**Gloria Schultz:** You are listening to the PYD Lab. (Music plays)

The podcast for implementers and young leaders who want to examine innovative approaches to Positive Youth Development and hear stories of young people leading change in their communities.

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**Natasha Zena:** Hey, it's Natasha and you're in the PYD Lab.

So today we are in the PYD lab with Cassandra Jessee and Lisa Lauxman.

Welcome!

**Cassandra Jessee:** Thanks, Natasha!

**Natasha Zena:** Cassandra has more than 20 plus years managing large implementation programs and evaluations for USAID, UNICEF and organizations like Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

And Lisa, you've been working domestically and internationally with youth in need for a number of years in PYD as well.

I’m so thrilled to have you both here to talk a little bit about the *Journal of Youth Development*.

Just to give a little context, the *Journal of Youth Development* is an open-source, peer-reviewed quarterly online publication dedicated to advancing youth development practice and research.

This quarter they are publishing a special issue that brings together diverse perspectives on current research, practice, and policy regarding challenges and opportunities facing international PYD.

Now, our YP2LE team members contributed their research and insight to the article titled “Listening to Youth through 17 Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessments.”

It also focuses on the implications for programming and policy of which Cassandra is a co-author.

But you both are co-editors of this special edition.

Your article is co-authored by Making Cents International experts that include Dr. Christy Olenik, Dr. Chelsea Pallatino, Audrey Marie Moore of Mathematica Policy Research and Nancy Taggart of USAID.

We know that you have other amazing professionals in the particular issue.

So I just wanted to kick it off by first asking, Lisa could you tell us a little bit about the *Journal of Youth Development* and then hone in a little bit on this particular issue.

**Lisa Lauxman:** Well, I’m going to kick off by saying the *Journal of Youth Development* is an online journal that offers the opportunity for practitioners and researchers to bridge the gap.

It was created through the National Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals in about the year 2006.

And in that time period it's expanded, the opportunity to reach positive youth development practitioners and focus.

Now the special issue we can just say that it's been a fun time.

**Cassandra Jessee:** It's actually been a lot of fun and kind of having this space to collaborate and co-create and imagine just where we can support the field going forward, kind of fall into the mission that we both individuals believe in that intersection between practice and research, and really help those practitioners and people who are working in the field to build on the sciences out there and what we actually know about what works. And so this issue was really an opportunity to do that.

**Natasha Zena:** Now, why was it significant for you to put together a volume that focused on international PYD?

**Lisa Lauxman:** There's never been an international issue dedicated to PYD from JYD, and nor can I really think of any other of the journals that have made a particular emphasis in this arena.

For me personally it was because I saw a great need between the domestic and international federal agencies that were working in this arena, and that was just a way from for me to merge the interest.

I mean, the Federal Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs was very involved and worked on a PYD agenda, and then there was an informal working group that was working on international PYD.

And at the time that just seemed to make a great convergence of opportunities, but I would say, Cassandra, it was probably the momentum of other factors there so you might want to fill in some more about that.

**Cassandra Jessee:** I was the director for Youth Power Learning which was the predecessor project to YP2LE and we saw sort of the academic researchers, they were pivoting and trying to identify what did we know from high income countries and with this more domestic space to understanding the applications internationally.

And USAID made these significant investments that really looked at what do we know and what works when thinking about Positive Youth Development.

We had done this systematic review um under Youth Power Learning that looked at Positive Youth Development in low- and middle-income countries and understand what works and what ways and how and to be honest what we were left with were more gaps than answers.

And so we had put forward a Positive Youth Development Learning Agenda that really looked at some of those critical gaps and we're trying to find ways to address those gaps.

But the biggest part of what we understood and knew is that people were doing Positive Youth Development, but weren't documenting it.

We weren't learning about it, and it wasn't getting elevated to a peer review level. And this was really an opportunity to take what we are learning from the field to really try to understand it and unpack it and make it accessible to those who are actually implementing the field.

So to me this was like—document what we're learning and-and help others learn from each other. And I think we've achieved that in this issue.

**Natasha Zena:** Is it a large community that's actually implementing PYD?

Are you guys like a tight-knit community and-and you communicate regularly or?

**Cassandra Jessee:** Youth Power and through Youth Power Learning and then YP2LE,

I think that there's been a real fostering of that community, I think it's been one of the beautiful outcomes from it, and how do we how do we learn from each other?

And so through the communities of practice, through you know the website, in different ways the different convenings, the advantage that we've had over the last year and a half is connecting with people that would have been harder to engage in person.

So, I think that community is both building and connecting and growing in different ways.

Lisa, I don't know what you might want to add.

**Lisa Lauxman:** I was just going to say that it's that opportunity really to take this wonderful thing called PYD and globally look at it.

