TrevorSpace:
Where LGBTQ+ Youth Thrive

Search INSTITUTE

Recommendations to Integrate PYD into TrevorSpace

February 2024

Prepared by Search Institute for The Trevor Project

The Design Challenge

How might TrevorSpace integrate positive youth development principles, strategies, and practices so that LGBTQ+ youth participants (ages 14-24) can engage with the online resources and community in ways that support them being and becoming whole, healthy, contributing, and joyful people?

The Discovery Process

GUIDING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORKS

Developmental Assets	Developmental Relationships
Developmental Assets are the *external* supports, opportunities, and relationships as well as the *internal* skills, attitudes, and values young people need to grow up well and thrive.	Nurturing most developmental assets occurs through meaningful, trustworthy, mutual **Developmental Relationships** within families, with other supportive adults, and with peers.

Each page of recommendations includes a key on the bottom of the page that shows the categories of developmental assets and elements of developmental relationships that most directly relate to that overall recommendation. This approach seeks to ensure that all the recommendations are conceptually integrated and aligned.

INPUTS

These are the information sources upon which the recommendations have been designed. The "rationale" section with each recommendation synthesizes key findings from these sources.

Opportunity Mapping	Youth Leadership Team	Listening Sessions	Literature Scan	Youth Survey
Trevor Project staff participated in two 90-minute sessions that focused on identifying and mapping potential opportunities for infusing PYD into TrevorSpace.	Six TrevorSpace users met with the Search Institute team 8 times to provide insights on the user experience, their desires for more PYD content, and priorities for the proposed strategy.	Search Institute conducted 7 sessions with moderators and other staff to identify challenges and opportunities for infusing PYD into the platform and service strategies.	Search Institute examined alignment and gaps with the PYD frameworks of developmental assets and relationships in 155 published research articles and reports on LGBTQ+ youth.	A survey of 631 users examined their experiences of developmental assets and relationships on the site, plus their feedback on the site as well as two key PYD outcomes; well-being and happiness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These seven recommendations are supported with a wide range of specific ideas, which are organized based on complexity. Ideas are marked as priorities based on TP staff input. Some are marked as having "issues to resolve" based on questions raised by TP staff. All require further ideation, refinement, and testing, and some may be combined or reimagined through further conversations.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ground TrevorSpace in Two Research- Based Positive Youth Development Frameworks	Boost Opportunities for Youth Voice, Agency, and Leadership	Reframe Monitoring and Enforcement of Boundaries and Expectations	Expand Exploration of Identities and Intersectionality in Daily Life	Emphasize Thriving Through Shared Passions, Pride, and Fun	Become More Intentional in Supporting Connections and Transitions	Explore a Broader Array of PYD Themes that Affect LGBTQ+ Thriving

1. Ground TrevorSpace in Two Research-Based PYD Frameworks

Recommendation

Use the Developmental Assets and Developmental Relationships Frameworks to organize and deepen the value of TrevorSpace.

Rationale

- TrevorSpace currently supports positive youth development (PYD), though not explicitly.
- Intentional integration of PYD in numerous instances could enrich users' experiences and bolster the site's rigor, depth, and credibility.
- Each stakeholder group that was part of the discovery process saw value in utilizing the frameworks to strengthen and expand TrevorSpace.
- The research base for both frameworks has potential to assist in responding to critics (at least those who are genuinely interested in understanding and learning).

FACTOID

ALL strengths (DAs and DRs) measured in the youth survey were significantly associated with two important PYD outcomes:

Well-being

Friendship

YOUTH SURVEY FINDING[1]

