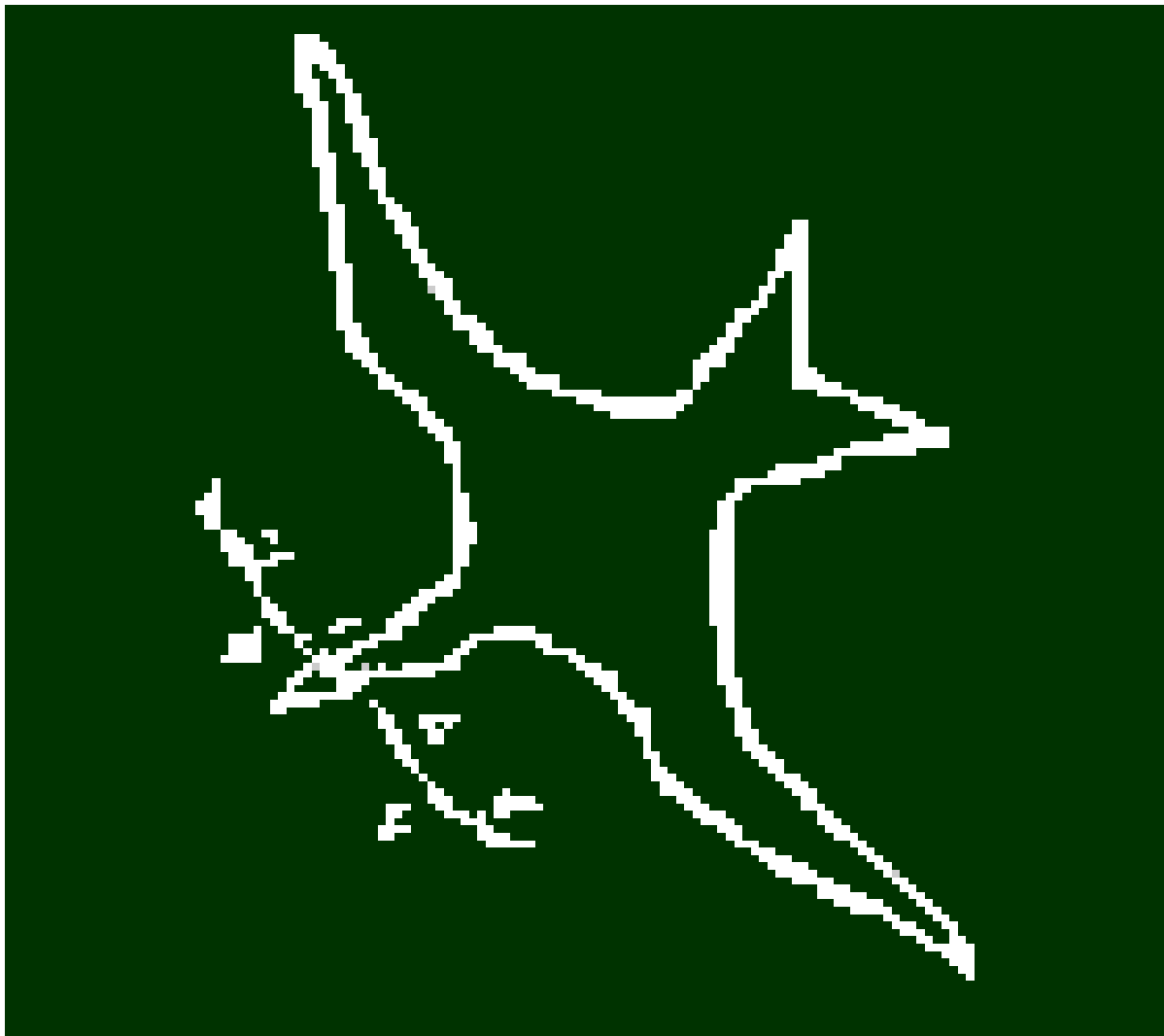# Supporting Youth by Strengthening Communities:

Helping Children Grow and Preventing Problem Behaviors

The DART Model: Linking Development and Risk Together

Kirk R. Williams, Nancy G. Guerra, and Delbert S. Elliott

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence

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SUPPORTING YOUTH BY STRENTHENING COMMUNITIES:
How to Help Children Grow and Prevent Problems at the Same Time

Introduction

Communities across the United States are mobilizing to support children, youth, and families. A variety of approaches have been used, ranging from grassroots efforts to involve citizens in children's lives to strategic reorganizations of local programs and policies. On the one hand, many of these efforts are designed to help all children grow into healthy adult. On the other hand, more intensive responses have focused on the prevention or remediation of specific problems behaviors among the most troubled or "at-risk" youth.

Too often, these two approaches — those that promote youth development and those that focus on preventing problems behaviors — have been cast as rival or competing approaches. Although the two approaches have different objectives and often focus on different populations, we believe they can compliment each other *if a comprehensive framework is used to bring them together to address the needs of today's youth*.

This comprehensive framework must help communities decide how best to use resources to help all children grow and develop into healthy adults. At the same time, it must also help communities organize prevention efforts that address many different types of problems, such as violence, teenage pregnancy, and substance abuse. Instead of providing different "programs" for different "problems," a comprehensive approach should lead to a seamless system of integrated services for children, youth, and families. This includes promoting community ownership of youth problems and involvement in their solution.

How can we create a seamless system that addresses the challenges and complexities of growing up in today's world? First, we must begin by thinking about what all children need to succeed at different stages of their development and in different settings. This is what we call understanding the *dynamics of development*. Next, we must look at what happens when children have problems navigating the developmental course, and how these problems, if uncorrected, increase a child's chances of experiencing emotional or behavioral difficulties later on. This is what we call *linking development to risk for problem behaviors*. Finally, we must realize that many other circumstances that are independent of development also put children and youth at greater risk for specific problem behaviors. This is what we call *identifying risk factors independent of development*.

