CULTURAL VALUES AND PRACTICE WHEN SERVING CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES: SHARING DEVELOPMENTAL CASE STUDIES

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ABSTRACT: Three case studies will be shared in this paper in the context of organizational values and practices implemented at the PHILLIPS Programs for Children and Families, located in Annandale, VA. The youth voices integrated in the case studies provide reasons for participating in special education and family strengthening programs. An overview of services and support received is given. Key challenges, successes, and emerging outcomes are considered. This study provides information on how to make organizational and cultural values come to life and how to recognize the positive youth development practices in special education and family strengthening services. This study also includes information on those working with crossover youth in special education day schools and family strengthening programs.

KEY WORDS: organizational, cultural values, positive youth development, case studies, youth voice, special education, family strengthening programs

Unable to find a safe and stable home with relatives, teenager Natasha has been placed into a foster care system for the first time in her life. She knows nothing about this system and she needs safety, stability, and nurturing in a family context. In another case study, Jefferson reports that he used to believe that he was dumb and violent. Why? Such words were directed towards him for several years by adults, including educators. In turn, Jefferson wondered if he had a future ahead of him. In another case study, Simon used to feel overwhelmed by life, educators, and adults; thus, he tended not to feel safe in many places, and he did not easily trust others.

The purpose of this paper is a) to share organizational and cultural values using the positive youth development framework as a backdrop, b) to use the case study and youth voice methodology to summarize the implementation and core components of two PHILLIPS programs, and c) to examine case studies in order to assess meaningful activities and experiences and review how such activities support families and guardians and positive youth development. The study is built upon the case study and youth voice methodology given that the case studies involve in-depth examination of three youth previously enrolled in a special education day school and the family strengthening program over at least two continuous years (Sukop, 2007). Using youth voice in the study also provides critical discussions on initial reasons for entering a program and for significant choices made

by youth that drive their concept of self. The research design includes structured observations, interviews with youth and family, check-ins with program developers, and reviews of past records and experiences.

Organizational Values And Philosophy

The two programs examined include the PHILLIPS' special education day school (known as PHILLIPS School-Annandale) and the Family Partners program. Family Partners is a program to strengthen families and communities because both are instrumental to child development and well-being (Family Strengthening Policy Center, 2007). Program headquarters are in Annandale, VA. The school has been in operation for 47 years, while Family Partners has existed for 20 years. The PHILLIPS organization is a private, nonprofit organization; staff are dedicated to serving the needs of individuals with emotional and behavioral disabilities and their families through education, family support services, community education, and advocacy.

The cultural values of PHILLIPS Programs for Children and Families for service delivery and continuum of care are utilized. The values represent a philosophy on how services should be delivered to children and their families. In practice, these values guide program development and decision making while prioritizing organizational practices. The cultural values were formalized in 2004 with the board of directors and staff. Printed as a one-page document, the values are permanently posted in offices and provided to staff on an annual basis. They include individualization, safety, commitment, community, compassion, integrity, and effectiveness (PHILLIPS Programs for Children and Families, 2010). Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the values. These values remain priority to the organization as a whole.

Closely linked to these values are important ideas associated with positive youth development, further ensuring that services and opportunities support all young people in developing a sense of a competence, usefulness, belonging, and empowerment (National Clearinghouse of Families and Youth, 2001).
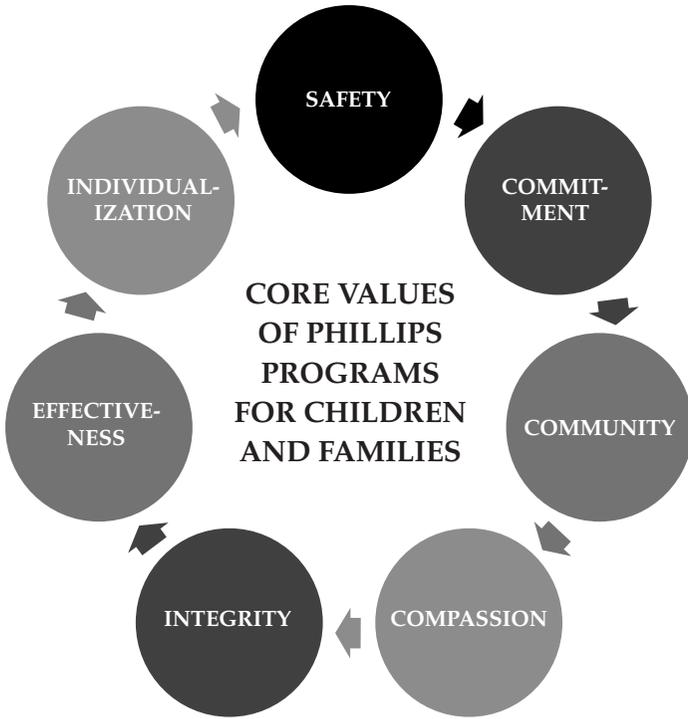
Figure 1: The Core Values of the Phillips Programs for Children and Famíles

