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YOUTH DON'T NEED TO BE FIXED:

STRATEGIC FRAMING FOR MESSAGING ON POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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>> XAN YOUNG: Welcome, everyone. It's the top of the hour, so we'll go ahead and get started. Welcome to today's webinar, titled "Youth Don't Need to Be Fixed: Strategic Framing for Messaging on Positive Youth Development." This webinar is being recorded and will be available for later viewing on the youth.gov website.

This webinar is being hosted by the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs on behalf of all the federal partner departments and agencies, which support programs and services focusing on youth.

In a moment, my copresenters and I will introduce ourselves, but first, Okori Christopher, our technology specialist, will give us a quick overview of the technology we're using and logistics.

>> OKORI CHRISTOPHER: Good day, everyone. Thank you for joining us. For those who are not familiar, this is Adobe Connect. This is our webinar platform. Today's recording, as Xan mentioned, will be shared via the LISTSERV or via email after the meeting is concluded. We will also have the

presentation available in a little bit. We're just making sure that we have a shareable version.

For those who have questions as it relates to the presentation, please use the Q&A pod that's directly under Xan's picture. That's how you will submit questions to us. If you have technical questions, I ask that you put "technical" in the beginning of it, that way I will screen it, and for questions that go directly to our presenters, you can just ask the question as is.

Our closed captioning pod, as you can see, is right below the presentation. If there are any questions or any technical issues that you have, please do not hesitate to contact us via the Q&A pod. With that, I'll turn it back over to Xan.

>> XAN YOUNG: Great. Thank you. Well, on to introductions. My name is Xan Young, and I'm a senior TA consultant here at American Institutes for Research. I work with community members, professionals, and organizations to promote policy, practice, and system changes with the goal of improving the lives of youth as well as other people across the life span.

Through my work with various federally funded TTA centers, including CDC's Youth Violence Prevention TA Center, I've had the honor and opportunity to witness firsthand how programs and interventions are strengthened when they involve and engage youth as equal partners, generating benefits for the program that involve youth and ultimately the broader community.

Michelle Stergio and Michael Baran will be copresenting with me today, so, Michelle, would you like to introduce yourself?

>> MICHELLE STERGIO: Sure. Thank you, Xan. I'm Michelle Stergio, digital and social media specialist at AIR. I have over 20 years' experience in digital marketing, 11 years specifically in social media. My past includes stints at the New York Times, Conde Nast, and nonprofits like New York City Economic Development Corporation and Montgomery County Office of Partnership and Community Services.

I have been here at AIR now for two years, and I support the different practice areas here at AIR with the social media and digital.

>> XAN YOUNG: Michael.

>> MICHAEL BARAN: Thanks, Michelle. So, my name is Michael Baran. I'm a principal researcher here at AIR and a cultural anthropologist by training, just enough cognitive psychology training also to be dangerous. What I do is conduct deep cultural ethnographic research into patterns of thinking and daily practices of people in order to then use that formative research to improve communications, interventions, and outreach on a whole wide variety of issues, including a lot of issues specifically related to children and youth.

Before coming to AIR a few years ago, I worked at a

nonprofit called the FrameWorks Institute, which specifically focuses on formative research and message framing, and a lot of the research that I'm going to present today and examples that I'll present later are going to come specifically from work that I did there and work that that organization continues to do as well.

>> XAN YOUNG: Great. Thanks, Michael.

So we'll start off by discussing positive youth development in general so that those of you who are new to the concept will understand what we're talking about, and, in fact, one of the things I'll cover is how people are talking about it, the language people involved in PYD programs tend to use when trying to explain the principles underlying the positive youth development approach and why it's important. And throughout this presentation, we'll refer to positive youth development as PYD for short, just to save time and simplify things.

I'll move through this part quickly because this content may be familiar to many of you, and for those of you who want more information, you can find a wealth of materials and links to additional resources about PYD on the youth.gov website.

After I speak, Michelle will describe the way people are communicating about PYD via social media, so we can see what that conversation looks like on those channels, including what drives it and how it has changed over time.

Then Michael will explain how culture plays a role in strategic message framing, and we'll describe cultural barriers that can inhibit our ability to communicate effectively about PYD.

And finally, Michael will wrap up with some specific suggestions about ways to increase understanding of and buy-in for PYD.

So, by the end of this webinar, you'll have a better sense of how to more effectively communicate with stakeholders, particularly people who fund or work at youth-serving organizations, to help them understand PYD and adopt a PYD approach.