We describe a comprehensive framework that can help communities identify how best to help children become healthy adults, while reducing risk for problem behaviors at the same time. We call this framework the **DART model**, which stands for **Development and Risk Together.** The DART model builds on youth development and risk-focused approaches, with a particular emphasis on the importance of mobilizing community resources and activities to support the successful development of all young people as well as to meet the special needs of at-risk youth. This model should be useful for foundations, policy-makers, community agencies and others who wish to develop comprehensive programs, policies, and services for youth and build community capacity.

The DART Model emphasizes the potential of each young person, with the understanding that this potential is greatly influenced by the settings in which youth live. At any given stage of development, young people with unique mixtures of strengths and limitations seek to master developmental tasks, and they do so in different communities and across different social contexts. The greater the supports that surround them, the greater the chances that they will accomplish essential developmental tasks and meet the "performance standards" of the settings in which they live. These adjustments, in turn, foster a strength-building process that prepares them for their next steps along life's course. The DART Model also recognizes that barriers can cause youth to stumble and possibly interfere with accomplishing developmental tasks. The result can be a painful failure to meet behavioral expectations and a building-up of the problems that young people must overcome.

To return to our earlier discussion, the DART Model can help communities develop a seamless system of services to promote development and prevent problems by focusing on three important areas: (1) the dynamics of development; (2) linking development to risk for problem behaviors; and (3) identifying risk factors independent of development. Each of these areas is discussed separately; however, they care best understood as they relate to people and communities. Therefore, we introduce the DART Model and these related concepts by telling a story about one boy's life, Randy's story. We conclude this paper by providing an example of how the DART Model could be used to guide community planning and mobilization efforts, with a particular focus on violence prevention, by discussing a hypothetical community we'll call Centerton.

Randy's Story

Randy is an 18-year-old African-American high school graduate who is headed to college to major in theater. He has a winning smile, a charming personality, and a good sense of humor. Attractive and physically fit, Randy has always been popular in school with both students and teachers. His personal characteristics serve him well. By all accounts Randy is on his way to a fulfilling life.

But life was not always so pleasant for Randy.

His first five years were happy. He had nurturing parents who gave him a sense of security and filled his world with toys, other children, and family get-togethers. There were regular visits from relatives, with all the significant adults in his life focused on loving and nurturing him.

But then came his entry into school. From the start, he couldn't quite figure out the rhythms and reasons for activities and how to meet his teachers' expectations. It all seemed so foreign and distant from the familiar comforts of home. As Randy moved through elementary school, his struggles intensified. He simply wasn't learning to read and write as the pace expected for most children his age.

Randy didn't understand why things that seemed easy for other children were so hard for him. Self-doubts surfaced ("I'm just dumb"), impairing his motivations ("I can't do that"), and spilling over into nonacademic areas ("I can't do anything right"). Soon he greeted school day mornings

buried beneath blankets, crying, and pleading with his parents to stay home. Weekends were greeted like a war-torn warrior looking for cover. Randy's problems at school began to seep into his life like a corrosive fluid, eroding his self-image, his bond to school, his confidence, and his sense of achievement.

To make matters worse, Randy also became fearful of the violence in his neighborhood. While his parents had managed to protect him from the dangers of the streets while he was young, his growing independence meant that he had to get around on his own. Although he was always careful to avoid gang areas as he walked to and from school, he realized that many times things happened simply by being "in the wrong place at the wrong time." The trash, broken bottles, and graffiti that marred his neighborhood also bothered him: he said, "It makes the buildings look nasty and it's unfair to the builders who took a long time to make them."

As Randy entered the fifth grade, his mother grew increasingly concerned. He seemed to be slipping farther behind in school, and was more and more reluctant to leave home. When his mother asked his teacher what was wrong, she said not to worry, all children are different. Besides, she said, there weren't enough resources in the school for Randy to get special attention. But Randy's mother knew something was wrong. Being the strong and assertive woman she is, she pushed the school to conduct special testing. Soon it was discovered that Randy had a severe learning disability. Because his mother had pushed so hard, not only was the problem diagnosed, but appropriate services were soon made available.

Still, Randy's mother wondered if too much damage had been done. Would he be able to catch up academically with the other students? Would he be able to regain the self-confidence he had lost along the way? Would needed services be there to support Randy's development and learning into adulthood?

As it turns out, Randy was quite fortunate. He found many teachers who were sensitive to his struggles and reinforced his efforts to improve. There were also many efforts to clean up his neighborhood, and he was less and less fearful of being outside. Perhaps the biggest boost to his growth and development was a drama teacher, Mr. Reidell, who he met as a freshman in high school. In Mr. Reidell's class, Randy discovered acting. Not only did he love entertaining others, he was also good at it. Mr. Reidell had also just earned a graduate degree with an emphasis on teaching students with learning disabilities. He helped Randy learn the lines of a script from tape recordings, which gave him a more concrete method of learning that didn't require the same techniques as reading a book. Randy's success with drama put him on the road to personal accomplishment.

The rest of Randy's high school career was golden. By his junior year, he was determined to get out of all special education classes, and by his senior year he had done so. When Randy graduated from high school, he won no academic awards, but he was an academic winner. With the aid of positive personal characteristics and support from family and school, he was able to overcome his limitations and the difficulties of his neighborhood, and find his own path to a healthy and productive future.

A Different Outcome

Clearly, Randy faced many difficult challenges in his young life. Yet, he was also very fortunate. He had many personal strengths, including a good personality and keen sense of humor. He also had a loving family who nurtured him from birth, and an assertive mother who made sure his problems were corrected. His drama teacher, Mr. Reidell, was a positive role model who helped him bridge the world of theater and the world of school.

But what might have happened to Randy if his personal strengths were undiscovered and the contextual supports that helped him to develop in a positive way were absent? What if he did not have nurturing parents and informed teachers? What if his special needs had not been diagnosed, and his school failure blamed on laziness and weak will? And what if his early frustration with school became so intense that he drifted out of school on a river of rage, taking his anger and physical prowess to the streets? Given these circumstances, it's easy to see how Randy's outcome could have been very different. Same boy, same community, with many different possible outcomes.