Positive youth development is a perspective that focuses on children and young people's capacities, strengths, and developmental needs—not solely on risks, problems, or overall compromising behaviors. It recognizes the need to broaden beyond problem reduction and crisis management to strategies that increase young people's connections to positive, supportive relationships, and challenging, meaningful experiences. According to Whitlock (2004), the positive youth development perspective is youth-centered, and comprehensive: "Young people thrive when they are developmentally supported across all sectors of the community—schools, youth-serving agencies, faith organizations, community governance, businesses, juvenile justice system, and more" (p. 1). Overall, the positive youth development perspective is a promising applicable approach for the development of all children and youth. A positive youth development perspective "reaffirms the need to invest fully in all youth. It urges us not to ignore the need to support those not in obvious trouble, while challenging us not to limit the expectations and range of supports offered to those who are" (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003, p. 6). Figure 1 demonstrates how organizational values are linked to positive youth development, using key case study notes from the study.

Table 1: Core Values, Positive Youth Development Principles, and Case Studies ~ Overlapping Areas in the Study

PHILLIPS' Core Values	Research and Practice Notes of Study's Youth and Case Studies	Positive Youth Development Principles
Safety – We are vigilant in promoting the physical and emotional safety of all. We help people feel secure in our environment. We are responsible for preventing and correcting safety issues.	Case studies reveal that youth have safety in part because they believe that they can return to PHILLIPS when they need to, for example, during times when they need additional support. They experience safety through caring and meaningful relationships with teachers, counselors, and peers. They experience safety in terms of being given the time needed to express themselves to others.	Schools, families, and communities are engaged in developing safe, stable, and nurturing environments that support children and youth.
	Staff employ critical skills such as active listening, patience getting to know youth and their families or guardians, working with home-based services as needed, working to re-integrate youth and families and guardians back into their communities, and building up strengths to avoid focusing on deficits in youth and their families and guardians.	

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Overlapping Areas in the Study

PHILLIPS' Core Values	Research and Practice Notes of Study's Youth and Case Studies	Positive Youth Development Principles
Integrity – We do what we say we will do. We tell the truth. We act thoughtfully based on the child's or client's interest, not on the organization's. Effectiveness – We aim for continuous improvement. We learn from our mistakes, as well as our successes. We make changes based on objective data to improve and evaluate the program.	Case studies reveal that youth and families and guardians trust PHILLIPS programs and services. Case studies reveal treatments operate with direct input from children, youth, and clients; in the school and Family Partners programs, team, IEP, and family conferencing meetings integrate family and guardian input. Youth voices in these meetings are supported on an ongoing basis, especially during discussion on transitions and existing programs. Staff want to learn more about the youth being serviced by programs and services. Staff work closely with parents to plan for youths' exit transitions and progress. Families and guardians are integrated into the treatment planning and IEP processes.	Programs and policies focus on the evolving developmental needs and tasks of children and youth, and involve youth as partners instead of clients.

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Community – We include each other in decision making, problem solving, and having fun together. Compassion – We welcome and accept others. We empathize with others. We listen to and respect others.	Case studies reveal the value of working with youth, wherever they are situated and with consideration for their special needs and challenges. Case studies reveal the need to use various strategies to help youth find their voices and self-concepts. Case studies reveal the need for staff to have patience and form caring relationships with youth and their families and guardians. Staff are prepared to work with diverse children, youth, and families. Youth included as case studies were culturally diverse and staff were prepared to work with their various needs and challenges, and operate with kindness in terms of the respecting cultural diversity.	Children and youth are viewed as valued and respected assets to society.

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Individualization – We respect the perspective of the child and family. We build the program to fit the child and family. We highlight strengths and embrace the potential of the children. Community – We include each other in decision making, problem solving, and having fun together.	By program design, the two programs work with strength-based approaches and strategies in partnership with children, youth, and families and guardians. Case studies show the value of working with child, youth, and family and guardian strengths and the value of developing new skills that contribute to emerging, positive youth development outcomes. By focusing on strengths, the youth in the study were encouraged to thrive, experience successes such as high school graduation, return to a home school, and move towards a better future as an adult. Case studies document strength-based and youth- and family and guardian-centered approaches, and case studies shed light on how clients' needs are diverse and contextual, which means that staff must respond to the needs and wants of youth and families as needed.	Children and youth are provided opportunities to experiment in a safe environment and to develop positive social values and norms.
Individualization – We respect the perspective of the child and family. We build the program to fit the child and family. We highlight strengths and embrace the potential of the children. Compassion – We welcome and accept others. We empathize with others. We listen to and respect others.	Case studies reveal a practice of working with each youth and their families and guardians based on their unique needs, wants, and challenges. Program directors from the school and Family Partners describe building a program and intervention around a child and youth instead of "fitting a child or youth into the program."	Children and youth are engaged in activities that promote self-understanding, self-worth, and a sense of belonging and resiliency.

