themes of the Self-government model that served as a framework for its participants successful integration and involvement were: peer learning, mutual mentoring, and a commitment to community building (Moffett, 2021). These themes were interwoven in the intentionality of the adult role as supportive frame-holders to the playing out of youth leadership, and self-governing. Peers (not adults) taught the newcomers to the community the ins and outs of functioning and the processes by which things operated. Mutual mentoring was a process in which citizens knew the collegiality and equivalency of the positions they were in and were building a society with each other that was bound within a practice of reciprocity, not an authoritative direction-oriented compliance response to an adult authority system. The commitment to community building was an expectation of valued participation and the validity that came with the importance that each citizen played into the outcomes of the collective whole.

It would be remiss to not mention the intentional practice of routine as an addendum to the three core themes. Routine was integral to the sense of duty and practice in all operations of the towns. A former mayor and citizen Claudio Di Biagio (2021) discussed his experience of the success of the program was tied to the balance between the practice of Self-government and activities. He discussed a rigorous routine in which the boys would be up at 6:30 am and in bed without issue at 9:30pm. The days started and ended with a scheduled routine that maintained a sense of structure and expectation.

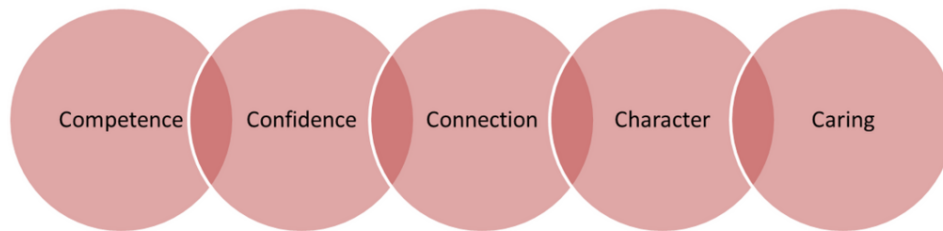
Moffett (1995) discussed that the processes of the town environment were very explicit, bound within routines including the town assemblies, court cases, daily interactions with citizens in the grocery store, banks, restaurant, or streets in the town. These town routines contributed to the sensitization of the citizens own agency in the building up of the community as an active daily participant in the community.

## Positive Youth Development (PYD)

PYD emphasizes the mutually beneficial relationship between the individual adolescent and their context. The core framework of modern PYD is conveyed by the five C's model of positive characteristics which include, competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring/compassion (Fig 1). The belief of the PYD model is that the five C's culminate in the expression of contribution (Five C's Model of Youth Development, 2021).

Fig 1.

### Contribution



The PYD model was a response to the deficit-based approach to the pathologizing of youth behavior that was usually solely dealt within a linear reductionistic framework of cure or singular prescribed treatment-based resolve. The PYD model was a paradigm shift and had an intentional focus through the lens of children's mental health from a growth-oriented perspective. The model is intended to measure and evaluate the strengths of youth as well as the positive qualities and outcomes that were wished to be measured (Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009). PYD roots were in developmental psychology, a theory grounded in the needs through development for ideal outcomes. PYD, with its foundation in developmental theory, intended to expand and emphasize nurturing the potentialities of youth as opposed to a deficit

only perspective, while addressing and assisting in shaping the roles of a developmental context, especially that of how the youth exists within community, and fostering youth as agents of their own development, bound with possibility (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2007).