The point is that young people like Randy can thrive — despite personal limitations or contextual barriers – when personal strengths are identified, channeled into constructive avenues, and supported by the people and settings in which they live. In other words, if resources are mobilized to support children and youth along the course of development, it is more likely that outcomes will be positive. However, in order to support children's development, we must first understand how development unfolds, or what we have called the *dynamics of development*.

The Dynamics of Development

Anyone who has been around young people can see that remarkable changes occur from birth into adulthood. Children are utterly dependent when they are born, and still greatly dependent on the tender cooperation of others for several years after birth; independence occurs over a period of almost twenty years. With increasing maturation and experience, the child develops more varied and flexible ways of responding to the environment. Milestones such as the advent of language, logic and hypothetical reasoning allow the developing child to draw on a wider array of responses to internal and external demands.

Although development is an ongoing and gradual process, it is also helpful to classify development into specific *developmental stages*. These stages are by no means exclusive, but can help us organize out thinking about typical advances that occur together around the same point in time. The primary stages for youth development are generally categorized as:

- ❖ Infancy (ages 0-1)
- ❖ Early Childhood (ages 2-5)
- ❖ Late Childhood (ages 6-10)
- ❖ Early Adolescence (ages 11-14)
- ❖ Late Adolescence (ages 15-18)

Many well-known writers such as Erik Erikson and Harry Stack Sullivan have talked about the basic needs that characterize each stage of development. For example, Erikson describes the basic need of infancy as the development of a sense of trust. Sullivan talks about the infant's need for tenderness. In both cases, the central theme is the importance of feeling secure; without such security that infant feels distressed and fearful. Understanding the central need of each developmental stage can provide critical insights into social and personality development. However, it tells us less about the specific accomplishments or milestones to expect at each stage. For this we turn to a discussion of developmental tasks.

Developmental Tasks

Many studies of child development have identified a variety of *developmental tasks* for each stage of development. These takes represent accomplishments or milestones that serve as markers of normative development. They can be divided into three primary areas: physical, cognitive, and social/emotional. Appendix A presents a brief overview of some of the key cognitive and social/emotional tasks for young people; the focus is on these two domains because they have received the most attention in the field of youth development and prevention of problem behaviors.

The listing of developmental tasks in Appendix A is not exhaustive but merely reflects examples of a variety of factors that relate to successful adaptation during different developmental stages. The tasks are based on research by professionals who study the processes of human development. Consulting such "expertise" is an important part of applying the DART Model, as is consulting the expertise of local community residents.

By mastering developmental tasks, children lean skills and behaviors that allow them to meet the "performance standards" or the behavioral expectations of their social groups. Mastery of age-specific tasks also prepares young people for successful passage into the next developmental stage.

For example, in Randy's case, failure to master academic tasks in late childhood began to interfere with the accomplishment of other developmental tasks of that stage, such as the development of a positive self-image. When Randy began to master these academic tasks, although later in development, he was still able to catch up in the social/emotional arena. His story carries a message of hope because it suggests that it is rarely too late to intervene to help a child or teenager who has failed to master earlier developmental tasks. Randy's story shows that past developmental difficulties can be "made up" later; they do not necessarily lock a person into an unchangeable pathway through life. Like Randy, young people can encounter turning points along the way that can change the direction of their life course.

In addition, it should be mentioned that some youth will need to accomplish additional tasks that are culture-specific. For example, by the time they reach high school, first generation bicultural children must learn to navigate between two cultures — the culture of their parents and the American culture of their peers. In addition to attending to what research shows, communities that wish to enhance the development of their youth should draw on the rich knowledge they have about the specific developmental tasks for children from different cultural backgrounds.

Whatever the developmental tasks, if they are not accomplished, future problems are more likely. In some cases, problem behaviors such as violence may serve as a substitute for unmet developmental tasks. For example, a key developmental task of adolescence is accomplishing a sense of autonomy and personal efficacy. For Randy, this was made easier when he discovered his love of the theater. Youth who do not find efficacy in positive school and community settings may turn to violence, for example, to establish an identity, and earn the respect of some peers Violence thus serves a "function" for some youth in terms of accomplishing a developmental task.

Because early experiences can affect children in more or less enduring ways, efforts to help children master developmental tasks must begin when they are very young or even before they are born. As the saying goes "as the twig is bent, so grows the tree." Still, although early efforts are needed, it is also important to realize that it's "never too late." That is, children are surprisingly resilient and can often bounce back from adverse circumstances with extra help and attention. As was seen in Randy's story, failure to accomplish developmental tasks does not necessarily mean that youth are doomed to problem behaviors. Young people are active participants in their development and can make choices that help remedy past shortcomings. Randy was able to overcome childhood failure as he built on his personal strengths. In addition, Randy was fortunate to find support in his family and at school, some of the key contexts of development. Let us now turn to a discussion of the role of these and other contexts in children's development.

The Contexts of Development

Today, there is a growing interest in many different contexts of human development and how they affect individuals at different points in time. Clearly, the family is a primary social context for children, and it is particularly important during the first few years of life. In addition to their families, children are also involved with friendship groups, schools, and neighborhoods — other important contexts of development — that influence the way they feel, think, and act as they grow older. These contexts also change in their relative importance over time. For example, the peer group is a more important context for adolescents than it is for infants. Appendix B provides a chart that details the many different contexts of development and how they can vary in importance over the life course.

Some social contexts are rich in resources that can increase the chances of successful youth development. They are full of *developmental supports* that help youth accomplish developmental tasks and make healthy adjustments. In many cases, these supports are "naturally-occurring" in specific contexts. For example, Randy's ultimate success was due, in part, to an extremely loving and nurturing family. A primary resource of Randy's family was the close and caring relationship they were able to provide for him. In other cases, supports must be "planned," such as health promotion or prevention and intervention programs that are part of a community-wide service delivery system.