To me that's the part where it's the connections that we can build between domestic here in the US or Northern America and really the global.

And-and know that you know the context is going to be important for us to all learn from each other—and that's where I really am looking forward to the articles springboarding more conversation.

**Natasha Zena:** Which is exciting.

**Lisa Lauxman:** We actually even have Youth Voice, um we have papers that draw on um the role and helping adults know how to facilitate with young people.

Um yet young people's voice, those articles and representation from world vision and academic institutions as well are represented.

So it's um really a great mix of folks.

**Natasha Zena:** And it's exciting to see, you know, the voice of the youth be included because I know that that is a large part of PYD right?

Making sure that their voice is incorporated in all of the work that you're doing.

Uh to talk a little bit about some of the work that was highlighted in the article that you co-authored Cassandra, tell us a little bit about it.

It focuses on the 17 Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessments that were done under YP2LE.

Why was highlighting these assessments important and what are some key takeaways?

**Cassandra Jessee:** So, recognizing much of our work could aim to reach the most vulnerable, um part of what we provided in this article was a snapshot of the factors that define vulnerability.

Each country's definition of who was vulnerable did differ, which makes sense right? Context really matters.

But the areas that were generally part of vulnerability included their socioeconomic level, their educational attainment, religious racial ethnic backgrounds, youth disability status, gender was predominant across almost all of the different assessments and age and sexual orientation status.

We can look at then, what are the solutions that young people are bringing to bear to address that?

We did notice regional patterns about how youth were characterizing marginalization.

In looking at the findings we took a sectoral lens in part because it is how people tend to enter a PYD approach, at least currently. But we did pull it together in a more holistic way as you go through the end of the article.

**Natasha Zena:** And what are some of the other topics that are covered in it?

**Cassandra Jessee:** I think our listeners can likely guess the top priority under the theme of workforce development and securing a decent livelihood is-is right there.

Securing formal employment was considered the most desirable, but succeeding as an entrepreneur was seen as more attainable.

But that said, entrepreneurship faced many challenges including the lack of understanding of complex startup procedures, there's few role models and little access to credit.

**Natasha Zena:** Right.

**Cassandra Jessee:** Across the assessments, youth saw education as a step forward towards self-reliance and there is really a belief particularly among younger youth that idealized education as that pathway out of poverty.

They did note the challenges around quality.

Young people were looking for education to be more flexible and be able to reflect both their desires and be able to meet what opportunities that might be coming their way.

So, there was a lot going on around quality of education.

You've heard a little bit around gender, I mean the quality issues affected women much more than their male counterparts.

And so thinking about what opportunities there are, what are the structural and institutional barriers that impede formal education?

How do you better link education to formal employment are some important opportunities ahead.

**Natasha Zena:** Wow.

**Cassandra Jessee:** Successful interventions that we saw drew upon the private sector to help with that upskilling and connect the education sector to the workforce need.

There's a real opportunity for private sector to engage, but also many are coming back and and working with youth and mentoring other youth as their peers.

**Natasha Zena:** That's pretty cool!

**Cassandra Jessee:** Thinking about what youth voices teach us about health.

So, the youth did raise mental and psychological health as paramount.

Family planning and reproductive health, specifically early pregnancy, was also a key issue that young people raised. And alcohol and substance abuse issues and the limitations around substance abuse treatment and prevention programs in countries were flagged as challenges and opportunities to really look at addressing those needs.

So, the solutions that they brought forward were really around youth-friendly health spaces that both focused on reproductive and mental health.

And so I wanted to-to flag just opportunities in the health space are there and it isn't something that through the assessments we explored enough but there's a lot to explore and to support young people around.

**Natasha Zena:** Wow.

**Cassandra Jessee:** To not mention Democracy, Human Rights and Governance would be problematic.

**Natasha Jessee:** *Mhm*! Those are important.

**Cassandra Jessee:** Yeah, they are important.

Okay.

So, Democracy, Human Rights and Governance.

In the article we talk about youth voice and some of the safety and security concerns.

And one of the things that was really top of mind for young people in every country was the frustration that adults in society at large did not hear their voice.

And then the way that they either wanted to engage or felt they could engage really did depend on the development context.

Like health, safe spaces was seen as an important element for expression, for emotional growth, for building their confidence, for fostering community and for looking at conflict resolution.

Young people really focused on the importance of building trust. Trust between young people and public institutions, trust between community stakeholders, and that there was a space for their voice to be heard and for their voice to matter.

**Natasha Zena:** Right.

What advice would you give implementers in terms of the important considerations in international positive youth development?

**Cassandra Jessee:** We had undertaken uh this analysis of the youth landscape and many issues are interwoven.

You've got education connected to economic outcomes, but their health of young people is really important.

