



## Character Development Learning Institute (CDLI)

Character is a key element of the Y's approach to working with youth and has been a common thread throughout the Ys history. For over 170 years, the Y has helped youth develop into ethical, caring, and successful adults. The word character reflects our commitment to a holistic approach to youth development, to evidence-based programming, and to our core organizational values of honesty, caring, respect, and responsibility. Building upon these core values, the Character Development Learning Institute is formally incorporating character into youth development programs. The Y created the Character Development Learning Institute (CDLI) in 2016 and, through the CDLI, is discovering, testing, and disseminating supports to develop character in youth.

The CDLI considers character to be the non-academic skills that help young people flourish. Character is the values, attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors that prepare youth to thrive in learning, in work, and in life. In an OST setting, such as the Y, influential and effective character development requires intentional programming and design, management of talent, effective partnerships, and evaluation (Taking a Deeper Dive into After School: Positive Outcomes and Promising Practices, Afterschool Alliance, Feb 2014).

**DEFINITION:** The process through which youth develop and integrate a set of values, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that allow them to operate successfully and responsibly in learning, work and life.

**MISSION:** To advance effective youth character development practice among adult providers in out-of-school-time (OST) settings so that more youth cultivate the character skills and traits necessary to reach their full potential.

**VISION:** Youth character development will be enhanced on a significant scale nationwide by improving the practice of OST providers and leveraging their contact with millions of youth in programs and locations across the country.

The process to develop the CDLI follows Y-USA's established model to implement interventions across the Y Movement.

The **Discovery Phase** was completed in 2016. In this phase, several evidence-informed and promising adult practice areas were identified through a literature scan, as well as case studies of three exemplar Y sites. Five adult practice areas were proposed for translation in the Testing Phase.

Now in the **Testing Phase**, the primary question we want to answer is "Can the identified adult practice areas be implemented within different kinds (size, location, program type) of Ys?" To answer this question, 32 sites were selected in early 2017 to translate the practice areas from working definitions to active strategies and tactics in their sites. Now translated, the identified and subsequently refined adult practice areas are being piloted more broadly in the Y Movement. The pilot includes 64 Y Associations and up to 96 youth programs.

Once the adult practice areas and supports have been verified, the CDLI will enter the **Dissemination Phase**. In this two-year phase, we want to address how to share the adult practice areas with success across the Movement and all Ys.



The CDLI has adopted **Five Practice Areas** selected based on their research foundation, their feasibility to scale, input and reviews from youth development experts, and their possibility to measure.

**Emotion Management:** Adults support youth to be aware of and constructively handle both positive and challenging emotions.

**Empathy:** Adults work with youth to relate to others with acceptance, understanding, and a sensitivity to diverse perspectives and experiences.

**Relationship Building:** Adults foster experiences where youth plan, collaborate, and coordinate action with others.

**Responsibility:** Adults develop youth to be reliable, committed, and fulfill obligations and challenging roles.

**Personal Development:** Adults encourage youth to act, persist, and initiate goals and outcomes.