In all cases, not only must developmental supports be *available*, they must also be *appropriate* and *accessible*. This point is particularly critical when thinking about planning for community services. For example, many communities have opened youth centers, only to discover that few

youth spend time there. On the one hand, the programs at the youth center simply may not be appropriate for the age group served. Or, the programs may cater to one group of youth, neglecting the needs and values of other teenagers. A more basic problem involves lack of accessibility, meaning teenagers have no way of getting there or getting home. In, fact, agencies often report that lack of transportation is the biggest single problem they face in providing services for youth and their families.

Just as social contexts can be rich in developmental supports, they may also have *developmental barriers* that stand in the way of young people who are attempting to master developmental tasks. Some parents have poor parenting skills; other families are plagued by alcoholism and abuse. In some communities, there may be widespread violence and poorly maintained public parks or recreational facilities. Barriers in the neighborhood certainly intensified Randy's struggles. Like Randy, many young people growing up today live in resource-poor communities, such as those in inner city neighborhoods or in isolated, extremely poor rural areas.

The concept of developmental supports and barriers can be applied to both individual case management and community planning efforts. At the individual level, each person experiences some unique contexts (such as their family) and some shared contexts (such as their community). In this manner, an individual profile of supports and barriers within each developmental context can be described. For each individual, it is also possible to build on the supportive features of these contexts in hopes of tipping the balance to increase supports and enhance positive developmental outcomes. For instance, Randy had a number of developmental barriers in his neighborhood, but he had a very supportive family context.

In terms of planning for community services, it is also possible to describe programs, practices, and policies that serve as supports as well as additional supports that are needed. Describing barriers that must be overcome is equally important. When supports are identified or proposed, the can also be evaluated in terms of their appropriateness and accessibility. When barriers are identified, it is important to realize that some barriers are more easily remedied than others. For instance, deteriorating recreation facilities can be a barrier to youths' social skill development that can be remedied through clean-up and restoration efforts. Other barriers such as concentrated poverty or hostilities between racial and/or ethnic groups often are more difficult and take longer to change.

The point is that youth develop in contexts, and that the features of social contexts go a long way in shaping developmental outcomes. But individuals also experience and even shape their social contexts in different ways, in part, because of the unique set of personal characteristics they bring to these contexts. Let us now turn to a discussion of the role of personal characteristics in the developmental process.

Personal Characteristics

All youth have inborn or acquired positive characteristics. These are the *strengths* they bring to any situation. For example, some children have an easy temperament that allows them to deal calmly with frustrating experiences. Randy's strengths included and engaging personality and good sense of humor; these traits helped him develop supportive relationships with his parents and teachers, helped

him find his place in school, and created a pathway for him to travel successfully through early and late adolescence.

In addition to strengths, young people also have *limitations* — inborn or acquired characteristics that interfere with their ability to adjust successfully to life's circumstances. A child with low "impulse control," for example, may throw frequent temper tantrums that overtax the patience of a caregiver. The result may be a strained relationship between the two, with insufficient nurturing that may interfere with developmental tasks related to attachments and trust in others. This, in turn, may also result in later problems with peers, including peer rejection.

Individuals differ in their combinations of strengths and limitations, and personal limitations can be offset by other strengths and supports. Randy's learning disability could have derailed his development if other important personal strengths and contextual supports had not been present, so the net balance of strengths outweighed limitations. The important point is that we must help children and youth build on their strengths and compensate for their limitations as they navigate the course of development.

Linking Developmental Tasks with Risk for Problem Behaviors

The DART Model assumes that a focus on the developmental tasks of youth is essential because that focus can: (a) provide a guide for broad-based youth developmental and prevention efforts that are beneficial to all youth in a community, and (b) be used to plan efforts to prevent problem behaviors, particularly among those youth who are most troubled or at-risk.

Grantmakers and those who design or fund programs for children and youth may ask how prevention efforts can be linked to the developmental tasks of children and adolescents. In the previous section, we described how efforts can be mobilized to help children master specific developmental tasks by building on individual strengths and contextual supports. Rather than providing a list of "assets" or other "good things" to help all children in a giving community, a focus on developmental tasks provides a specific guide for youth development programming. This programming should foster the healthy development of all youth, with specific recommendations for youth at each developmental stage.

Youth development strategies have also been used as prevention tools. It is our premise that the DART Model, with its focus on developmental tasks, provides a mechanism for understanding the relation between development and prevention of problem behaviors. In some cases, risk of problem behaviors increases when developmental tasks are not mastered. For example, learning to read is am important developmental task of childhood, with poor reading achievement identified as a risk factor for aggression and other problem behaviors. In Randy's case, his school failure could have led him on a downward spiral of academic disengagement possibly resulting in delinquent behavior. In other cases, failure to accomplish one developmental task may subsequently interfere with the accomplishment of other developmental tasks. For example, infants and young children must learn to control and regulate their emotions. Failure to accomplish this task may further interfere with other developmental tasks such as attachment to parents and academic achievement.

Using the DART Model, many risk factors can be recast in terms of how they relate to the accomplishment of developmental tasks. Rather than provide general lists of risk or protective factors linked to specific types of problem behaviors, the DART Model emphasizes the processes by which many identified risk factors are linked to problem behaviors via their influence on developmental outcomes. An advantage of this approach is that prevention and intervention strategies can be designed to impact a range of problem behaviors that are linked to development, rather than promoting specific programs for specific problem behaviors.

Appendix C is a chart that lists the social-emotional developmental tasks of early adolescence and the risk factors of violence that may be associated with them. It is designed to illustrate the connection between risk factors and the mastery of developmental tasks by providing some examples of risk factors that result from earlier unmet developmental tasks or risk factors that are barriers to the mastery of developmental tasks. Many of the risk factors commonly linked with problem behaviors such as violence can be re-examined in terms of how they relate to accomplishing a range of developmental tasks. For example, parental reliance on coercion could interfere with a child's accomplishment of several tasks, including achieving autonomy, self-control, self-regulation, and skills for intimate relationships.