Okay. So, let's get started. If you've spent much time talking with people about PYD, you've probably found that definitions of it vary. What you see here is a definition of PYD that can be found on the youth.gov website. For those of you unfamiliar with youth.gov, the site was created by the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs to provide resources to help youth-serving organizations and community partnerships plan, implement, and participate in effective programs for youth. I'll go ahead and read this definition to you since some of you are only participating by phone right now.

It says a PYD is an intentional prosocial approach that: Engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's

strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.

So personally, I'm glad to have that definition on the screen in front of me because I might have some difficulty remembering to say all of that if I were in, say, an elevator conversation with someone about PYD. You've probably heard people talk about elevator speeches, and it's this idea that we should be able to communicate a clear brief message on a topic of importance to us, something that gets across, like, the main idea in less than 30 seconds, or about the time it would take someone to ride from the top of a building to the bottom in an elevator. So, we were interested in finding out a little bit about what people actually say when they're communicating out loud about PYD in conversation.

We decided to interview people who've been actively involved in PYD programs and policies, people who've thought deeply about PYD, to see how they describe PYD when they try to speak about it with others, including people who are unfamiliar with the concept.

As you can imagine, the definitions varied, but what you see on your screen right now were some key concepts that most of their definitions shared, basically the core principles related to PYD that seemed to emerge when we looked at the collection of all of their responses.

So according to those practitioners, PYD programs and policies provide positive experiences or opportunities, supportive environments, and empowering relationships; are designed to be safe, supportive, and culturally responsive; recognize and respect the strengths youth already possess; recognize youth and their capacity to contribute; build the skills, assets, and competencies of youth; support development of positive identities among youth; and promote positive outcomes and empower youth to reach their full potential. As one person put it, "Youth are precious assets to be nurtured, not problems to be solved."

So, we also asked practitioners why PYD is important, and here are some important points we heard expressed. First, we need to foster youth assets, and assets were described by interviewees in a couple ways. They include the supports, opportunities, and relationships in young people's lives, as well as personal skills and positive self-perceptions and values. So, one thing we -- we've learned is that when youth are recognized, appreciated, and engaged for their strengths, they develop more assets, and when youth have more assets, they engage in healthier behaviors, demonstrate more resilience in the face of challenges, and thrive.

The traditional risk model really assumes adults are kind of like heroes and youth need to be rescued, and the PYD model,

on the other hand, assumes that youth have agency and can bring their own resources and skills and competencies to improve their own lives in their communities, and the surrounding environments should help to empower youth in that way.

So, the second point that came across strongly is that PYD programs don't just benefit the youth involved, they also improve outcomes for communities as a whole, and because when youth are involved in the design, delivery, and evaluation of programs and services, the quality of those programs and services improve.

So as one person put it, "Young people can contribute to decisions and actions in meaningful and productive ways." PYD programs are not just feel-good activities, in other words.

So we also asked interviewees to imagine how things would be different if more people understood and embraced the PYD approach, and here are some things they told us: More programs would employ PYD approaches and practices; policymakers would invest in PYD; we would see a shift in the types of supports and services provided to young people; we would develop different measures to determine program successes as well as individual successes; and finally, we would achieve the kind of change we want to see in the world. If you really want to have behavioral change happen and communities be healthy, then PYD's the approach is one thing we heard.

So that all sounds great.

(Laughter)

What are the barriers? That was our next question. We asked interviewees to tell us what they saw as the key barriers, and here's what they highlighted: Ignoring or trivializing youth voice; lack of cultural competence and responsiveness; excessive focus on negative risk-taking; and an expectation that we need to "fix" youth. And even people who think they're applying a PYD framework often fall back on old patterns of thinking, such as this one person put it, saying, youth are the leaders of tomorrow, when, in fact, youth possess leadership skills today, and a core component of PYD is creating opportunities for youth leadership.

So, a major barrier is the way we talk about youth, and one said, "I think we live in a society that doesn't value teens. You can tell by the way we talk about them."

So finally, we asked interviewees to talk about strategies they have used to overcome those barriers, and here are some suggestions we heard: Explain that youth are not simply recipients of services; talk about youth as partners; create opportunities for youth to speak for themselves and be heard; and tell stories and provide examples to help people understand why PYD -- what PYD is and why it's effective.

So, you know, in that first point, really explaining that youth are not just recipients of services but actually active stakeholders in shaping the programs and policies that affect

them.

And then that last point, telling stories and providing examples to help people understand why PYD is effective, we often use phrases like positive relationships, which just may not sound concrete enough to people, so one person gave an example that said, you know, say something like "A positive relationship is one that makes you feel valued, respected, and listened to." So, they tried to use language when explaining these concepts that people could relate to, drawing on their own lives.

Okay. Whoops. Sorry. Got a little carried away there.