Strategy	Is Compatible with Current Technology and Capacity (with SI)	Would Require More Technology and Staff Capacity	Would Have a Broader Impact on Trevor Project
Create and curate content in multiple formats[2] that introduces PYD themes, attitudes, and skills tied to LGBTQ+ identity.	1. * **Tag existing TS content** to align with PYD frameworks so users can search for PYD opportunities and resources. 2. * **Create a set of TS values** (e.g., integrity), building in youth feedback; share on site.	3. **Reframe key topics** in TS to emphasize PYD. 4. Have moderators and/or youth leaders **scan TS for emerging PYD topics** that interest users.	
Introduce features that activate and sustain **PYD on TrevorSpace.**	5. * Create with youth a series of **short videos that introduce PYD themes for LGBTQ youth** and PYD's role in TS to use with youth and in employee & volunteer orientation. 6. **Create youth self-assessment** based on the 2 frameworks, with instant feedback and action guide.	7. Guide youth to **TS content based on their own strengths and needs** as identified from their survey results.	
Support deepening staff and volunteer capacity to engage with LGBTQ+ youth through PYD.			8. * Introduce PYD in orientations for **all Trevor Project employees and volunteers.**
Develop new roles and supports for youth as leaders/contributors.	**9.** * Co-create with youth leaders video **intro to PYD for LGBTQ+ youth.** Introduce sub-categories.		
Strengthen infrastructure to sustain PYD integration.	10. Continue to administer the **TrevorSpace PYD Survey** to track change over time.	**11.** * Survey youth on PYD interests, then **host guest speakers** to lead webinars with Q&A sessions.	12. * Integrate PYD into Trevor Project's **policy agenda and public messaging.** 13. Use **the PYD frameworks for** strategic initiatives (research, policy) **across Trevor Project**.

[1] For a comprehensive summary of the youth survey findings, please see the full report, "The Strengths and Assets of TrevorSpace Young People"

[2] Priority formats based on youth leadership team: Videos; Blogs/articles; Podcasts; Live events; Infographics; Interactive content

2. Boost Opportunities for Youth Voice, Agency, and Leadership

Recommendation

Provide more opportunities and structure for youth leadership and youth voice in order to foster their sense of agency and thriving.

Rationale

- Both youth and moderators expressed a desire for their interactions to be more proactive and positive—consistent with an PYD approach.
- Youth, moderators, and staff identified ways in which TrevorSpace could create structure and support for youth to be more active agents on TrevorSpace and take on leadership roles.
- Adults maintain TrevorSpace, with little youth input on content, customization, or moderation.
- With a strong sense of community and responsibility for the TS community, youth voiced a desire to more actively engage and contribute back to the community through leadership.
- Some youth actively play informal peer leader roles on the site (e.g., clubs, answering tech questions), but the TS structure does not proactively acknowledge or reward them.
- Youth-adult interactions on TS occur through the moderator role, which currently centers around safety/regulation.

FACTOID

37

Percent of survey respondents who did not experience being given useful roles and responsibilities on TrevorSpace.

YOUTH SURVEY FINDING

Strategy	Is Compatible with Current Technology and Capacity (with SI)	Would Require More Technology and Staff Capacity	Would Have a Broader Impact on Trevor Project
Create and curate content in multiple formats that introduces PYD themes, attitudes, and skills tied to LGBTQ+ identity.	14. Create a topical forum/feature on **Being & Becoming a Leader** in the LGBTQ+ Community.		15. **Formally recognize participants** who show positive leadership on TS (e.g., badge, roles, or annual awards).
Support deepening staff and volunteer capacity to engage with LGBTQ+ youth through PYD.			
Develop new roles and supports for youth as leaders/contributors.	16. Identify a continuum of opportunities for **youth to contribute to content creation.** 17. With youth & staff, ID **leader roles youth could play** on TS.	18. * Establish a **TS youth leadership council.** 19. **Provide peer leader training** for youth who step up, including those on the council. 20. * Create a survey and pop-up boxes that allow users to **give instant feedback to TS** (site overall, content, engagement)	21. * Create spaces or structures for users to give **feedback on their onboarding and offboarding** process to be used for continuous improvement. **22.** Integrate youth voice and leadership **across Trevor Project (research, advocacy, etc.).**

Key: Related Domains of Developmental Assets & Relationships — Support & Express Care | **Empowerment & Share Power** | Boundaries and Expectations & Challenge Growth | Constructive Use of Time & Expand Possibilities | Commitment to Learning | Positive Values | Social Competencies | Positive Identity