Risk Factors Not Related to Development

The DART Model places a primary emphasis on understanding and attending to the developmental needs of youth. It also integrates a risk-focused approach by recasting many risk factors as unmet developmental needs or barriers to development. However, development issues alone are not the only predictors of problem behaviors. If a community is concerned with specific youth problems such as violence, teenage pregnancy, or substance abuse, it is also important to identify problem-specific risk factors that are not directly related to developmental processes.

For example, the availability of guns in a neighborhood can increase the risk of lethal violence, while community policing efforts can decrease that risk. The impact on risk of these community factors not directly related to the mastery of specific developmental tasks. Rather, their impact is through other processes such as deterrence. Similarly, in some cases specific information, for instance about how to prevent AIDS, can decrease risk of independence of developmental issues.

The DART Model is a comprehensive framework that brings youth development and risk-focused approaches together, while also acknowledging that programs that attempt to prevent some problem behaviors must also target risk factors that fall beyond the domain of youth development.

Applying the DART Model: An Illustration Focusing on Preventing Youth Violence

The DART Model can be considered a starting point for grantmakers, program planners, and others wishing to organize, implement, and evaluate programs to promote youth development and prevent problem behavior. A central theme of this model is that comprehensive planning should lead to a *seamless* system of integrated services that addresses both development and prevention of problem behaviors. However, it is also true that communities vary greatly in terms of the level and types of services they provide as well as the degree to which they are concerned about one or more youth problems behaviors. They also vary in terms of their readiness to address comprehensive planning versus problem-focused planning.

At the broadest and most general level, the DART Model can be used for general planning for youth development. For example, a community may wish to provide services for all children ages 0-18 that are coordinated across systems such as schools, health care, and child welfare. The DART Model suggests that developmental tasks be specified for each stage of development, and that policies, practices, and programs be linked to children's accomplishment of these developmental tasks across relevant contexts. Another important consideration would be how to assess and follow children to identify those most in need of special help or remediation along the way. If more comprehensive planning is warranted that integrates prevention of problem behaviors, developmental tasks could be linked to the specific problem behaviors of concern, and additional risk factors could be described.

In other cases, communities often organize around the prevention of a particular problem or set of problems. Sometimes this can be the result of a specific event, such as a school shooting. Other times this may come about because of an escalating problem that sparks community concern like teenage drug use. The DART Model can be used to develop problem-focused prevention strategies, with an emphasis on integrating youth development and risk-focused approaches. The potential use of the DART Model for this type of effort is illustrated by an example of how a hypothetical community might apply it to the problem of youth violence. The example is organized around six questions that are specifically related to this problem. We also emphasize how answers are likely to vary in different settings and cultures.

The six DART Model questions addressing youth violence:
- ❖ What is the nature of the youth violence problem, both nationally and locally?
- ❖ Who are the youth to be served, what is their stage of development, and which social contexts are most important?
- ❖ What developmental tasks should be accomplished by youth to be served, and which are most closely associated with youth violence?
- ❖ What are the developmental supports and barriers in the community that promote or interfere with youths' accomplishment of developmental tasks?
- ❖ What are the additional risk factors for youth violence?
- ❖ Are new programs or activities needed or can existing services be reorganized to increase supports, minimize barriers, and reduce associated risk factors?

Our hypothetical community (we'll call it Centerton) is a working-class town located approximately 30 miles from a large urban center in the Midwestern United States. Over the past few years, Centerton has undergone a number of changes. First, one of its major employers, Allied Metals, moved south to Florida, leaving more than 3,000 workers without jobs. Many of these people lived in West Centerton, where Allied was located. As residents moved in search of jobs, many of the houses were left vacant.

Soon, the city manager, chief of police, and fire chief began to realize that West Centerton was generating a higher-than-proportionate number of police and fire calls. Domestic violence, fights, and drug use were increasing, particularly among teenagers. For the first time, it appeared that some of the more organized urban gangs were moving in.

Together the explored the DART Model's first question focused on youth violence: ***What is the nature of the problem, both nationally and locally?***

Addressing youth violence is a daunting task. The committee soon realized that different people had different opinions about the nature of the problem. They decided first to get an accurate picture of the national youth violence problem. They had access to a number of recent publications from the Department of Justice, and compiled a brief overview of national trends. They discovered startling changes in the picture of youth violence. For example, they saw that youth violence has become more lethal, is concentrated in urban areas and perpetrated largely by males, more frequently involves handguns than in the past, peaks during the late afternoon hours, is short-lived during adolescence, and only infrequently continues into adulthood.

But what did that tell them about the situation in West Centerton? They all knew that things were getting worse, but they didn't really have accurate information about the local problem. They decided to compile data from available sources including the police department, schools, and local hospitals. They also decided to hold several focus groups for residents to understand their perspective on youth violence programs. Because residents are in touch with diverse local cultures and conditions, they can serve as "key informants" in this area, and their insights are critical for any type of strategic planning process.

The initial data they gathered confirmed that West Centerton indeed had a growing youth violence problem. Both non-lethal and lethal offences had almost doubled over the past four years. They were startled to find that handgun use had nearly tripled. In terms of related problems, the high school graduation rate had gone from 86% four years ago to 63% in the previous year. Agency representatives on the planning group also confirmed that the situation for youth was growing more difficult, with fighting and other problems on the upswing. Although there were more and more children with no after-school supervision, program attendance seemed to be down.

At the neighborhood meeting, residents reported an increasing fear of gang activity, particularly in light of a recent drive-by shooting. Because the local police did not track whether crimes were gang-related or not, this was important information for the planning group. What emerged was a picture of an increasingly serious youth violence problem in West Centerton that involved both

gangs and guns.   Over a period of several months, the stakeholders in Centerton explored the DART Model's second question: ***Who are the youth to be served, what is their stage of development, and which social contexts are most important?***

A developmental approach to youth violence prevention suggests that programs and services should be available for children from the earliest stages of development. A central theme of the DART Model is that prevention strategies will be most effective if they address the process of human development at different stages of childhood and adolescence, and in the most important social contexts during those stages.