Okay. So Question 1, one thing we wanted to do before we move on to the next section is hear from all of you because many of you are involved in some way in funding positive youth development programs, implementing them, promoting them, so we're interested in hearing a little bit from you about challenges you've encountered when communicating about positive youth development. Take a moment to type in to your chat box some thoughts of yours on that, and I'll read out what -- what you tell us.

So, one person said youth want to be treated like adults, but they don't act like adults is something that people often say, and that's a challenge that she's encountered that she's encountered in conversations.

What else do we have?

Focusing more on the negative and not giving credit for the good or positive is another barrier.

People just don't buy into the concept. They just don't believe it. Okay.

Adults don't think youth have expertise in anything.

Adult staff think they need to save youth from the streets, danger, et cetera.

There are lots of great comments coming in here, I can't even keep up with it at all. I'll read a little more, but I see there's a lot of great thinking about barriers.

One person said, it's really hard for some of our staff to not see clients as a problem.

Another person said, when you have very educated staff, they want to impose their wisdom on youth rather than listen to them.

Another person said, it's really hard to keep things strength-based, and it's difficult to engage with senior leadership to learn about PYD so that you have support from people above you. Good point.

And buy-in from stakeholders up the chain, it's hard to get that sometimes because they just don't trust the youth.

Okay. So, I have a feeling many of the other comments are going to be similar, but also, there are just a lot of barriers that people are experiencing, and I appreciate, but actually an indication of the number of barriers is the number of comments I

just got.

(Laughter)

So clearly, we've encountered some. So, my next challenge to you is to share what are some of the strategies that you've used that have been successful for communicating about positive youth development? What works for you? You know, we shared a few examples from our interviews, but, surely, those of you who have encountered barriers have also tried to figure out how to overcome those barriers, so what are the things that have worked for you.

One person said training, just training; training on positive youth development makes a difference.

Motivational interviewing. Great.

What else has worked?

Okay. Find ways to employ youth and have them participate in projects to show the value that they bring to the work.

Speak directly to the youth. Mm-hmm.

Focusing on an idea of positive youth development being about a partnership between youth and adults seems to help.

Youth Advisory Councils are a great tool.

Reframing a conversation that is focused on youth negative behaviors by asking what strengths they have seen in the youth. Great.

Service learning. Community meetings that allow youth to empower each other.

Helping staff think critically about why the rule needs to be enforced and what they can let go of.

Being transparent.

Incorporating youth voices so as to make it personal.

Youth leadership opportunities, creating more of those.

Showing the outcomes, showing that -- what the benefits are of positive youth development.

Highlighting real-life examples of PYD in action.

These are all great. We're going to talk more in a few minutes about positive youth development strategies.

Moving on to some ideas around how to reframe it in a way that will really engage people around this idea, but we're also capturing all of these good ideas, and we'll find a way to share back with all of you because -- so please don't stop writing your ideas down.

(Laughter)

We don't have enough time for me to read them out, but we are going to use all of the information that you're sharing with us right now about strategies that work to share back to the broader community these ideas through the youth.gov website, as we continue to add materials to that site on this topic, in part informed by the experiences and perspectives you're sharing with us today, so thank you for taking the time to share these ideas.

I'm going to go ahead and hand this off to Michelle, and she'll move on to the next part of our webinar.

>> MICHELLE STERGIO: Great. Thank you, Xan. Jumping off of Xan's slides on face-to-face conversations, I'm going to discuss how positive youth development conversations are happening across social media.

AIR has tools which allow us to track and monitor social media conversations from more than one trillion public social media posts across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others. Today we'll dive into a topic positioning assessment focused on conversations related to positive youth development, youth leadership, and youth engagement between January 2014 and August 31st of 2018.

Initially we began our query with about 15 keywords related to positive youth development. In the initial results, the team noted off-topic tweets or noise within the conversation, related to jobs and cryptocurrency, but in order to neutralize most of that noise, we decided to run three independent queries, one for positive youth development, one youth leadership, and the last one youth engagement.

When analyzing a topic, it's important to measure the volume, what is the size of the conversation? Post-volume is a wonderful indicator of interest because let's face it, people in organizations talk about things they're passionate about.

Since January 2014, youth leadership, the top yellow line, has had the most shared voice across the social media platforms. Over the years, the conversation has had many peaks and valleys, but overall the conversation remains strong, showing a minimum decline.

Conversations focused on positive youth development, the green line, has the lowest share of volume -- or share of voice among the three. The conversation seems to be stable, lacking the peaks and valleys seen in youth leadership, and has shown a slight increase in volume over the years.

Youth engagement, which falls in between in terms of share voice has doubled in post volume and has had a stable post volume since January 2018, showing the most potential for growth.

