

the asset approach

40

ELEMENTS OF HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Minnesota high school students spend hundreds of volunteer hours working on a youth center that won't even be built until most of them have graduated; a mayor successfully campaigns for teenagers to become voting members on all city commissions and boards in Idaho; a New York school bus driver knows every one of her riders by name; a fast-food restaurant manager in Michigan includes training on peer leadership as part of new-employee orientation.

These are real examples of real people making a positive difference in the lives of youth. Whether they know it or not, they are demonstrating what Search Institute's president, Peter Benson, calls the "power of one"—the potential for one individual to help, to heal, to support, to challenge, and to change, for the better, the life of a young person.

➔ **Search Institute® has identified 40 positive experiences and qualities that all of us have the power to bring into the lives of children and youth, which are called *Developmental Assets*®. For many people, the assets have become a source of ideas and inspiration in the face of frustration and even despair.**

Assets helped change one Seattle mother's self-image as the parent of a child with special needs. "What a revelation!" she says. "I'd been walking around feeling handicapped as a parent because my own childhood was no picnic. I realized that I can still build assets for my son even though I hadn't received enough assets myself."

Caring adults used assets as a way to encourage an 18-year-old in Georgetown, Texas, to get involved in the community as a leader. "I used to get in a lot of fights," he says. "I'm still a fighter, but in a different way now."

So what are these Developmental Assets? The assets are spread across eight broad areas of human development. These categories paint a picture of the positive things all young people need to grow up healthy and responsible. *Please see the sidebar for a full description.*

On the next page, you'll find a chart of the Developmental Assets.

ASSET CATEGORIES

The first four asset categories focus on **external structures, relationships, and activities** that create a positive environment for young people:

EXTERNAL ASSETS	SUPPORT 	Young people need to be surrounded by people who love, care for, appreciate, and accept them.
	EMPOWERMENT 	Young people need to feel valued and valuable. This happens when youth feel safe and respected.
	BOUNDARIES AND EXPECTATIONS 	Young people need clear rules, consistent consequences for breaking rules, and encouragement to do their best.
	CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME 	Young people need opportunities—outside of school—to learn and develop new skills and interests with other youth and adults.

The next four categories reflect **internal values, skills, and beliefs** that young people also need to fully engage with and function in the world around them:

INTERNAL ASSETS	COMMITMENT TO LEARNING 	Young people need a sense of the lasting importance of learning and a belief in their own abilities.
	POSITIVE VALUES 	Young people need to develop strong guiding values or principles to help them make healthy life choices.
	SOCIAL COMPETENCIES 	Young people need the skills to interact effectively with others, to make difficult decisions, and to cope with new situations.
	POSITIVE IDENTITY 	Young people need to believe in their own self-worth and to feel that they have control over the things that happen to them.

This chart shows eight areas of human development and groups the 40 Developmental Assets by these categories. The percentages of young people who report experiencing each asset were gathered in 2010 from the administration of the *Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors* survey in 26 states.

asset type

asset name and definition

SUPPORT



- | | |
|--|-----|
| 1. FAMILY SUPPORT — Family life provides high levels of love and support. | 72% |
| 2. POSITIVE FAMILY COMMUNICATION — Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parent(s). | 32% |
| 3. OTHER ADULT RELATIONSHIPS — Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults. | 50% |
| 4. CARING NEIGHBORHOOD — Young person experiences caring neighbors. | 40% |
| 5. CARING SCHOOL CLIMATE — School provides a caring, encouraging environment. | 35% |
| 6. PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLING — Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school. | 33% |

EMPOWERMENT



- | | |
|---|-----|
| 7. COMMUNITY VALUES YOUTH — Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth. | 25% |
| 8. YOUTH AS RESOURCES — Young people are given useful roles in the community. | 32% |
| 9. SERVICE TO OTHERS — Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week. | 50% |
| 10. SAFETY — Young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood. | 54% |

BOUNDARIES & EXPECTATIONS



- | | |
|---|-----|
| 11. FAMILY BOUNDARIES — Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts. | 47% |
| 12. SCHOOL BOUNDARIES — School provides clear rules and consequences. | 56% |
| 13. NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARIES — Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior. | 48% |
| 14. ADULT ROLE MODELS — Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior. | 28% |
| 15. POSITIVE PEER INFLUENCE — Young person's best friends model responsible behavior. | 68% |
| 16. HIGH EXPECTATIONS — Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well. | 55% |

CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME



- | | |
|--|-----|
| 17. CREATIVE ACTIVITIES — Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts. | 20% |
| 18. YOUTH PROGRAMS — Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community. | 61% |
| 19. RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY — Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution. | 51% |
| 20. TIME AT HOME — Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week. | 56% |

COMMITMENT TO LEARNING



- | | |
|--|-----|
| 21. ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION — Young person is motivated to do well in school. | 71% |
| 22. SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT — Young person is actively engaged in learning. | 62% |
| 23. HOMEWORK — Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day. | 53% |
| 24. BONDING TO SCHOOL — Young person cares about her or his school. | 61% |
| 25. READING FOR PLEASURE — Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week. | 23% |

POSITIVE VALUES



- | | |
|--|-----|
| 26. CARING — Young person places high value on helping other people. | 52% |
| 27. EQUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE — Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty. | 54% |
| 28. INTEGRITY — Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs. | 71% |
| 29. HONESTY — Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy." | 69% |
| 30. RESPONSIBILITY — Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility. | 67% |
| 31. RESTRAINT — Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs. | 47% |