However, because resources are often limited, it is necessary to make hard choices about who will receive services and where. Public outcries about drive-by shootings will not be satisfied by programs that provide prenatal care to young mothers, for example. Although such early interventions are clearly important, immediate and pressing problems must also be addressed.

Accordingly, communities with serious and escalating problems of youth violence may choose initially to focus on prevention activities with youth in the early and late adolescent stages of development. Communities with youth violence problems that are less pressing may choose to begin by addressing areas where there are the biggest service gaps for children and youth. In all cases, however, community residents should be center stage in determining what is needed to address developmental issues and problem behaviors of youth in their community.

In the case of Centerton, community members decide to focus on the young people at greatest risk. These youth were in the stages of early adolescence (11 to 14 years) and late adolescence (15 to 18 years). The peer group, school, and neighborhood were identified as the most important social contexts. Participants in the Centerton project then addressed the third question posed by the DART Model: ***What developmental tasks should be accomplished by youth to be served, and which are most closely associated with youth violence?***

As was noted earlier, Appendix A provides a list of major cognitive and social/emotional developmental tasks for the stages of youth development discussed previously. The listing is not exhaustive, and the developmental tasks are not equally relevant for all youth in all settings. The list is offered as a guide to thinking about developmental tasks for youth; as noted earlier, communities need information about their youth in order to determine what tasks should be addressed.

Centerton leaders decide to focus primarily on social/emotional tasks. They were very interested in helping adolescents develop a positive personal identity, increasing their capacity for rewarding personal relationships, and improving their moral reasoning skills. In their community focus groups they learned that many of the teenage boys were drawn to the city gangs because they could gain almost instant "status" and recognition. Their identity was connected to being tough rather than working hard in school and having a good job.

The next step for the planning group was to answer: ***What are the developmental supports and barriers in the community that promote or interfere with youths' accomplishment of developmental tasks?***

The role of contextual supports and barriers in promoting development is an important feature of the DART Model. Even the most distressed communities have some features that support (or can be mobilized to support) youth development. This approach will help avoid sweeping generalizations about the advantages or limitations of a specific community. For example, although community poverty often creates many barriers to successful development (largely due to insufficient resources and services), strong faith organizations can be extremely influential in promoting successful youth outcomes.

The members of the planning group began to think of the supports in West Centerton. They were glad to be focusing on the positive characteristics of their community and soon realized that it had many strengths. Among the supports identified were a number of available service programs for recreation, counseling, and social skills development. The members of the planning group were sure that opportunities for positive engagement such as these would facilitate youths' identity development, relationship skills, and moral growth. Other supports identified included a strong network of community leaders, who were motivated to seek solutions and engage citizens, and a very responsive school system.

They also identified some barriers. Few job opportunities were available for teenagers, a problem that had gotten worse after Allied Metals left town. Not only were jobs unavailable, but the job prospects for local youth looked grim, which seemed to have a demoralizing effect. The increasing influence of gangs from the nearby city was also identified as a barrier, particularly because the apparently quick and easy road to "status" and money seemed to hold great allure for many local youth. Finally, they identified growing ethnic rivalries at the high school as a barrier to building positive relationships.

The group then explored that DART Model's fifth question: ***What are the additional risk factors for youth violence?***

To apply the DART Model effectively to prevention of specific problems, it is also important to identify additional risk factors that are not related to identify additional risk factors that are not related to development. In the case of West Centerton, one of the biggest problems was the increasing availability of guns. Most of the youth who had participated in focus groups said that most anyone could get a gun within a few hours. They also mentioned the increasing number of abandoned buildings that served as hotbeds of illegal activities, making nearby residents more fearful.

The residents of West Centerton also felt that the police presence in their community was dwindling. One woman complained that it had taken police 45 minutes to respond to her call about a burglary in progress. Others said they felt that the police were insensitive to the racial tensions in their community and often made it worse.

The planning group then decided to bring all this information together to answer the final DART Model question: ***Are new programs or activities needed or can existing services be recognized to increase supports, minimize barriers, and reduce associated risk factors?***

Overall, the planning group realized that although a number of programs and services were available, they were not focused directly on the problem of serious youth violence or gangs. They were committed to enhancing their programming for adolescents, with particular attention on identifying and serving the most troubled youth. They were particularly interested in ways to increase youths' peer relations skills and provide opportunities for positive engagement with peers and others in schools and neighborhoods. They also realized that the neighborhood barriers would need to be addressed before other supports could take hold. Although they realized that an organized, comprehensive response would tale some time to develop and implement, they decided to begin with the following activities:

❖ *The city would address the contextual barriers of run-down or abandoned buildings and neighborhood deterioration. It would install additional street lights, tow away unlicensed cars, replace crumbling curbs and gutters, immediately clean graffiti, and increase the frequency of street sweeping. It would also begin a program to tear down abandoned buildings and explore the possibility of providing tax incentives to businesses that moved into West Centerton.*

❖ *The city would also address the identified risk factor of police involvement and response by establishing a community policing program, with offices in West Centerton. Further, they would look into diversity training programs to increase cultural sensitivity among police officers. Finally, they would increase surveillance of gang activity and particularly focus on getting guns away from youth.*

❖ *The high school would develop a relationship skills program as part of their regular health curriculum. The program would not be limited to conflict resolution or peer mediation skills but would provide training in a variety of skills related to positive social relationships. Opportunities for positive social engagement would also be enhanced through a cross-age tutoring program, where seniors would be matched with younger students needing academic and personal guidance.*

❖ *The YMCA would develop a business/community mentoring program where the most troubled youth would be matched with a community mentor. The focus would be on developing "shadowing" programs in order to give youth more exposure to skills and opportunities in the business world.*

Participants in West Centerton recognized that much remained to be learned about the specific needs of individual youth in the community. They planned to meet regular and on an ongoing basis to share what they were learning and to assess their progress in preventing youth violence.

Conclusion

The DART model provides grantmakers, policy-makers, and community leaders with a comprehensive approach to the many and complex issues that surround the topic of youth development and prevention of problem behaviors. The model incorporates a way for those who are conducting strategic planning to consider development and risk within a common framework. It addresses building individual strengths and increasing contextual supports. Moreover, these issues are addressed as they relate to important variations in the needs of children and youth as they grow older.