Spikes in post volume can happen when an individual or organization with strong influence posts on social media on a topic that their followers are very passionate about or are highly engaged with. The chart to the left visually shows when post volume spike occurred, and the post volume trend afterwards.

Catching conversations that directly impact positive youth development, whether they're positive or negative, helps to react and reframe the conversation.

In February of 2014, the conversation around youth leadership spiked with the release of a book called "The CEO Manual 4 Kids," a homeschooling book. Although the post, which is featured to the right, was highly retweeted and shared, there was a sharp decline in post volume. Post volume didn't spike

again until four years later in February of 2018.

The positive youth development conversation spiked in March of 2017 when BelievePerform posted a tweet about how coaches can promote positive youth development. Ultimately, the tweet didn't do much to elevate the conversation in the following months.

Finally, youth engagement conversations spiked in March 2018 when news broke via traditional media that Adam Rippon would be teaming up with GLAAD to raise funds for youth engagement work. Although post volume within youth engagement conversation had already begun an upward trend in January, the March post simply provided a pop in post volume, as the volume settled back to its low upward trend, which began in January.

So, here's something that you'll not hear very much in a presentation. Please don't read the slide. It can be very overwhelming, and like we said at the beginning of the presentation, you'll be able to download these slides after the presentation.

So, on the slide are two topic wheels. The one on the left is from 2014, and the one on the right is from 2018. A topic wheel is helpful in covering key topics and phrases that are part of the overall conversation and identifying the patterns between common words that -- common words that dominate the conversation.

The inner portion -- let's see if I can control this. The inner portion here are the main topics, and the outer layer, which you see here, are the subtopics within the main topics.

Now, the topic wheels here are going to show how the conversation has shifted over time from 2014 to 2018, but it will also show the overall conversation and the synergy that it has now in 2018.

In the past, organizations and other Twitter authors have used social media to push information out regarding programs, events, and webinars, which we can see here in 2014. The main topic with the most post volume is supporting positive youth development, as we see here; whereas, if we look at the subtopic, it promotes a webcast on positive youth development given by Teen Health Gov. Focusing on 2018 over here, the main topic has shifted to positive youth development programs, which we see in this outer ring right here, with subtopics that describe the type of program, support, help, girls. So, the takeaway here is that most of the conversations happening on social media today are related to positive youth development programs that support or help the youth with some programs specifically for girls.

Now, looking at both of these as a whole, you can see that the conversation surrounding positive youth development has matured in 2018, as it doesn't have big gaps in the conversation as we see in 2014. An example of how it has matured specifically is the subtopic Training Programs, which is right

about here. The subtopic can be found in three of the main topics, Positive Youth Development Programs, Learning, and Support Positive Youth Development, so it's here, here, and here again. Having subtopics represented within multiple main topics like this shows that the conversations surrounding training programs is being weaved throughout many conversations that relate to positive youth development.

So, who's influencing the conversation? Today social media influences come in all shapes and sizes. An influencer is somebody or an organization who has a strong relationship with their audience or followers, the topic, or both. The relationship could mean that they are mentioned frequently in posts that relate to positive youth development or they frequently tweet about it and their followers engage with the post in some fashion, whether it's a retweet, a reply, or a comment.

To the right are four examples of influencers within the positive youth development conversation. So, what constitutes an influencer? Is it having a ton of followers? Is it tweeting a million times a day? Nope, none of that. There are four general types of influencers, celebrity, industry experts, bloggers and content creators, and micro-influencers. Those are the folks who have about 10,000 to 500,000 followers on their social media channel.

So, as you think of how we can tap into influencers, employing a strategy of the influencer marketing can certainly be a smart way to elevate and reframe a conversation.

Retweeting is an important aspect of a social media plan. In fact, one retweet alone from an influencer can have a significant impact on reach. These are the top retweets from organizations for -- between 2014 to 2015, 2016 to 2017, and 2018. The first retweet -- we'll get rid of this -- over here, is from January 2014, and shares information from a study. This tweet has had 44 retweets, but it was a retweet from @4H, which helped amplify the post to their 38,000-plus followers.

The second one from September 2017 announces a multi-sports complex, local influencers who engage at a community level, like @johnsoncontrols, who has over 24,000 followers, can help amplify and elevate a conversation locally and beyond.

And finally, for 2018, this retweet shows how a dialogue between two influential organizations, Rights4Girls and Children's Defense Fund, impact reach by tagging each other in posts and using relevant hashtags. Children's Defense Fund significantly extended their reach beyond their own followers.