3. Reframe Monitoring and Enforcement of Boundaries and Expectations

Recommendation *Explicitly share positive values (what we do) and concrete examples of boundary/expectation violations (what we don't do), and enhance the role of moderation as a tool for growth and mutual participation. Reframe the enforcement of boundaries from 'prevention of bad interactions' to 'opportunities of growth'.*

Rationale

- TrevorSpace takes a reactive (vs. proactive) approach: youth do not know about the boundaries and expectations for behavior and interaction on TrevorSpace until they break them. Youth often face consequences reactively (moderation warning points) with few opportunities for correcting behavior.
- TS has established clear boundaries and expectations around what behaviors are not appropriate
- Staff, moderators, and youth identified areas to expand boundaries and expectations to support youth agency, recognize and reward positive behaviors, and promote positive peer interactions.
- Boundary setting on TS focuses on safety and identifying and addressing inappropriate behaviors.
- Cases in which deeper conversations were possible (e.g., youth could explain the situation) and education/restoration was used offer insights into alternate approaches aligned with PYD.
- Youth expressed a desire to have a role in establishing and enforcing boundaries; TS has unique affordances to scaffold skills of boundary setting and empower youth agency within and beyond TS.

FACTOID

How well are TrevorSpace users setting boundaries and expectations for each other? Among survey respondents:

82% said others on TrevorSpace stood up for them.

82% said others urged them to grow in new ways.

76% said others set a good example.

71% said others were good role models.

Strategy	Is Compatible with Current Technology and Capacity (with SI)	Would Require More Technology and Staff Capacity	Would Have a Broader Impact on Trevor Project
Create and curate content in multiple formats that introduces PYD themes, attitudes, and skills tied to LGBTQ+ identity.	23. * Design tool on **negotiating boundaries and expectations** with friends, family members, and co-workers as an LGBTQ+ person. 24. Use **positive values** to define boundaries and expectations for users, communicate values proactively as well as through youth moderator interaction to increase decision-making transparency.	25. ? Create **an onboarding "quiz" that introduces TS values, boundaries, expectations,** and the rationale for them. *(Quiz may not be well-received.)*	26. Work with a youth task force to **create public guidelines for behavior on TS,** consequences of violations, and the positive values that support them.
Introduce features that activate and sustain **PYD on TrevorSpace.**		27. * Create filters that allow youth to **block people, info & discussions on TS.**	
Support deepening staff and volunteer capacity to engage with LGBTQ+ youth through PYD.	28. * **Work with moderators to create brief scripts** that infuse PYD into their responses. 29. Support staff in being **growth oriented** in addressing violations.		
Strengthen infrastructure to sustain PYD integration.			30. Explore potential of an **intergenerational mediation or resolution team.**

Key: Related Domains of Developmental Assets & Relationships — Support & Express Care | Empowerment & Share Power | **Boundaries and Expectations & Challenge Growth** | Constructive Use of Time & Expand Possibilities | Commitment to Learning | Positive Values | Social Competencies | Positive Identity

4. Expand Exploration of Identities and Intersectionality in Daily Life

Recommendation

Foster youth's development holistically by expanding resources on gender and sexual identities to also include other salient aspects of their identity development.

Rationale

- TrevorSpace offers a safe context for youth to explore their identity and youth expressed a desire for more education and opportunities around identity exploration and intersection.
- Youth value opportunities to examine and "try out" aspects of their LGBTQ+ identities on TrevorSpace.
- Youth want more opportunities to address intersecting identities (ethnic identities, spiritual identities, etc.) and support and resources related to typical life skills/milestones for LGBTQ+ youth (e.g., going to college, finances, general life advice).
- The research on LGBTQ+ youth does not spend much time dealing with aspects of the identities of LGBTQ+ youth other than their gender and sexual identities.

NOTE: Many of the ideas on other pages also reflect exploring LGBTQ+ identity within a PYD framework. See Recommendation 7, for example.

FACTOID

61

Percent of survey respondents who use TS to explore their own identity.

64

Percent who use TS to feel safe.