The DART Model differs from more general youth development approaches in several ways. As described earlier, a focus on developmental stages suggests that any efforts to promote youth development must clearly describe how they are linked to the developmental needs of children and youth at each stage. For example, parental supervision of homework may be important for young children but interfere with the development of autonomy for adolescents. Too often, listings of "good things" for positive youth development are not placed in age-appropriate contexts.

In addition, although the DART Model provides general guidelines for age-specific milestones, it also encourages an assessment of whether these (or other milestones) are most relevant for youth in a given cultural and community setting. As discussed earlier, some developmental tasks, such as those faced by bicultural youth, may be unique to a particular group of individuals. In other cases, more normative tasks such as the development of personal autonomy may also look different across diverse cultures. In some neighborhoods, such as those rife with racial tensions, youth may face yet other important developmental tasks in navigating their particular social context.

Although the DART Model recognizes the importance of supporting the successful development of all youth, it also emphasizes the successful development of all youth; it also emphasizes the importance of strategies to reach specific individuals with particular needs. In this manner, it shares some features of most risk-focused approaches that describe different levels of preventive intervention involving "general" versus "targeted" approaches. Because youth differ in their strengths and limitations, and because they experience different contextual supports and barriers, it is unlikely that all youth have the same needs to ensure successful development. Within this framework, one method for identifying youth who need services (and the services they need) focuses on creating individual assessment profiles that document mastery of relevant developmental tasks, as well as areas in need of improvement. This may be done at a general preventive level for all youth or may be used for youth exhibiting problem behaviors.

Given that this model is rather broad in scope, we believe it can be applied to a number of different programmatic and service efforts ranging from community planning to individual assessment and case management. Because community mobilization has often focused on strategic planning around a specific problem behavior, we have provided an example of its potential application to the problem of youth violence. Still, we believe that the DART Model will be most useful for comprehensive strategic planning to integrate promotion and prevention efforts into a seamless system of services for children, youth, and families.

Glossary of Terms

The DART Model (Developmental and Risk Together) — A comprehensive framework for promoting the positive development of young people that brings together issues of youth development and risk for problem behaviors. The model, which can serve as a guide for strategic planning, associates developmental tasks with developmental stage and environments in which children live.

Developmental stages — A series of stages comprised of age-related advances that follow a logical sequence and contribute to a young person's ever-increasing complexity of feelings, thoughts, and actions.

Developmental tasks — Accomplishments or milestones that serve as markers of normative development across physical, cognitive and social-emotional domains.

Social contexts of development — The environment (including family, school, friends, and neighborhoods) that surrounds children and youth and influences the way they think, feel, and act, as they grow older.

- ❖ Developmental supports – Resources in relevant social contexts that increase the chances of positive youth development such as safe neighborhoods, adequate recreation programs, and opportunities for youth involvement.

- ❖ Developmental barriers- Factors in relevant social contexts that stand in the way or reduce the chances of successful youth development, including abusive families and violent neighborhoods.

Personal characteristics — The characteristics that exist in all youth. These include:

- ❖ Strengths – Inborn or acquired individual traits that help youth accomplish developmental tasks, such as an easy temperament that allows an individual to be calm when faced with frustrating experiences.

- ❖ Limitations – Inborn or acquired characteristics that hinder youths' ability to make successful adjustments, such as low impulse control.

Appendix A

Key Cognitive and Social/Emotional Development Tasks

Infancy (Ages 0-1)

	Task	Description	Example
Cognitive Domain	Establish early neural connections	Nerve cells in the brain are pre-wired in a rough blueprint that is refined via experience and social interactions.	Unless some systems such as vision are exercised early on, they will not develop.
	Begin language acquisition	Early connections for understanding and reproducing language begin even before birth.	By 6 months, babies can recognize vowel sounds; babbling is a precursor to patterned speech.
	Acquire ability to use symbols in thought and action	There is an increasing use of words, pictures, gestures, or signs to represent experiences and concepts.	By 12 months, babies can pretend a number of actions, including eating, drinking, and sleeping.
Social/Emotional Domain	Learn to express and regulate simple emotions	Babies display emotions such as fear, distress, anger, sadness, joy, and happiness.	During infancy, babies improve their ability to cope with emotional arousal.
	Use "social referencing" in novel situations	Towards the end of infancy, babies learn to use a caregiver's expressions as cues for responding.	When unsure how to respond in an unusual situation, babies look to and mimic caretakers' responses.
	Establish secure attachment to primary caregiver	An enduring emotional tie between an infant and caregiver is formed.	Securely attached infants explore novel situations and are at ease with strangers.
	Engage in social interaction based on reciprocity	Babies can engage in mutual exchanges with partners such as "patty-cake," for example.	During infancy, babies improve in interaction skills such as taking turns with others.

Early Childhood (Ages 2-5)

	Task	Description	Example
Cognitive Domain	Continue to establish neural connections	During the early years a human brain forges quadrillions of connections, or synapses.	By age 2, a child's brain contains twice as many synapses as an adult's brain.
	Acquire language skills and build vocabulary	During the preschool years, children rapidly expand their vocabulary, grammar, and use of language.	By age 5, a child's vocabulary may be as high as 10,000 words.
	Increase use of symbols in thought and action, including early knowledge of numbers	Use of words, pictures, or signs to represent experiences and concepts continues to develop.	Preschool children become increasingly sophisticated at making distinctions between what is pretend and what is real.
Social/Emotional Domain	Learn to express and regulate complex emotions	Preschool children display emotions such as shame, guilt, and anxiety; they also assume a more active role in managing their emotions.	By the end of the preschool period, children are more able to exercise self-control and reflect on actions.
	Expand self-awareness and build self-confidence	The child becomes aware of his or her existence as a separate individual.	Children know how their behaviors and intentions are distinct from others.
	Engage in cooperative play with peers	Preschoolers become more competent in their interactions with peers and others.	Children are more able to play interactive games in social settings.
	Develop awareness and understanding of others	Preschoolers recognize that other people are independent agents.	Children realize other children's feelings can be different than their own.