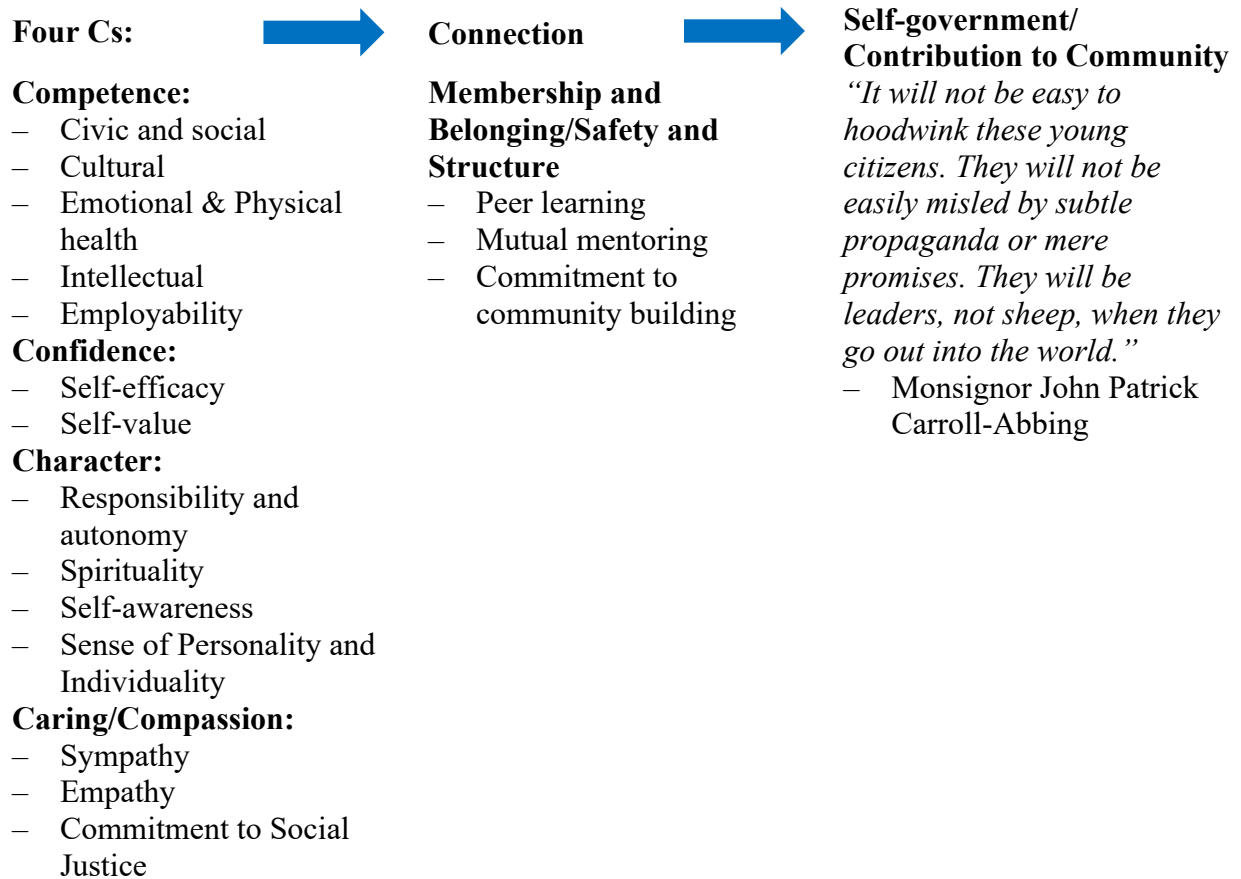
### **Convergence**

The models of Self-government and PYD converge quite naturally, and in a more organized framework than the two models in isolation. Since its inception, the Self-government model was functioning from a positive outcomes approach by fostering the outcome of the ideal in PYD, contribution to community. I have intended to illustrate the marrying and organized integration of the two models below (Fig 2). I have broken down the four C's of competence, confidence, character, and caring as initial individualized assets that youth enter programming with and that can individually evolve through their growth and development of self-agency in relation to gains they experience in programming. The fifth C, connection, was separated as the second tier of growth through the evolution of belonging to and having an impact on their peers, cohort, colleagues, and the community that they join, learn from, and participate in. Self-government and contribution have become married in the third tier to exemplify a cohesive development, and the culmination of the growth from the prior tiers of the four C's in the first tier, and the connection-based focus of the second tier.



Fig 2.

## Self-government Through Positive Youth Development



## Data and Measurement

PYD has numerous recommendations for assessment and measure. The most successful measurement evaluates youth perspectives on a regular basis, to determine and compare growth and program outcomes and trends. The two most accessible and wraparound means of program and individual outcomes assessment are the Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) and the Attitudes and Behavior (A&B) Survey. The DAP assessment is reported to have acceptable to good: alpha reliabilities, stability reliabilities and validity (Scales, 2011). The DAP is also accessible readily for online use and consists of a one-page survey of 25 questions that can be

taken online or via paper survey that measures numerous indicators of well-being. The DAP measures include: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity (Scales, 2011), all factors of the primary four C's of the PYD model. The A&B Survey can be taken online and integrates the evaluation and identification of developmental assets, youth risk behavior elements, high risk behaviors, key social and emotional skills, thriving indicators, and developmental environmental deficits (Search Institute A&B Survey, 2021).

## **Conclusions**

The models of Self-government and PYD converge naturally, and in a more organized framework than the two models existed historically in isolation. The merger of these two models integrates PYD's measured approaches with means tested data collection and a framework of evaluation and integrates the core tenets of the Self-government model. By teasing out the nuances of what has made the Self-government model so successful from program to program A Chance In Life will be better able to serve and develop their participants and programs.

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