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Case Study and Voice Background

The study focuses on three youth who have experienced a transition away from at least one of the programs as well as an entry into another educational program that is less restrictive in nature. While the case studies cannot be generalizable to all youth in PHILLIPS' programs, they are designed to provide a deep understanding of a subject by "systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions" (Berg, 2007). In the past, case studies in special education research have shared students' personal mean-

ings and given voice to persons who have been historically silenced or marginalized (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Brantlinger et al. describe the use of case studies as narrative research, operating with the assumption that persons, including young persons, have important stories to tell about their lives such as their treatment efforts and assessment strategies for persons in special education. In program evaluation, others have found that storytelling is effective because "it accommodates diverse voices and perspectives, while making the most of the particular resources and ways of learning readily available" (Sukop, 2007). In relation to the California Endowment, Sukop (2007) suggests that sharing stories and voices respects and values diverse ways of knowing and learning—it is empowering and participatory. Sukop writes that stories work effectively with statistics and surveys and support communication with stakeholders and other community partners.

In special education, child and foster care, and the positive youth development field, youth voice is encouraged. The United States federal law known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) specifies how states and agencies should provide special education, early intervention, and other related services to children and youth with disabilities. According to the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (DATE), the IDEA requires that students be invited to their Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting, especially when transitional processes or decisions are being made. A positive youth development toolkit (National Resource Center for Youth Services, 2008) states that "as key stakeholders in their communities, youth are being formally recognized in many communities as important members of society, worthy of a voice in decision-making opportunities." According to Nybell (2013), national and international movements also promote a voice for children and youth to share their experiences with systems of care and a voice for social workers and others managing their cases or situations. In Nybell's research (2013), youth describe how they self-regulate when sharing stories, especially in the context of their lack of power and resources to find meaningful solutions in their families, schools, and communities. Quest, Fullerton, Geenen, & Powers (2012) used the case study and qualitative youth voice methodology (with seven youth) to explore themes like experiencing challenges, difficulties having clarifying relationships with family members and adults, having to make key decisions during times of uncertainly about services, and trying to become successful.

By design, the PHILLIPS School-Annandale and the Family Partners program work directly with children, youth, and families in educational and home-based settings. Both involve families or guardians, assisting families with accessing and coordinating needed resources and services. Both promote collective responsibility, commitment, and accountability for the well-being of children and youth, and both programs support families in accessing beneficial social capital as it relates to their children by creating trust and reciprocity, and providing information and

cooperation. Programs acknowledge processes in the child, youth, and family or guardian contexts. This has recently been identified as a growing need in the field of case study science for child, youth, and family work (Muñoz, Fasano, & Greenaway, in press). Muñoz et al. note that youth work should assess youth, family, and care contexts along with the presentation of a program's or intervention's core components. By documenting the programs, the study integrates personal and process perspectives with vignettes, and the data analysis provides information on how youth work is conducted.

Methodology

Data Gathering Process

Data were collected during face-to-face interviews with participants and families and guardians. The interview team consisted of two females who had previous interview and developmental experience. They conducted interviews in private areas, generally within the day school. In order to assess developmental activities, they attempted to conduct interviews with youth three to six months after their exit, for one interview per participant. Youth were not compensated for their participation. Interviews included open-ended questions addressing reasons youth enter and exit programs, program history with activities and interactions with staff, perceptions on personal changes, and overall emotional and social functioning. Youth were asked to sign a release form and were informed that their names would not be used and that participation was completely voluntary. All interviews were conducted at the Annandale campus.

Research Participants and Their Settings

Five adolescents were originally considered as part of the study. Qualifications for taking part in the study included a willingness and understanding of how to participate in the research, which involved audio and video recording, a comfort level with a formal interview process, and an ability to share experiences with the researchers, which required cognitive skill and development. The participating youth were male and female, with a mean age of 19 years and an average enrollment of five years in the programs. The sample composition was Latino and African American youth. In one case study, the participants acknowledged their enrollment in PHILLIPS' therapeutic foster care program, known as Teaching Homes, which provided family education training. Training sessions were for all participants, including foster youth and families and were in safe, nurturing, and therapeutic environments and with caring parents. The program serves children and youth, ages birth to 21, at time of placement, and services include case management, independent living support, respite care out of home, treatment and intensive level foster care, and teen parent placements.