Hashtags are a valuable tool in amplifying a conversation -- let me get rid of this -- amplifying a conversation. A hashtag is a keyword or phrase used to describe a topic or conversation. They are used to categorize posts and tweets in a way that makes it easy for other readers to find and follow. Utilizing hashtags in social media posts can amplify their reach

to a wider audience with similar level of interests who may not be following your social media pages.

Listed here are the top hashtags used within the positive youth development conversation. The bars, broken down by years, allows us to see how the hashtags have shifted over time. Although hashtag use has historically been the most popular within positive youth development conversations, the use of it has significantly declined in 2018. #PYD and #positiveyouthdevelopment has replaced it. A hashtag that seems to be growing in popularity and certainly worth following is #investinyouth. This hashtag can provide an easy entry point into related conversations.

So now I will pass this off to Michael to discuss what happens with messages about positive youth development and when it reaches members of the general public.

>> MICHAEL BARAN: Great. Thank you, Michelle. So, you've heard from practitioners, from Xan about kind of what needs to be communicated, some of the challenges in that setting, some of the successes, you've heard about the messages that get pushed out over social media, but what happens when the messages actually hit the eyes or the ears of real people in the public?

So, I'm going to argue that we need to understand culture to really understand that, and so first, what I want to do is talk about how that works in general, and then I'll get specifically the PYD.

All right. So how this works in general, I first want to explain that with two examples. They're not directly from PYD, but they're not totally unrelated either, but don't get caught up too much in the details. I just want to show how this works overall and why culture is so important.

So, this first example comes from a project that I did working with an organization called Transform Justice in the UK, and basically, the experts that they were relying on wanted to communicate something like this, okay, "Prison only makes a youth offender more likely to commit future crime. Prison doesn't do any good for youth who engaged in minor crimes." Right? That's not just a value that they have or that they believe in, but they -- that's their message because that's based on a lot of evidence, right, that when people go to prison, they actually it actually increases likelihood of committing future crimes for various reasons, pruning networks outside of prison, forming identities, forming new networks in prison, cutting off certain life opportunities, and stuff like that.

So that message, based on evidence, it seems fairly logical. What happens, though, when people hear that message? They hear something like this, "Yes" -- it sounds like they're agreeing, but then it diverges. "Yes, prison is too cushy, like a holiday camp!" -- which is a very British expression. "We need to take away prisoner activities and make prison more harsh

so they never want to come back." Right?

So, it looks at first like they're agreeing, but it goes in a very different direction, totally missed message about what's going on here.

Here's a second example. This one was from work that we did with the Harvard Center on the Developing Child, and the scientific experts there wanted to communicate how "Stress is harmful for young children's cognitive development," actually inhibits their physical brain development, right, a very serious issue.

What happens when the public hears this? Ah -- they're sort of like, ah, "I experienced stress and it made me stronger," Stress isn't really such a big deal.

So here you have these experts and advocates trying to advocate for policies to reduce stress among children, and the general response is like, yeah, I don't really think so. Again, total missed message.

So, what's going on here? If you ask a communications expert, they might say things like this, the message is too complicated, you couldn't digest it; the message didn't get distributed, it wasn't -- people didn't see it enough; the message wasn't memorable or attention grabbing, too boring; the message didn't trigger strong emotions, so people didn't buy into it; the message didn't have facts in it or even worse sometimes, it contrasted facts with myths. I'm sure you're very familiar with myth fact sheets. There's a lot of evidence out there that these are really not a great way to communicate because, unfortunately, what actually happens is people remember the myths as facts, and that gets worse over time, so you're actually reinforcing the myths rather than replacing them with the facts, so not a great way to communicate.

Another explanation, that people just misunderstood the message, they just have no understanding of this topic, so they don't get it.

But here's another possibility that I want to put out there, which is that it's culture that's getting in the way, okay. Now, what is culture? If you ask a thousand anthropologists what culture is, you'd probably get a thousand different definitions. If you ever meet one, I actually encourage you to do that. It's kind of a fun exercise to watch them squirm or try not to use jargon. This is how I approach culture, and a lot of people who are psychological cognitive anthropologists like me also do. So, it's as models in our minds, right, so if you think about a developing child's brain -- and you've probably heard this statistic a lot -- from the first years, from 0-3, the brain is developing 700 synaptic connections per second, which is quite astounding. Their brains are literally being built in a cultural environment, and as that happens, you have these cultural models that form implicit patterns of thinking that are very widely shared about what's

going on in the world, what things mean, how things work. Basically, they give us a common sense of what's going on in the world in people's minds.