Middle Childhood (Ages 6-10)

	Task	Description	Example
Cognitive Domain	Continue to establish neural connections and eliminate those that are used less often	Around age 10 or earlier, the brain's excess connections (synapses) undergo a dramatic pruning.	Although the brain is flexible and resilient during these years, the ability to rebound from trauma or deprivation declines with age.
	Acquire ability for logical and systematic thought	Children can use multiple pieces of information simultaneously	In middle childhood, children perceive underlying reality despite superficial appearance; they think about their own thinking
	Develop literacy, reading, and basic math skills	Children move from word/concept recognition to become competent readers and writers; basic mathematical computations can be performed.	By age 10, children can read long books divided into chapters; math skills include fractions.
Social/Emotional Domain	Increase ability to express and regulate emotions	Children know that different emotions can be felt at the same time.	Children are increasingly able to cope with frustration and to delay gratification.
	Expand self-awareness to include psychological dimensions	Children know that people have an inner, private self; they also define self in relation to others.	By age 9 or 10, children make comparative judgments, such as "I am the tallest person in my class."
	Develop a sense of industry and personal efficacy	Children are increasingly aware of personal mastery and their own responsibility for successes.	Children with high personal efficacy do well on tasks requiring self-control.
	Improve social skills such as problem-solving and perspective-taking	Social relations reflect an understanding of others' viewpoints.	Behaviors such as sharing are offered to address an inequality or perceived need.
	Learn rules for social behavior across contexts	The influence of peer group is accompanied by increased attention to social rules and conventions.	During this period, children's play primarily involves games with rules.
	Develop a sense of right and wrong based on absolute moral constraint	Children believe that behavior is either totally right or totally wrong.	Children make moral judgments that focus heavily on the consequences rather than the intentions of others' actions.

Early Adolescence (Ages 11-14)

	Task	Description	Example
Cognitive Domain	Focus neural functions through a decrease in the number of connections	The brain becomes less flexible and pathways become more specialized.	Specialized pathways improve higher-level cognitive abilities such as abstract reasoning.
	Increase ability to engage in formal operations	Using principles of logic allows adolescents to think more abstractly and systematically.	Youth are able to construct logical arguments and see fallacies in others' logic.
Social/Emotional Domain	Begin to establish a positive personal identity, including an increase self-awareness	Young adolescents recognize that various parts of the self are parts of a whole; they also explore ways they are unique or different from others.	The characteristic self-consciousness of adolescence stems from an increased concern that others are watching.
	Achieve an increased level of closeness with peers	In early adolescence, youth develop close relations with peers of the same gender.	The emergence of same-gender cliques begins during this time.
	Develop ability to take the third-person perspective	Young adolescents can see both self and others from an outside, or third-party, viewpoint.	During this period, adolescents can see relationships as ongoing mutual understandings.
	Develop a sense of morality based on social and situational factors	Young adolescents see morality as related to the situation and to social agreements rather than absolute standards.	During this period, adolescents focus on intentions when making moral judgments.

Late Adolescence (Ages 15-18)

	Task	Description	Example
Cognitive Domain	Increase ability to engage in "formal operations"	Experiences such as secondary school education foster the development of logical and abstract thinking.	"Formal operations" represents a form of reasoning that is more evident in cultures with an orientation toward science and technology.
	Increase focus of learning for vocational and career orientation	During late adolescence, youth begin to identify specific areas of interest and prepare for entry into the workforce.	About 75% of high school seniors hold part-time jobs; this experience serves to prepare youth for work.
Social/Emotional Domain	Develop an autonomous and positive personal identity	Adolescents make decisions and take actions that display increased independence.	During late adolescence, youth make career choices, anticipate future roles, and commit to certain values and lifestyles.
	Achieve an increased level of closeness with peers in intimate relationships	As adolescents strive for greater intimacy with friends and partners, they experience a deeper sense of commitment to relationships.	Adolescents begin to describe relationships in terms of loyalty, fidelity, and trust.
	Acquire new status in family based on independence	Relationships with parents become more equal as youth grow more independent and responsible.	As desire for autonomy increases, adolescents often become more rebellious and resistant to rules.
	Develop a sense of morality based on abstract principles	Obligations to others and society are seen as a basis for moral judgments.	Adolescents can focus on abstract principles underlying right and wrong, such as fairness and justice.

Appendix B

Ecological Life Course Development

Ecological Life Course Development
Conceptual Matrix

Developmental Stages

Social/Ecological Contexts	Infancy	Early Childhood	Late Childhood	Early Adolescence	Late Adolescence	Early Adulthood	Middle Adulthood	Late Adulthood
Societal/Community*	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary
Neighborhood	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary
Family	Primary	Primary	Primary	Primary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Tertiary
School		Tertiary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary			
Friends				Primary	Primary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary
Intimate Partner/Family					Primary	Primary	Primary	Primary
Work					Secondary	Primary	Primary	
Legal/Justice System				Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary

* Includes both structural and cultural components

☐ TERTIARY

▩ SECONDARY

■ PRIMARY

Appendix C

Developmental Tasks and Their Relation to Risk Factors

Developmental Tasks and Their Relation to Risk Markers

Social/Emotional Developmental Tasks of Early Adolescence	Risk Factors that are Unmet Developmental Tasks	Risk Factors that Interfere with Mastering Developmental Tasks
Achieve an increase level of closeness with peers	Peer rejection, gang involvement	Poor social and interpersonal problem-solving skills
Develop the ability to take the third-person perspective	Lack of perspective taking skills	Authoritarian parenting style
Develop a sense of morality based on social and situational factors	Immature moral reasoning skills	Inconsistent family discipline and reliance on coercive practices
Begin to establish a positive personal identity, including an understanding of self across time and situations	Low self-esteem	Unemployment, economic disparity, sexism, and racism