PHILLIPS School-Annandale serves children and youth who require special

education services and support for educational, intellectual, and social-emotional disabilities. The school provides special education programs to roughly 170 youth. It serves males and females between the ages of 5 and 22, with a wide range of academic performance levels, and were determined to be eligible for services in one or more of the following categories: autistic, emotionally disabled, intellectually disabled, learning disabled, multiply handicapped, and other health impaired. The purpose of the school is to provide high quality special educational and related services to children who are unable to benefit from placement in a less-specialized school environment because of emotional disabilities, learning disabilities, and emotional vulnerabilities. It provides complementary training and consultation to their families. Related services include counseling, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. Administrators and all staff (e.g., counselors, therapists, behavior specialists, interns, one-to-one assistants, and occupational and physical therapists) operate with the belief that schooling should lead to competency in basic academic and survival skills, and to prepare for work, leisure time, and citizenship. The school environment provides a warm, therapeutic milieu in which instruction and related services can be adapted to accommodate each student's individual learning needs. The school relies on established empirical knowledge and is committed to using objective data in its approach to education and treatment. Therefore, there is no rigid adherence to any given set of procedures or methods. The program takes into account the interrelationship between the intellectual, physical, social, and emotional aspects of a youth's development. Thus, the school provides each youth with an individualized program of balanced activities developed and monitored by an interdisciplinary team. The teacher is the case manager of the children in their classroom, and all staff working with each child is a part of their team. During the 2012-2013 school year from September 1 to mid-June, the youth served by the school presented with the following primary disabilities: autism, emotional disability, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, and traumatic brain injury. For this year, 90% of the students received counseling services while close to one half (47%) received speech therapy services.

PHILLIPS' Family Partners program was established in 1993 with the goals to support and empower children, youth, and families with mental health and developmental needs, to reduce family stress and dysfunction, to build on strengths and resiliency to stabilize families, and to create safe home environments. The staff build on family strengths and children's resiliency to address family stress or dysfunction by using a wellness and resiliency philosophy, which is the best approach to bringing stability and health to a family. The program follows the "family voice and choice" philosophy to ensure that families participate and guide their services which overlaps with national wraparound principles (Osher, 2008). In terms of key outcomes, Family Partners teaches the families or guardians the needed knowledge and awareness of their children's or families' situations and

teaches new skills to be better able to manage the stressors that lead to increased stabilization of child and family by improving their functioning. The program offers home-based counseling and intensive individualized family and child plans, and utilizes tools such as motivational interviewing and meaningful developmental activities to strengthen families and youth. The program targets children and their families who are experiencing serious family stress or dysfunction, sometimes with the risk of a child's removal from a family due to problems that are too complicated or severe for the parents to solve without intensive support. Problems may include a child's functioning in school, at home, or in the community. These problems may appear in conjunction with mental illness of the child or parent, developmental disabilities, emotional-behavioral disabilities, learning disabilities, poverty, substance abuse, attachment disorders, and sex offenses. For those children who have already been removed from the home prior to working with Family Partners, staff work with the family toward reunification. Family Partners strives to successfully serve a widely varied population that is at high risk using its ability to match staff with appropriate skills to a population varying widely in age, income levels, and ethnicity.

In practice, Family Partners counselors meet with the family or youth two to three times per week for individual and family therapy and spend additional time providing case management and wraparound services. Inclusion and engagement of youth and families in all parts of the service is of paramount importance in service delivery and developing goals, for example, in treatment plans. Youth and families develop their goals and sign their treatment plans to assist in their taking ownership of their plans. Time and attention is devoted to wraparound services and advocacy to support the families' needs within a community system of care as Family Partners transitions. The program has also been engaged in developing its own evidence-supported model with an independent consultant, Pam Meadowcroft. Key short-term outcomes for children, youth, and families include a desire to improve, the belief that change can happen, and the feeling of being connected to and trusting to natural supports. Other outcomes include knowledge and skills to meet goals on treatment plans, access key resources and services, communicate, problem solve, and make positive decisions. The program provides flexible, individualized services based on needs and progress, and 2 to 10 hours per week of face-to-face contact with program youth and their families and accessibility anytime day or night to all program participants. Several working assumptions are used by staff: that family can be the best place for children and youth to grow and develop and that families or guardians want what is best for themselves and their children.

The following case studies of Natasha, Jefferson, and Simon illustrate how PHILLIPS programs come together and serve youth and their families.

First Case Study: Natasha

The first time Natasha sat down for the interview session she had already given some thought about how much she would share about herself and her experiences. Bringing up too many negative experiences seemed too difficult for her, especially not knowing the research team members; however, she felt comfortable sharing some of her experiences. Being and functioning with a positive persona or tone and having resiliency remained important to Natasha.

Natasha entered the Family Partners and the therapeutic foster care programs during her teen years and remained enrolled for over five years. Her entry process involved placement into the foster care system due to family instability. She stated that she needed a safe home, and she wanted to "continue with life." When asked about what worked well, Natasha mentioned three core components: helping guardians to be better parents, mentoring youth and families, and promoting independent living skills.

She said she believes that supporting parents to be better at raising children and youth helps everyone in the family; it helped her to relate better to adults and vice versa. With mentoring, she felt forever connected to PHILLIPS and caring staff. "I can always come back . . . this is my second home." She knew where to go for support in times of need. She stated that she knew this because "I know they helped me . . . I have support here." The developmental activities that worked best for Natasha included mentoring by caring adults, having a safe and nurturing place to live and thrive, and being supported to attain her high school and postsecondary education. She liked the way that the program provided mentors to both the home and foster parent and to her on a monthly and ongoing basis. With mentoring Natasha gained a better understanding of the child welfare system and what it entailed to connect with similarly situated children and youth. She liked working with her peers and teaching children and others about how to function in the contexts of family, school, community, and work. Later during her time with the PHILLIPS programs, she served as an older youth mentor and teacher to children, focusing on independent life skills, resiliency strategies, and connections to themselves and others in their communities.