Overall, however, survey respondents scored lowest on positive identity as compared to the other PYD indicators.

YOUTH SURVEY FINDING

Strategy	Is Compatible with Current Technology and Capacity (with SI)	Would Require More Technology and Staff Capacity	Would Have a Broader Impact on Trevor Project
Create and curate content in multiple formats that introduces PYD themes, attitudes, and skills tied to LGBTQ+ identity.	31. * **Post inspirational videos** by LGBTQ+ adults & TS grads describing **how they became who they are** (community, family, career, etc.) 32. * **Curate resources for growing up LGBTQ+** (e.g., finding gender-affirming products, dealing with health care). 33. * Develop **content on mental health and wellness,** such as: Sexual ed + wellness; Mental health		
Introduce features that activate and sustain **PYD on TrevorSpace.**		34. * Create a feature for **<18 youth to ask >18 youth questions about LGBTQ+ identity and life issues;** then share curated info with <18.	

Key: Related Domains of Developmental Assets & Relationships — Support & Express Care | Empowerment & Share Power | Boundaries and Expectations & Challenge Growth | Constructive Use of Time & Expand Possibilities | **Commitment to Learning** | Positive Values | Social Competencies | **Positive Identity**

5. Emphasize Thriving Through Shared Passions, Pride, and Fun

Recommendation *Curate and protect dedicated space for youths to share their passions, pride, and fun. Intentionally counteract the oppressions that LGBTQ+ youth face with positive and empowering content.*

Rationale

- TS is a context for PYD specifically for LGBTQ+ youth; participants collectively voiced this value and youth expressed possibilities for even more.
- Some youth come to the site simply to share interests and engage light-heartedly; TS has the unique opportunity to shift the narrative around LGBTQ+ youth as one that is holistic, complex, and joy filled.
- Users look for conversations around entertainment (e.g., interest in a band or video game)
- Youth have space to be their authentic selves
- Youth can engage in club spaces to find users with similar passions and hobbies
- Youth expressed the need for more agency in curating the content they are exposed to on TS (e.g., to avoid potential triggers or negative content) and dedicated forums for good vibes (e.g., queer news, queer history, etc.).

FACTOID

86

Percent of survey respondents who said other site users introduce them to new experiences or opportunities.

YOUTH SURVEY FINDING

The Youth Leadership Team described TS as a "tight-knit community."

They were interested in more informal opportunities to just be themselves.

Strategy	Is Compatible with Current Technology and Capacity (with SI)	Would Require More Technology and Staff Capacity	Would Have a Broader Impact on Trevor Project
Create and curate content in multiple formats that introduces PYD themes, attitudes, and skills tied to LGBTQ+ identity.	35. Create content on: Finding your "spark"; How to find places where you can be who you are. 36. Collaborate with an organization such as www.everywhereisqueer.com/map to help youth locate welcoming places in their community.		
Introduce features that activate and sustain **PYD on TrevorSpace.**		37. **Invigorate the club space** so users can find one another based on common sparks or interests.	38. * As part of offboarding, conduct an exit survey with users to identify community mentors and highlight TS's impact on them.
Support deepening staff and volunteer capacity to engage with LGBTQ+ youth through PYD.		39. Support staff in Identifying LGBTQ+ adult or youth experts in the community on topics/sparks of user interests.	40. Develop a forum for "community mentors" to tell their stories as examples of developing sparks and expanding possibilities for the future.

Key: Related Domains of Developmental Assets & Relationships — Support & Express Care | Empowerment & Share Power | Boundaries and Expectations & Challenge Growth | **Constructive Use of Time & Expand Possibilities** | Commitment to Learning | Positive Values | Social Competencies | Positive Identity

6. Become More Intentional in Supporting Connections and Transitions

Recommendation

Maximize the value and long term impact of the TrevorSpace experience by developing intentional opportunities focused on transitions and bridges between what young people experience through TrevorSpace and their experiences in other areas of life before, during, and after their use of TS.