Now, that's really important if you're going to be communicating because what happens is the way that messages get framed actually cue those cultural models. Now, what do I mean by a message frame? What I'm doing is separating the content of the message from the way that that message is communicated. That would be the frame. All messages are framed, so picking out what value is implicit, why is this important, any metaphors that are in there in the way the message is delivered, any keywords, who's the messenger, what the tone is; all of that stuff is the frame, and then you have the content in there. You can take the same content and frame it in many different ways. Now, that frame often cues a particular cultural model in our mind and determines how that message is understood. So, we have this sort of outdated way of thinking about what communication is, that the speaker has an intention, they code it into a message, send it out, the receiver takes that code and unpacks it and understands it just the same way the speaker intended it. If that's your model of thinking how communication should work, when you get the miscommunication, like the myth messages, you're kind of surprised.

If we, instead, understand communication in terms of frames and cuing cultural models, we're not surprised at all. The speaker has an intention, but there are all these intended or unintended frames around that message that cue these cultural patterns, and you don't know, necessarily, what's getting cued, and so depending on what gets cued, your message may have a very different interpretation. They're really important to understand and really critical to plan for this particular type of miscommunication.

So, this is not just -- people don't just sit around and think, oh, this would be a good frame, let's use that. It's actually based on a lot of research. There are two phases of research. Not going to go into a lot of depth here, but just to give you a sense, there's a first phase of formative research where you try to figure out during interviews, focus groups, things like that, what are the cultural models at play on this issue that are going to get triggered, and then once you understand that, you come up with a whole list of hypotheses about how to communicate differently about this issue, how to trigger different cultural models, and then enter into a Phase II where you actually test those messages out so that if you say, this is our recommendation for how to communicate about this issue, it's not just a hypothesis, it's actually based in evidence on what works.

So, I want to go back to those first examples I gave you and tell you what was sort of one of the conclusions. Of course, on any particular topic, there's a whole range, a whole

set of communications tools and recommendations and messages. Here's just one example. So you take that first one about the prison causing more crime in the future, and when you do the formative research, that first phase, you find out that there are these cultural models, two cultural models that are really dominant at play here, one being retribution, so people are not thinking about future safety, they're not thinking about public safety, they're thinking about a crime happened, there needs to be an appropriate punishment for that crime, and that's getting in the way of some of the messages.

Then, also, people have this idea that humans are these rational actor decision-makers, that you've got people out there sort of weighing the pros and cons, should I commit this crime? Well, the prison is really harsh, so I better not, and that's not the way humans make decisions. We know that. But people think that that's how we make decisions. So, when you understand that, you can come up with different ways to communicate.

In this case, here's one example of a reframe that was tested and shown to be really positive. Prisons sweep young people into a powerful stream of crime from which it's difficult to escape. So, this is a metaphorical way of talking about the same thing, which allows people to be more receptive to those ideas of pruning connections, making criminal connections, limiting opportunities, et cetera. It takes that kind of -- it allows you to think about the future, you know, what's -- what's going to happen in the future, and it allows you to get away from that idea of rational actor and see that some things aren't entirely in your control, right, that you're getting swept up into things, so it's really a powerful communication tool, although it's pretty subtle; right?

Here's another -- the second example about stress. So, the common communication advice might be here, oh, well, this is a scientist being too complicated, simplify it, dumb it down, that's the only way people are going to get it. And what we actually found, first of all, is what was going on in the first place was a very strong sense of individualism, this happened to me, right, and so that's how I'm thinking about it, and also this idea that the resilience, doing things better, overcoming stress was just a matter of willpower and not anything else.

So, what we found when we did research to figure out a different way to communicate is that actually, the message was much more effective when it was made more complicated. So, we talked about a taxonomy of stress, normal stress, things like, you know, if you have children, your children starting their first day of school last month or this month, those are normal stress things. Those actually are good for you. And then tolerable stress, something very serious, death of a grandparent, for example, but with support, with love, with positive connections, children can get over that. And then

toxic stress, prolonged abuse, neglect, the kinds of things that really do inhibit brain development, just like the scientists were trying to communicate.

Now, when the scientist or advocate takes the exact same message and instead of calling it stress calls it toxic stress, all of a sudden you get a completely different reaction. Oh, toxic stress, yeah, that is bad, we should limit that, right, and so it's a tiny little change to the frame, but that has a big impact.

All right. So now let's turn specifically to PYD. First, what are the cultural models that are getting in the way? Now, these are based on research, research that was done at the FrameWorks Institute, not done specifically on PYD but youth issues, things like education, human services, juvenile justice, et cetera.

So another thing that I wanted to mention is while you may not have these cultural models because through your work you've been able to think in different ways, a lot of people do, the research is really clear, and so these are some of the things you're going to be up against, and it seems like from your comments earlier when Xan asked that question, a lot of you know you're up against these things, so they'll sound pretty familiar.

