Importance of Youth Development in 
Parks & Recreation

**Definition of Youth Development**
Youth Development is a framework that addresses human needs for the healthy growth of young people, including competencies (knowledge, skills, behaviors, values) necessary for adult success.

WPRA believes that human condition is improved as a direct result of experiences gained from participation in youth development programs. We believe that today’s recreation and park professional has a social responsibility to share in the creation of a healthy society. Park and recreation professionals are in a unique position to help define exactly how to implement a youth development program, and the role we provide in the development of youth offers a unique challenge to each and every recreation professional.

Each Wisconsin community must establish a vision that supports the healthy growth of young people of all abilities into successful adults. This vision for youth must be developed, accepted and endorsed by policymakers, staff and key stakeholder groups in the community.

Wisconsin’s local park and recreation agencies are involved in youth development; these programs are offered as afterschool programs, day camps, youth sports, drama classes and numerous other recreational, athletic and cultural programming. Youth development begins with the goal of growth and development and engages youth in positive learning activities in a supportive environment led by trained and caring adults.

**Park & Recreation Youth Development Policy Statements**
Park & recreation commissions, advisory councils or youth commissions should consider adopting these policy statements:

- We endorse the youth development model as a framework that addresses human needs in the healthy development of young people.
- We believe the development of meaningful, achievable and measurable youth outcomes is critical to establishing the foundation for the transition to youth development.
- We use our key assets (programs, services and facilities) to support the healthy development of young people.
- We adopt an “outcome management” model when establishing youth development programs. Measurable outcomes of youth development include behaviors, skills, knowledge, perceptions and values that address youth competencies in the areas of health/physical; personal/social/ cognitive/creative; vocational; and citizenship.

**Parks & Recreation Promotes Youth Development Mission Statement of WPRA:**
*To promote the involvement of park and recreation agencies in fostering and evaluating youth development.*