



# cityWILD Approaches and Frameworks Overview

cityWILD operates with five core frameworks in all that we do. We believe that this combination of approaches will lead to the greatest opportunity for young people to succeed in developing deep connections with the natural world as well as fostering their unique style of leadership, supporting their resilience, and reinforcing their community-centered mindset. These four frameworks are briefly outlined below and more detail is provided in additional documents about each framework area.

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## **NATURE AS OUR GREATEST TEACHER**

At cityWILD, nature is our greatest teacher. We believe that we are both part of and in relationship with the natural world. Nature can facilitate growth and healing, as well as deepen our relationships with one another. cityWILD sees the world through a nature-based lens. We envision communities as ecosystems that thrive when equity, diversity, and inclusion are a part of the air we breathe and the soil we rely upon for grounding and nourishment. We envision a world where everyone has immediate access to the healing, recreational, and social-emotional opportunities that nature has to offer. This world is one that deeply values the cultivation of youth as our greatest resource and is a place where all youth are valued, connected, and supported in achieving their wildest dreams.

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## **TRAUMA INFORMED APPROACHES**

cityWILD believes that in order for youth to thrive, they need to feel fully supported at home, at school, and in the community. cityWILD offers comprehensive Support Services for all participating students and their families. The Support Services Department works together with program staff, youth, families, schools, and other community service providers to create pathways for students to develop their strengths and to identify how they prefer to be supported, encouraged, and celebrated. In order to ensure that students have access to the resources necessary for their social and emotional development, cityWILD provides support through a trauma-informed framework.

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## **JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION**

cityWILD recognizes the historic and current injustice done through systems of marginalization and is therefore committed to creating an environment that is **welcoming and affirming of all identities**, including but not limited to: racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, economic, age, ability/disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity. cityWILD strives to be an inclusive organization by embracing and celebrating differences and acknowledging how various perspectives enhance the way we provide services.

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cityWILD believes in order to effectively partner with students, families, staff and communities who are marginalized, it is critical to actively challenge and dismantle oppression, power, and privilege.

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## **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

cityWILD believes that experiential learning is a developmentally appropriate and deeply effective learning modality for adolescents. Experiential learning focuses on the development of people as individuals and emphasizes internal versus external motivation. While conventional education approaches are useful in some settings, cityWILD relies on experiential approaches to engage youth in long-lasting, culturally competent

learning based on real-world experience. Below is an example of the difference between conventional and experiential learning approaches.

Experiential education allows youth to take healthy risks with the support of adults who provide a scaffolded approach to youth development. The result is higher capacity for critical thinking, risk management, positive decision making, self-efficacy and self-esteem, coping skills, and community connection.

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## **POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

cityWILD believes that the philosophies inherent to Positive Youth Development (PYD) frameworks are critical to working effectively with young people. PYD stresses authentic relationships and authentic youth engagement at all levels of the organization.

### **Positive youth development is guided by the following principles\*:**

1. **Strengths-based:** we take a holistic approach by focusing on the inherent strengths of an individual, family, or community, then build upon them.
2. **Inclusive:** we address the needs of all youth by ensuring that our approach is culturally responsive.
3. **Engages Youth as Partners:** we ensure the intentional, meaningful, and sustained involvement of youth as equitable partners in the programs, practices, and policies that seek to impact them.
4. **Collaborative:** we create meaningful partnerships within and across sectors to effectively align our work.
5. **Sustainable:** we address long-term planning through funding, training, capacity building, professional development, and evaluation in order to ensure ongoing support and engagement of youth.

\*PYD principles provided by CDPHE <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/positive-youth-development>