All right. So, first, cultural model. Thinking about adolescence as a time that's inherently risky, that youth are highly susceptible to influences, that they will do foolish things, make bad decisions, and adults these days are more worried about this than ever because of perceived heightened dangers, dangers online, dangers with guns and drugs and new drugs and things like that, and, therefore -- and this is the key piece -- they have to be strictly protective with boundaries, right, you get this whole protection frame, and while some pieces of this model aren't totally wrong, right -- I mean, the brain science on adolescence, for example, shows that the executive function decision-making skills are not fully developed, and so we have to really take that into consideration, but that leads the experts to a very different conclusion, not to a we need to protect them with strict boundaries conclusion, and so that's what's key here.

Another cultural model, the public basically objectifying teenagers, thinking of them as others, that we couldn't possibly understand. They're not children but they're not adults either, and people just generally having a black box of understanding on this idea of development at a particular time during adolescence, what happens.

You have this idea that young people are totally under their parents' control until they're 18, and then at 18, they're an adult. I mean, we know that's not true, according to the brain science, right, but in public thinking, that is true. You're 18, you're an adult. So, this is really problematic.

There's also this idea, you know, if -- because of that, right, if youth are -- they think that they're just making bad decisions, having bad judgment, they have no willpower, and then, of course, there's just some really strong negative stereotypes about youth, teens, adolescence, they're wild and rebellious and disrespectful and stubborn and selfish, and these are all serious challenges.

Not only that, I mean, stereotypes about teens have existed for a long time, but there are specific ways that how people think of youth of today as especially irresponsible and entitled, you know, to the point where "millennial" is considered as a bad word, and people often ignore data to the contrary, ignore data that youth values are very much in line with adult values and they're volunteering more than ever and all of that stuff.

All right. Another cultural model, the public thinking that is really contributing to this is the way people have associations just about digital media, smartphones, social media in general. All of these have powerful cultural models attached, thinking that this stuff is all trivial, it's all a luxury, it takes youth away from the real responsibilities and the real world, that they're passive media, and so youth are lazy by using them. Very problematic.

And, of course, all of this sort of leads to sort of a throwing up of the hands, it's too confusing to figure out, and youth attitudes are just inherently bad, and once they're not the parents' responsibilities, there's nothing anyone can do, so just what are we going to do, nothing?

All right. I don't want you to think -- don't think, what are we going to do? Nothing. So, moving into some actual strategies that could help reframing these issues, okay.

So, one, I talked about cultural models that are problematic. Those are often dominant. Within the same person, sometimes you can get conflicting ideas, some are dominant, some are recessive, and they come out at different moments, but one would be just be avoiding triggering those problematic dominant cultural models. Don't roll your eyes when you talk about teens and laugh and, you know, don't even do that for a joke, right, in part of a communication.

Definitely don't use a fear or crisis frame, which can trigger that idea that they need to be protected. Don't use that protection frame, that just reinforces it.

Don't judge teens, it reinforces that other thing.

And then watch how you talk about smartphones and social media because that can trigger a whole set of problematic associations.

On the other hand, we do have sometimes some very positive but recessive cultural models that can help to increase understanding. So, for example, people do think about hands-on learning as being helpful and productive and you can use that to

talk about supportive and enriching programs and an active use of digital media rather than a passive one.

Emphasizing the agency of youth and the developmental period they're going through, emphasizing development, again, and something positive other than just this protection idea, and definitely to avoid being fatalistic. Emphasize that there are things you can do. Adults can't control youth, but they can support them.

Focusing on the developmental benefits of youth programs is critical, something like this. Youth development programs are not about just filling time or learning new information. They're about the experiences that adolescents need to shape who they will be in adulthood. So, it gets people out of that family responsibility frame and also replaces that objectifying with a developmental perspective.

Use an explanatory metaphor to emphasize this developmental process, which people don't understand, so figure out a way to talk about it. This is a metaphor that's actually been tested to work. Something like this, our brains get built like the structure of a house. What comes first in childhood lays down the foundation. As children grow, the basic structures get built, and the experiences and environments that adolescents have available to them become the building materials that allow them to adjust to new demands, to support new skills, to develop as unique people. So that can really be helpful to emphasize the developmental perspective. That emphasizes brain plasticity in adolescents, right?

Here's a different metaphor that can be used to explain the different brain functions that are developing. Air traffic control at a busy airport coordinates many things to keep planes moving and keep everyone safe. Similarly, the human brain controls its mental airspace through what's called "executive function." It lets us create priorities, focus, and make good decisions. The Air traffic control of an adolescent brain is still developing into its mid-20s, and we need to make sure youth get support and practice as they develop these skills, okay.

