Getting the Parent/Caregiver Perspective

Being a community-based initiative, LiFEsports holds the belief that success of its program hinges on the ability to effectively meet the needs of the youth and families who the program services. By partnering with the parents/caregivers of youth participants, LiFEsports is primed to glean meaningful knowledge and to better understand the best practices related to youth development. In order to help disseminate the Initiative's innovative research, LiFEsports has developed a series of Research Briefs summarizing their findings. The current summary, originally published in Children and Youth Services Review (Riley & Anderson-Butcher, 2012), explores the beliefs of parents/caregivers of youth who attended the LiFEsports summer camp for at least two years. Additionally, practical implications for researchers, program administrators, and youth development workouts are highlighted.

Study Aims
The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of low-income youth participation in a summer sport-based PYD findings program at the individual, parent, family, and community levels. Sport-based PYD programs, which integrate sport and PYD principles, have been shown to enhance life and social skills, moral development, and personal values. However, while research has suggested that participation in sport-based PYD programs leads to enhancement of individual level protective factors, research has yet to identify the reduction of risk factors and enhancement of protective factors at multiple systems levels. Specifically, through the use of semi-structured interviews with 10 parents of youth participating in a summer sport-based PYD program specific mechanisms that contribute to the program outcomes were explored. Findings from the study provide support of the value of sport-based PYD summer programs, as well as to identifying important mechanisms that may guide future programmatic design features.

Methods
Parents/caregivers with a child involved the LiFEsports Summer Camp in both the summer of 2009 and 2010 were recruited for the study, with interviews occurring during the 2010 Summer Camp. A total of 10 semi-structured parent/caregiver interviews were conducted. In addition to general demographic question, parents were asked questions that explored the impact of sport-based PYD program through an ecological lens. More specifically, interview questions focused on outcomes for youth participants, parents, family system, and the neighborhood/community. Of the 10 parents/caregivers, 1 self-identified as male and 9 self-identified as female, 1 parent/caregiver was Caucasian and 9 were African American, and ages ranged from 31 to 58 years old. Six of the parents were single parents/caregivers and six were employed at the time of the study. The ages of children ranged from 11 to 13 with a majority of the children being female (n = 7).
Results
The parents/caregivers who were interviewed reported positive impacts of their youth’s participation in the program at various levels. At the individual level, parents/caregivers discussed how the program helped biopsychosocial development; provided opportunities to broaden horizon; and enhanced affect, behaviors, and cognitions among their youth. At the family level, impacts included parental peace of mind due to child involvement, positive changes in emotions due to child involvement, personal parental growth, increased parent/caregiver commitment to the program, as well as increased family communications and interactions. Parents/caregivers also identified that at the community level, the program had a positive effect on the youth of the community being involved in prosocial activities and community interactions/support. Through the interview process, several factors also emerged as mechanisms of the program that lead to its multisystem impact. Such mechanisms included the quality and roles of counselors and structured programming during discretionary time, the lessons for sport and life that were learned, opportunities for peer/family interactions, as well as additional resources that were provided to youth and families.

Discussion
The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the impact of youth participation in a sport-based PYD summer program from the individual, parental, familial, and community levels. In the end, parents/caregivers confirmed that the program had the intended impact on youths’ individual development, and that the parents/families were also positively impacted as well. Several mechanisms emerged that are known to be key design principles to sport-based PYD programming such as the program provided lessons for both sport and life, the opportunity for peer and family interactions, role of the program’s staff, the positive use of discretionary time, a physically safe environment, and being fun yet challenging.


The LiFEsports Initiative is a collaborative endeavor sponsored by the Department of Athletics and College of Social Work at the Ohio State University. For more information, please visit our website at: [www.osulifesports.org](http://www.osulifesports.org) or contact us at LiFESports@buckeyes.ath.ohio-state.edu.