What stability they face in country is critical to being able to achieve their own positive outcomes.

And yet, very few activities actually address those systematic problems, policies, norms and didn't focus as holistically on longer term.

So, if we kind of take a step back from sectoral lenses that, we do have three recommendations that were consistent across the assessments.

**Natasha Zena:** *Mhm*.

Building capacity around adolescent and positive youth development is important from government levels all the way down to frontline workers that are engaged with youth and with youth themselves.

Being intentional about focusing on and engaging with youth is critical and paramount.

And then ensuring that programming is holistic and cross-sectoral.

**Natasha Zena:** I’m also curious and-and Lisa this is for you too.

If you guys have any recommendations or things that you would point to, whether it's in this particular article or in the issue, that private sector people should think about.

Because so much of it interlaps especially when you start talking about the economy and employment and job opportunities.

Are there things that they should be thinking about in terms of helping implementers and policy makers do some of this work?

**Cassandra Jessee:** That is one of the areas that we really looked at in this assessment.

The private sector has been sidelined in reform.

When businesses can look at young people as strategic partners, when they build out trust where businesses can serve as advocates for youth, they're able to-to better stimulate growth, they can think more expansively and broadly about the ways in which business can influence positively.

And I think that there's-there's a real opportunity to help transform them as advocates and stakeholders and not just limited to employment initiatives.

**Natasha Zena:** Yeah. Lisa any thoughts on that?

**Lisa Lauxman:** Well, I think from a Positive Youth Development perspective and a systems approach one would want to think about it as partnerships from the get-go because a private sector will only be as healthy as both the educational and health systems for the potential participants and those that are active players already.

And so, as Cassandra said, you know, it's kind of like they need to be involved and engaged.

And it's this mismatch of skills, and that skills is attainable through education or experiences.

And so how do you create those intentionally-framed experiences for young people in those opportunities and that's where partnering together.

Where both youth and the private sector are actively engaged in a partnership, and I think it has to also be viewed as developmentally.

You know, we don't just emerge as youth. We start off as infants, children, youth, to adults, and guess what? Those private sector folks are probably once a youth!

**Natasha Zena:** Right.

**Lisa Lauxman:** So, kind of think about those experiences of what helped us, and though the

context has changed and shifted it's-it's important for us to keep that as uh as partners in this.

**Natasha Zena:** What are the gaps and future directions for research on PYD?

**Lisa Lauxman:** Well, one of the things that came out of, real startling to me, is that we've been working on developmental theories and developmental perspectives.

And to have now a conversation about, you know, we were always talking about the mean, or here's a cohort and here's kind of like the average, and the key thing that's going to come out of all of this is that the end of average is going to happen.

In other words, we're going to start looking at context specific.

And I think Natasha you already and Cassandra have alluded to this so much with the studies that have been done.

Context is important, because young people are impacted by their connections. So whatever their parental, child, familial relationships are like are different. And the context in which they are, whether they’re resource poor or resource rich, and then how those play out.

So, the context.

So, we'll be looking more in research, I believe at individual development and plotting for that because some interventions work well for some youth but not for all youth.

That's going to be where we're really going to be looking at how can research inform for practitioners to do a better job in implementing.

**Cassandra Jessee:** And I would add to that and there were some efforts both in the journal and article that we had written, is measurement. Right?

And really thinking about how do we better measure youth engagement?

How do we better measure Positive Youth Development overall?

And we had made some efforts under Youth Power Learning with a PYD measurement toolkit that pulled together basically what-what we knew at this point.

There's new efforts underway by a variety of groups like YP2LE is really thinking about measurement as well, and so I think there is movement forward.

**Natasha Zena:** Which is super important and I encourage people to definitely check out your article and follow up by joining a COP and actively working to see what they can do.

Thank you for that.

**Lisa Lauxman:** What you're saying about the COPs, I participate in many of them and I encourage it.

The COP just recently did one on gender as well as youth engagement and so I think it's really, that was one of the areas that we would say we didn't have as much opportunity to focus on from an LBGTQ marginalized populations.

So that's why we would encourage folks to want to share their articles with the JYD in the future.

So as future editions come, don't wait for that any other opportunities for special issues just make sure you get those in.

**Cassandra Jessee:** Yeah, and I will second the sharing. When we conceptualized the Positive Youth Development Learning Agenda, we were really harnessing what we didn't know and needed to know as a community.

And so there's a real opportunity for us to collaborate with each other, to better support and harness the energy and documenting, writing about it, contributing to JYD or other articles and journals is a really important opportunity.

And so, I encourage all of us that are listening to share with each other. We have the ability to contribute in ways that move beyond just the immediate work that we're doing and to learn from each other.