Natasha thrived by building social connections with caring adults and adult mentors, feeling free to share information about her dreams to graduate with a good high school diploma and to continue her educational career. While she allowed herself to feel sadness about her own lack of a strong family situation, Natasha focused on being positive and on achieving her goals in educational attainment, getting good employment, and staying connected to caring people in her life. She would make diffi-

cult decisions about friends, for example, keeping supportive friends close by to support her decisions and belief systems on being independent and having educational achievement and economic stability. She had to make economic decisions, too, for example, about keeping a savings account and balancing her budget when it came to needs and wants.

Natasha benefitted from mentors who also served as counselors because she recalled needing the one-to-one counseling from time to time and felt the family counseling opportunities were also helpful for everyone. Natasha felt she had strong access to mentors and counselors when every key challenge arose. It was during these times that she would request a visit from staff, and the visit would happen seamlessly. "It was a big help to work with counselors," she told us. When it came to the mentoring program, she outlined the benefits: Mentors helped her to stay positive even during the unexpected struggles; they listened and gave her good advice; and they made her feel connected to others, including the mentors, the program, and her new foster family. Natasha felt she could trust others because of the mentors, especially because they were present and there for her in good and bad times, and they would not judge her.

Natasha liked activities that were associated with learning about how to become more independent—"by doing." She credited this type of approach or training with teaching her how to balance a budget, open a bank account, keep a good credit score, and plan a program with staff with meaningful content and good guest speakers. Overall these activities were "helpful and fun to do," according to Natasha. They made learning these skills and behaviors easy and fun. Part of her strategy towards becoming successful was taking advantage of programs and services provided. She described herself as wanting to learn how to be independent at a very young age because this is important for children and adolescents: "I learned about not wasting my money," "We learned about using coupons," and "Did you know that you don't need a credit card to have a good credit score? You can get a secure card from your bank." For her, the independent learning activities made sense and allowed her to better understand the skills she needed to have in her life.

One key underlying theme for Natasha was having trust—she came to trust caring adults. She credited PHILLIPS' programs with this outcome. Further, she believed that the skills she acquired matter. For instance, she opened a bank account and she knew the rules in banking. She also learned how to complete an apartment application. She said, "They were helping you so much . . . helping you get through life." Hopes and dreams were part of her discourse. She said she hoped to work with children similarly situated, those needing family support and stability. She hoped to serve in a professional field to advocate for child welfare and

system reform. In this process, she knew that she had a great deal to learn, but she was driven to learn and to give back to other children, too. Her caring persona was strong, and her educational attainment and employment experiences were already on her path.

Natasha's foster parent was honored and surprised to hear the words of admiration and gratitude. Her parent was modest in acknowledging several of Natasha's successes such as getting through high school and getting a car. These successes were viewed as expectations for Natasha. In the end, her foster parent was proud of Natasha's life and supported her educational, employment, and life benchmarks. The parent seemed to especially value parent training sessions. She showed love towards Natasha when she heard her talk about her experiences, challenges, hopes, and dreams.

Practice Notes. The case study illustrates the ways that youth do have important stories and experiences to show the ways that youth are resilient and trying their best not to give up on themselves and others. Natasha's case study illustrates the complexities of working with youth who have experienced harmful, biological family members and really want only what makes them happy. This includes learning how to help and trust others, getting a good education and job, and learning to have hopes and dreams, to be able to live independently, and to set doable goals.

Natasha's counselors were available day and night, making sure that her educational and personal aspirations were addressed and integrated into her treatment plan. They provided guidance to her foster parent and to Natasha for meeting transportation needs, making better choices about future planning and friends, having positive supports, friends, and colleagues, and remaining focused on long-term goals. Mentors provided the additional support Natasha needed to get help that was needed and feel connected to more than one caring adult. Coming together with peers, for example, as part of a formal training session or as a peer facilitator, helped her feel connected to others and her community.

Regarding time and timing, Natasha was encouraged to think about her timeline for exiting her guardian's home and care. In particular, family and care-team discussions focused on how to streamline postsecondary educational activities with working outside of the home.

Natasha was part of the team effort to make key decisions about high school, and postsecondary education. She knew that coming back to PHILLIPS, the staff, and counselors would continue to remain an option. She knew where to go to for concrete support in times of need. Natasha also knew that she mattered to people associated with the PHILLIPS programs.