Rationale

- TS is intentionally designed to meet specific needs in a specific context at a specific developmental time for specific young people. That specificity is a particular strength, and it also presents challenges, including that youth will be transitioning to and from TS.
- TS already offers support and resources for users and there are opportunities to formalize, and more intentionally connect young people with needed supports and resources at all stages of engagement (e.g., onboarding, during, and offboarding).
- TS youth typically are not guided to positive supports and opportunities beyond Trevor Project.
- Users age out of the platform at 25 automatically and do not yet have opportunities to say goodbye to the community or re-engage from a mentor perspective.

FACTOID

89%

Proportion of youth who report that their peers on TrevorSpace listen to their ideas and take them seriously.

TrevorSpace survey respondents over the age of 18 reported lower PYD strengths and outcomes compared to users under the age of 18.

YOUTH SURVEY FINDINGS

Strategy	Is Compatible with Current Technology and Capacity (with SI)	Would Require More Technology and Staff Capacity	Would Have a Broader Impact on Trevor Project
Create and curate content in multiple formats that introduces PYD themes, attitudes, and skills tied to LGBTQ+ identity.	41. Tip sheet or other format: Making the most of your experience as part of the TS community (accenting PYD growth themes). 42. Tip sheet or other tool: How to find, create, and **become part of a community when you move or change.** 43. Set up processes for **users aging out to write letters** on what they learned, their advice for their younger selves, and their hopes for the TS community.	44. ? **Offer an automated self- assessment** (based on pilot survey) that recommends ways to plug into TrevorSpace. *(Feasibility?)* 45. **Create a private forum on TS only for those aging out in X months** to focus on transition issues and share information to stay in touch. 46. * Create **structured offboarding** that facilitates reflection on TS and options for next steps based on strengths, interests.	
Support deepening staff and volunteer capacity to engage with LGBTQ+ youth through PYD.		47. ? **Match new users and a TS moderator** for support and questions. *(Capacity?)* 48. Automate a process for moderators to **send a personalized welcome message** to matched new TS participants.	
Develop new roles and supports for youth as leaders/contributors.	49. **Match trained peer leaders** (including volunteers who have aged out) with new members who request a mentor/guide.		50. **Connect periodically to an opt-in list of off-boarded users** to reinforce PYD themes, elicit stories, engage volunteers.

Key: Related Domains of Developmental Assets & Relationships

Support & Express Care | Empowerment & Share Power | Boundaries and Expectations & Challenge Growth | Constructive Use of Time & Expand Possibilities | Commitment to Learning | Positive Values | Social Competencies | Positive Identity

7. Explore a Broader Array of PYD Themes that Affect LGBTQ+ Thriving

Recommendation *Use the developmental assets and relationships frameworks to build out additional content tied to LGBTQ+ identities that is also integral to well-rounded positive development and thriving.*

Rationale

- Although the core identity and support work are primary in TS, other aspects of youth development can enrich young people's experience on the site, particularly if they are approached through the specific experiences and developmental needs of LGBTQ+ youth.
- Categories of the Developmental Assets and Developmental Relationships frameworks resonate with youth and staff. Some categories are particularly emphasized in the site (e.g., identity, support, care).
- Others are sometimes mentioned (e.g., challenge growth, positive values, and social competencies) and two are rarely mentioned (e.g., constructive use of time and commitment to learning), suggesting room for better integration.

FACTOID

89

Percent of survey respondents who said that others on TrevorSpace show them that they matter—a strong foundation for being more intentional in a focus on expressing care and providing support.