**Natasha Zena:** I thank you both so much for coming on to talk about the JYD and its special issue and Cassandra the-the article that you co-authored with the YP2LE team.

Before you go, this is my favorite part of the show always. We want to hop into your PYD recommendations.

Each episode we ask our guests to come with three recommendations: one is usually a published piece, one is around youth whether it's a resource or a project that you know of, three is disrupt. What's a disruptive innovative idea or project or resource that you want to share with our audience?

So, I’ll ask you about the first one ‘P’ for “Published.”

What do you got?

**Cassandra Jessee:** I think uh it would go without saying: it's this journal, right? So there'll be a lot in there that would be my published and I think Lisa’s as well.

[Laughter]

**Natasha Zena:** What do you have for “Youth”?

**Cassandra Jessee:** Some of you may have heard about William Kamkwamba and *The Boy Who Harnessed The Wind.*

Back in the early 2000s, I was managing a project that donated books in Malawi and had donated to his community. We had done some follow-up trips, you know monitoring trips sometime later, and found out about this amazing young boy who was 14 at the time who built a windmill based on what he had read in in response to a famine that his family and his community were facing.

This windmill was intended to provide electricity and to pump water. With that, we had brought in journalists, he gets picked up by bloggers, invited to be TED speaker.

He then, you know, got a scholarship, had really become famous.

So wrote a book, movies, all of this.

At the age of 21, he ends up setting up moving windmills and really focused on community empowerment, working with farmers, and helping farmers solve the problems that they're facing.

They're moving into this next phase now, and it's been about a decade later, so he's just edging out of youth, but it's building on all of his work.

And he's got this new project from moving windmills that's really focused on a hands-on, collaborative learning center. This space that to work with young people specifically. And his goal is to help young people find mentorship, tools, skills that they need to be able to address their problems.

And this sort of co-creation implementation space is something that he's in the process of setting up, and I just really see this as such a positive example.

So [movingwindmills.org.](http://movingwindmills.org)

**Natasha Zena:** And last but not least ‘D’ for “Disrupt.”

**Lisa Lauxman:** Well, this is where the ties all together.

Because in the journal, you'll find an article that's about the future trends. But the specificity principle, *The End of Average* is a book by Todd Rose who's dealing with the neuroscience piece in education.

So, context matters and there is no average. And William’s story is a perfect example of how context; he received a book and look how it transformed his developmental stage in PYD.

And now he's seeking now to provide a different context and specificity opportunity in principle for other young people.

And each of them will have a different way they develop based upon the context in which they interact with him.

But that's the cool piece about what the future holds, is that we can begin to tease out those elements and make those practices and implement those programs that make the differences for all youth, not for some youth.

**Natasha Zena:** Right. Those are really powerful recommendations and again it just goes back to the power of getting involved, because I mean look at all the work that young man's doing based off of a book that he read. You might just think, I’ll-I’ll donate these books, but you never know, you know, the domino effect that it could have so that's really-really amazing.

Thank you both so much for coming on the show today.

I really enjoyed learning about your work and PYD and-and your amazing recommendations at the end.

It's really inspiring.

**Cassandra Jessee:** Well, thank you this was really fun.

**Natasha Zena:** Yeah, and Lisa one more time the website that listeners can go to-to access the journal?

**Lisa Lauxman:** Yes. They can go to [jyd.pitt.edu](https://jyd.pitt.edu/ojs/jyd) and we hope you will check this out.

**Natasha Zena:** A special thank you to Cassandra and Lisa for joining us today.

Congrats again on the special edition of the *Journal of Youth Development*.

So, you may be asking yourself what other resources does YP2LE offer to continue this rich discussion.

I’m glad you asked!

Here are three resources to aid you on your deep dive into PYD.

A great companion piece to our conversation is “Reset The Way You Think About Youth.”

It's a blog post written by today's guest Cassandra Jesse. It talks about the 17 country and regional assessments as well as using a post-COVID world as an opportunity to engage youth as partners in rebuilding.

Our second resource is our Higher Education and Transformation (HEET) Community of Practice.

They recently hosted a great talk during their meeting on strengthening Positive Youth Development in higher education.

This COP is aimed at those who want to do just that—play an active role in strengthening the link between PYD and higher ed programming.

Last but not least, for those who are starting from scratch you may be asking yourself how do I introduce PYD into my programming or to my organization?

Well, we have you covered with PYD 101. It's a USAID Positive Youth Development E-Course that's designed to give you the fundamentals of effective youth programming.

There's a related course titled 201 that you can also access.

Now, a link to that page and all of our recommendations can be found at [youthpower.org/PYDLab](http://youthpower.org/PYDLab).

Until next time, I’m Natasha and you've been in the PYD Lab.