Evaluator Reflections. It was important to have a good balance of asking questions, probing, and keeping an appropriate pace with Natasha to process the inter-

view questions and responses. With the audio and video recording equipment on, Natasha remained reserved about sharing details of her experiences. She became more at ease when the equipment was put away. She needed to control how much she shared, and she kept some of her information private during the interview session. For her, trust was critical, and sharing her story needed to feel right and valued. This may have happened, in part, because of her presentation of self, which remained as a positive person with hopes and dreams, and it may have happened because of experiences when recalling the point of entry into programs and services. Yet while she was guarded, she was willing to answer most interview questions. In the end, Natasha viewed the interview session as part of her own process to gain her voice after being a program participant. With this in mind, the research team was mindful of being respectful and kind, ensuring that no inappropriate tactics or harm were part of the data collection procedures. The data collection for Natasha occurred over three sessions meeting in a non-office, a relaxed conversational setting. The session with her foster parent was also informal.

Second Case Study: Jefferson

During his first year at PHILLIPS School, Jefferson documented one of his favorite quotes in a school writing journal: "Do What You Feel." With the support of PHILLIPS, it took over one and a half years for Jefferson to feel comfortable with being himself in the context of struggles and successes in his community, family, and home school. He decided to be a better person (on purpose) by being kind to his family, helping others who looked up to him at school and in his community, and by realizing that people really cared about him. Jefferson explained his process: He decided that being one of the meanest persons on campus was no longer a goal for him. Instead, he wanted to be happy, have caring friends, trust his teachers and adults in his life, and he realized that he mattered to himself as well as to his community, family, and teachers. He wanted to thrive, and there was no stopping him. It was at this turning point that he advanced in his high school studies, developed a positive perception of himself, and showed a willingness to take control of his future and happiness. "I can say, people look up to me—outside of school," Jefferson told us during his final days enrolled in the PHILLIPS School-Annandale.

What worked for Jefferson? He expressed several reasons which helped him feel like a whole person. Consistency, for example, in what was expected from him academically and behaviorally, was transparent and reinforced on a daily basis. He worked with teachers and his team to comprehend consequences and rewards for better behavior and grades. The staff helped him—by listening to him talk about what was bothering him—this really mattered to him. Strong, positive messages and interactions with staff and school friends helped him to see that he was

important to others. Staff paid attention to him but not just for negative behavior but also for positive behavior and insights. His attendance at school mattered to his teachers and others. People began counting on him to set the tone within the classroom; people began looking up to him as a leader for himself and others. Caring relationships with staff helped him to trust and understand that he was not alone in his life experiences. Staff reminded him of their availability to help him with classwork and their willingness to discuss key concerns with family. Staff provided Jefferson with what he needed—sometimes it was a quiet time to talk, a hoodie jacket or jeans, or a big hug or high five. In a memory book, he wrote that his teacher "was like a father."

Key developmental activities helped him to learn to be part of something bigger than himself. For example, a school-based sport activity helped him to remain committed to a team and to understand that peers could really care about one other. Participation in a school-based student organization helped him to see his leadership qualities which he had not seen before. He learned not to be afraid of his own potential. Participation in peer mentoring opportunities encouraged him to care for others, and this caring became a part of his persona. At PHILLIPS, he was strongly encouraged to take his academic studies seriously, and the labels of "dumb" and "violent" were no longer used against him. Instead, serious one-on-one conversations were being held with him about his hopes, dreams, and his potential to return to his previous school to complete his high school education.

During his time with the PHILLIPS school, Jefferson reported feeling loved by teachers and peers, feeling okay about being helpful to others, and learning important life skills such as how to pick better friends, how to cook a meal, and how to be respectful to his family members. His hope was to continue to let his true self-identity emerge and to continue to pick good friends, including those who cared for him and wanted him to excel in all of his endeavors. He was living out more of his dreams every day, and he planned to leave PHILLIPS school in order to return to his home school and quickly graduate with his high school diploma and move into a postsecondary setting. As part of an exit process, many people wanted more time with Jefferson. Teachers wanted to know what worked well for him. Students did not want him to go. His parent was so happy to see this new Jefferson.

His parent shared a poem about him. What did Jefferson's parent see in him at that time? Strong opinions about what was important to his future, better decisions, a focus on a better future, willingness to be a mentor to others, a willingness to talk about what mattered to Jefferson, and happiness. Team Jefferson emerged, and his parent and siblings were

all on board—Jefferson was a success story.

When asked to share what he learned as a result of his time with the school, Jefferson said he learned to mind his own business, help others, control his emotions, have honesty and loyalty, trust people, see that school staff cared for their students, and behave differently at home and his community, which included avoiding drama and keeping his emotions under control. These were critical and positive youth development outcomes. He stated, "I love being myself," and "I'm not in this world for the fame or the greed but I'm in this world because I'm highly created to lead . . . my place in this world is to be a leader."