So, I'm talking really fast to get that all in there, but I wanted to make sure to get some really practical strategies out there for you. These are not magic words, you just memorize them and say them and all of a sudden everybody agrees with you, but they're generally -- it's really helpful for you to understand even more clearly the barriers that you're up against but not just feel frustrated with it, but really understand how to use that to communicate more effectively for the important work that you're doing.

We have a little bit of time for questions, if anybody's got questions they want to type into the Submit Questions chat box.

Xan or Michelle, did you notice any questions on there

while I was talking we could address?

>> XAN YOUNG: I'm not seeing any questions yet. Oh, here we go. We have one question, someone's asking, can you talk specifically about strategies for getting buy-in on positive youth development as a whole up the chain?

>> MICHAEL BARAN: Yeah, that's a good question because that, of course, involves a whole lot of other factors, communicating anything up the chain, that have to be taken into account. A lot of times what happens is that even people who are comfortable with these issues, know what they are and even support them, can still be susceptible to some of these cultural models, and so adopting these framing strategies can be really helpful, even with folks you think have a lot of familiarity and understanding of the issue, just reinforcing again and again with every communication triggering the positive rather than the dominant problematic models.

>> XAN YOUNG: Yeah, and we're getting a couple of questions about where to find additional resources on positive youth development, and also whether this presentation is being recorded, so I just want to let folks know that we are recording this webinar, and we will upload it to the youth.gov website so people can see it later, so if you know other people who were unable to attend, you'll be able to point them to that website, or if you just want to take a look at this later, you're welcome to do that as well.

And as -- I also want to let you know that there are resources on the website about positive youth development and links to many other resources where you can get more in-depth information about PYD, so please do go to youth.gov, and if you have any difficulty finding the PYD section, just type positive youth development right into the Search bar, and it will pop right up.

And then there's another question, how would you suggest engaging youth themselves in changing this conversation?

>> MICHAEL BARAN: Yeah, that's a great question. I can think of a couple ways. You know, one is in the specific thinking about the social media communication, I think youth would be critical in having an understanding of how that works, how to best communicate about some of these issues. I could also see, you know, one way -- if we were -- if I were doing a whole new communications research project on PYD, I would think -- what we usually do when we start those projects is get a group of experts together and interview them and figure out according to this group of experts what needs to be communicated to a wider audience, and if we were doing a research project on this topic, I would want to have youth kind of considered as experts on this topic and do a set of interviews with youth to see what it is from their perspective that needs to get communicated out. I think that would be really important.

>> XAN YOUNG: Great. Thank you. Any other questions? We

only have a few minutes left, but we're happy to take other questions.

Great. There are some comments about the fact that this is applied in a variety of different settings, and that's absolutely true. One of the things that came out in interviews was that, you know, this might be something that people think about in developing new policies, the positive youth development approach to policy development, program implementation. It's also sometimes thought of as a set of principles, you know, they guide the way we talk about youth, as we mentioned earlier, in conversations, the way we frame the things we write, the things we talk about, and the whole way we orient ourselves around doing any work that relates to youth well-being, so those are all really good points.

Yes, and just to clarify, there will be a link to the -- this recorded webinar on the youth.gov website. So, a couple of people have asked me to repeat that, so all you have to do in your Search bar is type in youth.gov, and you'll go straight there. That's the website.

Great. Anything else? We have one more minute left.

And there's a question about whether the principal service informed the methodology. Yes, I think so. When we talk about positive youth development and some of the core concepts that we covered in the earlier slides, those underlie the approach, so when we talked about, for instance, youth leadership, that's considered, you know, a core component of the positive youth development approach, this idea that youth are -- currently have the capacity to be leaders in the work, and that's why we engage them as partners and leaders around anything having to do with youth well-being or things that pertain to youth, but that's -- that's informed by some kind of core values or principles, right, the belief that that's -- that youth have that capacity already. So, yeah, I'd say the principles do inform the framework.

That's about all the time we have, but I do want to reiterate that although we had hundreds of people on this call, and, therefore, we couldn't unmute your lines and have you all speak at once, thank you for being patient and typing into the chat box. It was a great way to capture the wisdom that this entire group of people bring to the conversation. We are going to save all of the comments that you posted in the chat box, and we'll find a way to share some of that back out to the rest of you, since we just didn't have enough time to read off all of the great comments and suggestions that we received today.

So, thank you for your time, and I want to thank my fellow presenters and the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs for hosting this event. We look forward to hearing more from all of you in the future about the work you're doing related to PYD. We hope you have a great day.

(Session concluded at 3:01 p.m. ET)

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