YOUTH SURVEY FINDINGS

Strategy	Is Compatible with Current Technology and Capacity (with SI)	Would Require More Technology and Staff Capacity	Would Have a Broader Impact on Trevor Project
Create and curate content in multiple formats that introduces PYD themes, attitudes, and skills tied to LGBTQ+ identity.	51. * V- **Post inspiring videos** of adults and peers describing how they live their values as part of their LGBTQ+ identity. 52. L-**Link to curated classes and content**[1] on topics of interest to LGBTQ+ youth (e.g., LGBTQ history; different LGBTQ identities; intersectionality). 53. C-**Create tip sheets/videos** on: De-escalating online conflicts; Connecting online with people who aren't like you; How and when to set firm boundaries, block people; Rebuilding from a hard social encounter online.	54. * L-Curate links to **credible sources about LGBTQ+ life, history, and culture** that users can access to research school projects. 55. S-**Users maintain interest profiles** to make it easier to connect with others on TS. 56. S-**Add emoji to show support, care** in response to posts. 57. V- Co-create with youth **topical advocacy guides**/checklists. 58. C-**Discussion-starter question generator** on a variety of topics to deepen relationships	59. S-Create a forum/feature on **family support.** 60. C-Repurpose hotline resources (e.g., list of coping strategies)
Introduce features that activate and sustain **PYD on TrevorSpace.**	61. S-Offer mini-courses on skills on **peer care and support** (e.g., listening, asking for help, etc.).		62. S-**Pop-up windows** that distinguish everyday and crisis support; **redirect to Hotline**.
Support deepening staff and volunteer capacity to engage with LGBTQ+ youth through PYD.	63. S-**Create videos in which moderators and staff** tell why they deeply care about TS youth and their work with them.	64. V-**Recognize users** who show positive values on TS.	65. V-**Collaborate with LGBTQ+ orgs** to offer service/justice opportunities for youth.
Develop new roles and supports for youth as leaders/contributors.		66. S-Trained older **peer leaders provide support in forums** for younger youth.	67. L-Develop webinars, courses, or a network on **becoming a leader in school as an LGBTQ+ person.**

Key: Related Domains of Developmental Assets & Relationships — **Support & Express Care** | Empowerment & Share Power | Boundaries and Expectations & Challenge Growth | Constructive Use of Time & Expand Possibilities | **Commitment to Learning** | **Positive Values** | **Social Competencies** | Positive Identity

Words of Gratitude from TrevorSpace Participants

These recommendations focus on ways to strengthen TrevorSpace using PYD frameworks as guides. They build on ideas and feedback from several sources, including a youth leadership team and youth participants in TrevorSpace who responded to a survey. In conclusion, it is important to put these recommendations in context with extensive positive feedback from TrevorSpace users offered. Their critiques were within a context of being deeply appreciative and wanting to make it even better! For example, here are some open-ended comments from the survey of 631 TrevorSpace users.

I love TrevorSpace!

I just love you all, TrevorSpace has been amazing to make me feel less alone. Thank you.

Thank you for creating a safe space. < 3

I am diagnosed autistic and can have a hard time connecting and communicating with people. But I have ALWAYS felt at home and understood on TS.

U guys r kewl.

Thanks for making this website.

Thank you for creating such a wonderful space.

TS has helped me through so much! From the time I joined to the point I'm at now, I have come out to my family and friends, figured out my sexuality, working on my gender identity, am in a relationship, and overall have become a more accepting and supportive person.

Thank y'all for providing a safe space for the queer youth of the world.

I really want to thank you guys for making this place, 'cause so many people struggle or don't know who to talk about issues to. This place gives us comfort knowing there are people who are there to listen and support us!

I have loved being a part of TrevorSpace, I even recommend other people to use it as well. Your community really helped me understand myself and I'm just so glad I found it.

I love TrevorSpace. It's an amazing site with an amazing goal. Thank you!

Thank you for making this program possible. I don't know where I'd be without it.

I would like to thank all the staff members that put this space together. You've saved me and countless others. You're the true MVPs :).

It's a great website really it's helped me so much. So thank you!

It's been a cool experience! I really like the community here. :)

It's an amazing place for all young members of the LBTQ+ community!

I found people to vent to, and they convinced me not to leave home when I was outed and was having a tough time. That made all the difference.

I really feel my sense of belonging here. I meet people who share the same interests and struggles, and we talk about them.

I have made some friends this way. Without TrevorSpace, I would have never met _____ or _____, two of my closest friends I've ever had. I love them so much as friends. < 3

Thank you all so much!!!! :3

It's been easy to find friends, and I'm happy I was able to find a supportive community.

Keep up the good work (wo)man(s)!

Your platform is great!

Keep up the great work :)