Practice Notes. Jefferson's case study illustrates how consistent support, positive messaging, and authentic caring remain critical for youth who need to feel like they belong in our social institutions and communities. For Jefferson, such strategies worked to support his emerging expression of true-self to his family, peers, and community. This case study also suggests the powerfulness of youth finding their narratives that promote caring for oneself and others, and knowing that their futures can be positive. In an effort to gain a better sense of this story, I conducted outreach to several staff. They described a difficult transition to the school program that changed over time. They felt that consistency presented in a positive way was important to his success because he needed to feel connected to the PHILLIPS environment, and this needed to happen as quickly as possible. Staff began to understand that friends in his community served as barriers to his overall success, so they worked with several new cohorts to establish meaningful friendships. Staff recognized positive outcomes for Jefferson, and they shared their perceptions with him using one-to-one conversations. The staff wanted Jefferson to know that they were witnessing positive changes in his attitudes, behaviors, and future visioning. In the end, there was buy-in when Jefferson realized he was becoming a youth with positive outcomes, for example making better choices and improving grades, social and emotional functioning, and civic engagements.

During the interview session, Jefferson articulated his personal and clear, turning point—when he finally decided that he was going to do better in school, and with family and friends. "I decided that I was going to start being myself," he told a staff member. He stated that he knew he needed to change, on purpose and for the better. He was not prepared to fail in his studies and his future. It was at this turning point that Jefferson went back (in his mind) to the encouraging words from behavioral staff, teachers, counselors, and his parent—they had told him he was a great kid and that people were waiting for him to be himself, thriving and present in his life. The staff considered this in order to understand how youth can make their own decisions and that personal buy-in helped drive Jefferson towards positive outcomes.

Evaluator Reflections. Jefferson's voice and story were easy to follow and share

with others. In fact, staff wanted to hear his story shortly after he exited the school program because they had seen significant change in him from his first day to his exit date. They wanted to share lessons learned with each other and with other students. The interview helped them understand youth care practice, youth voice, and positive youth development. They remain connected to Jefferson and his parent, monitoring his next steps and being prepared to provide support, as needed. For example, his parent may need advice on a postsecondary institution, and staff are available to help with questions and concerns. In this way, they remain connected and act as an extended family for a long time.

Third Case Study: Simon

Age 13 was a turning point for Simon: His growing sensitivity to noise and light, and his inability to meet new people and negotiate spaces prevented him from being part of society. At the same time, his intellectual ability was growing. He and his parent searched for school and family services that could accommodate his need to better function and relieve stress. "I was in my difficult time then," he told us later. His parent took an active role to locate a special education program and family-strengthening program to benefit the entire family. The parent had a little shyness about asking for help and securing quality services for Simon and the family. This was a new role for Simon's parent, becoming a strong advocate and making sure that important changes for the family were clearly understood.

Family Partners' services ensured that the positive changes happening at the school were realized and supported at home. "They helped us—as a family," Simon's parent said during the interview. Then, the school program provided the right amount of time and academic challenge in an environment that was becoming safer to Simon. The school had quiet time and appropriately paced programming, including the time needed to learn how to make friends and work with different teachers and staff and the time needed for Simon to process and experience both highs and lows in his educational and social experiences.

The highs came when Simon spoke several words during the school day—a process that took over two years. "Most places tried to push me to talk, and it did not work; here I could take time I needed and it happened on its own," he told staff. On that day, the school called the parent: "They called me, and I was so happy; he spoke; and that was the first time," his parent said. Other highs came when he excelled in his academic studies. His teacher saw active engagement in special projects and willingness to work on mathematics and geometry at or above his grade level. His teacher saw a focused youth who began to let little things not bother him so much, such as other students voicing

their own opinions or not allowing Simon to work on his studies at his own pace.

The lows would come during important transitions that entailed moving into the building spaces, meeting new persons, or learning new content. Eventually, these transitions would be successful ones; however, they took time.

The activities that helped Simon the most were being taught social and professional skills such as cooking, getting mock applications completed for an apartment, taking public transportation, and acting correctly at his jobsite. It also helped when staff provided realistic explanations about the expectations at school, family, community, and work, instead of simply being told what to do. He said later, "I can be stubborn, but I don't want to cause problems . . . I like being shown the reason about what you should and should not do."

One key social skill acquired was learning to accept others for who they are, compared to wanting everyone to think "just like me." Simon learned that he could avoid conflicts with others by telling himself that everyone was allowed to have their own opinion and perspective. He learned, "We don't all have to agree the same way."

Equally important was the skill he described as "being persistent"— when he decided not to give up on himself during his struggles and to become part of the social environment. He liked getting career education experiences and trying out different types of jobs; he liked traveling off campus to work in different work settings; he liked having other friends doing these tasks, too.

During discussions with staff, Simon's persona was evident. For example, he was articulate, he spoke slowly, his thinking was methodical, and his social values were clearly intact. He liked sports and being with his family; he wanted to learn a foreign language; he was happy that he had been at PHILLIPS program; he wanted to work and go to a postsecondary school; and, he was hopeful in what he wanted for his future. His parent was proud to be part of the interview process alongside Simon and felt like the program had been the last option for success for Simon. The parent was slightly anxious about Simon's next steps after high school graduation but was ready nonetheless. After the interview, Simon's parent informed PHILLIPS of several interviews planned for Simon's getting a full-time job with the federal government. His skills of keeping items well-organized in the workplace and willingness to learn new job requirements helped him to secure the work, according to the parent.

Practice Notes. Simon's parent said that Simon could have been institutionalized because of his extreme fear and anxiety of people and places. Before entry

into PHILLIPS, the family believed that no strategies were available to help him towards interacting with the outside world. This case study illustrates the ways that youth need time to express their own needs and feelings, and it reinforces the value of helping youth to find their good qualities, too, for example, having patience with oneself and others or being persistent in having a better life with family and friends.

In terms of practice, this case study suggests that listening and patience with youth is required when helping them find ways of expressing themselves, and learning to cope with their familial, social, and peer environments. The team effort for Simon was comprehensive as staff from two PHILLIPS programs had to work together to support family and school processes. Simon's parent was particularly connected to Simon's teacher, so the teacher was a good point of contact for the family for a long time. Simon was enrolled in PHILLIPS' program for over five years, and working with Simon and his parent took time and patience, leading up to Simon's high school graduation.

Evaluator Reflections. The case evaluator worked with the teacher to build trust with Simon's family. Patience with the pace was required, allowing for breaks and letting Simon and his parent finish one another's sentences and thoughts. Simon's parent also expressed anxiety about high school graduation and needed support from the Family Partners staff. Simon's teacher was notified about the anxiety. After the interview, Simon's parent provided feedback on Simon's status, which was helpful in terms of monitoring the next steps and potential positive youth development outcomes. At the same time, there was a strong sense of gratitude towards PHILLIPS from Simon's parent.

Conclusion And Practices

The youth included in our case studies felt safe in programs, services, interactions, and caring relationships. Youth believed that they could return to PHILLIPS if they needed to. They experienced safety through caring and meaningful relationships with teachers, counselors, staff, and peers. They experienced safety in terms of having the time they need to express themselves to others.

In terms of trust, the case studies reveal that youth and families and guardians trust PHILLIPS programs and services. The studies reveal that their treatment and educational plans work in partnership with the youth, families, and guardians. For example, school, team, and IEP meetings integrate family and guardian input. Youth voices in the IEP processes are important, especially when discussions focus on transitions and existing programs. The case studies research shows that staff work with youth—wherever they are situated and with consideration to their special needs and challenges. With this in mind, we found the use of various youth-centered strategies helps youth to find their voices and learn more about themselves — in other words, developing their self-concepts.

With the various youth, staff practiced patience and formed caring relation-

ships with youth and their families and guardians. Working with strengths of the youth and families was apparent in the case studies. In particular, a strength-based approach helped youth to develop new skills (e.g., speaking up for themselves, increasing independent living skills, etc.), which contributed to their emerging, positive youth development outcomes. By focusing on strengths, the youth were encouraged to thrive and be successful, for example, graduating from high school, returning back to a home school, and becoming focused on a better future as an adult. Case studies reveal a practice of working with each youth and their families and guardians based on their unique needs, wants, and challenges. When discussing the different programs, directors for the school and Family Partners continue to describe building a program or intervention "around a child or youth," instead of fitting a child or youth into the PHILLIPS program.

Case studies further reveal the establishment of strong, caring relationships with peers and caring adults. This practice promotes youth moving through a process of self-actualization, which helps them to find their voice and define better future options. Thus, the case studies document strength-based, youth-centered, and family-centered approaches when working with youth and their families. The case studies show that PHILLIPS staff must be able to respond to the diverse needs and wants of youth and families as needed. The practice at PHILLIPS has been flexible in striving for positive outcomes. Organizational practices and the PYD approach help staff with listening actively, having patience to get to know youth and their families, working with home-based services as needed, working to reintegrate youth and families back into their communities, and building up strengths to avoid focusing on deficits of youth and their families and guardians. Because youth in our programs and youth in these case studies were culturally diverse, the study reveals that staff must be prepared to work with various needs and challenges, and to support kindness in terms of the cultural diversity of youth and their families and guardians in the PHILLIPS programs and settings. Finally, the PHILLIPS staff clearly indicate that they value youth voices and want to learn more about the youth being serviced by their programs and services. In terms of technical work, the staff has worked closely with parents to plan for their youths' exit transitions and progress. Families and guardians have valued being integrated into the treatment planning and IEP processes, which is a standard practice in the two programs.

This study used the case study and youth voice methodologies to explore emerging practices in the special education day programs and family strengthening programs. Such programs have goals and objectives to accomplish positive youth development outcomes and success stories. The study documents key aspects of cultural values that are supported by positive youth development. Interviewing the youth and their families and guardians revealed what activities youth valued and how the families viewed their situations. Staff at PHILLIPS hope that additional research and documentation of successful practices and contexts of child/youth/family/guardian can expand this type of study and work towards

program evaluation and improvement.

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