SOCIAL COMPETENCIES



- | | |
|---|-----|
| 32. PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING — Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices. | 33% |
| 33. INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCE — Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills. | 48% |
| 34. CULTURAL COMPETENCE — Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds. | 42% |
| 35. RESISTANCE SKILLS — Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations. | 45% |
| 36. PEACEFUL CONFLICT RESOLUTION — Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently. | 44% |

POSITIVE IDENTITY



- | | |
|--|-----|
| 37. PERSONAL POWER — Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me." | 45% |
| 38. SELF-ESTEEM — Young person reports having a high self-esteem. | 52% |
| 39. SENSE OF PURPOSE — Young person reports that "my life has a purpose." | 63% |
| 40. POSITIVE VIEW OF PERSONAL FUTURE — Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future. | 75% |

EXTERNAL ASSETS

INTERNAL ASSETS

THE **POWER** OF ASSETS

On one level, the 40 Developmental Assets represent common wisdom about the kinds of positive experiences and characteristics that young people need and deserve. But their value extends further. Surveys of over 89,000 students in grades 6–12 (ages approximately 11–18 years) reveal that assets are powerful influences on adolescent behavior. Regardless of gender, ethnic heritage, economic situation, or geographic location, these assets both promote positive behaviors and attitudes and help protect young people from many different problem behaviors.

0–10 assets

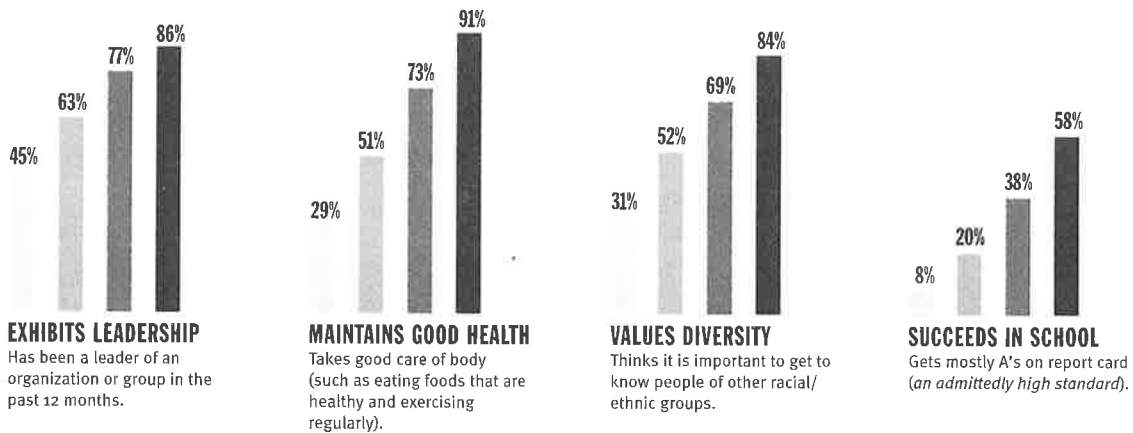
11–20 assets

21–30 assets

31–40 assets

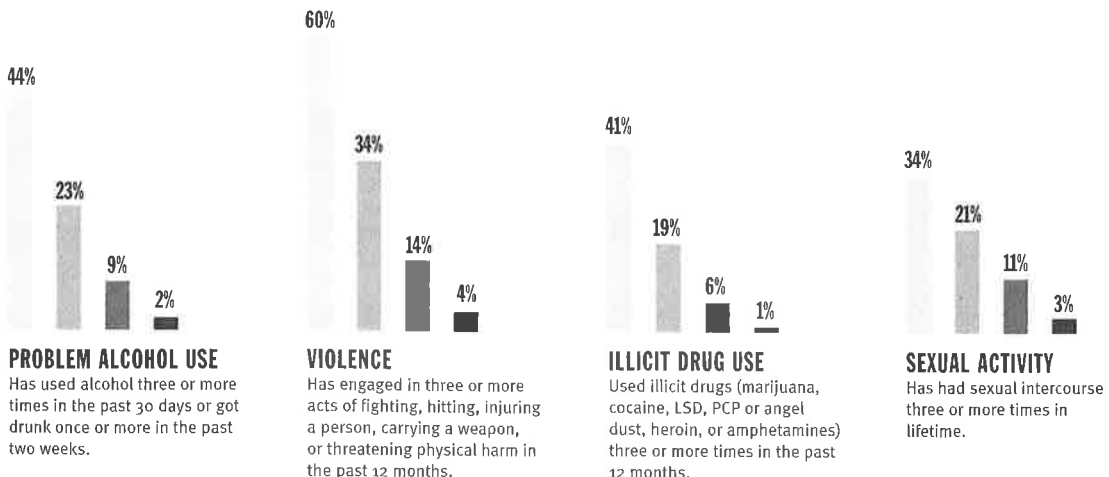
PROMOTING POSITIVE BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES

Our research shows that the more assets students report having, the more likely they are to also report the following patterns of thriving behavior:



PROTECTING YOUTH FROM HIGH-RISK BEHAVIORS

Assets not only promote positive behaviors, they also protect young people: The more assets a young person reports having, the less likely he or she is to make harmful or unhealthy choices. (Note that these definitions are set rather high, suggesting ongoing problems, not experimentation.)



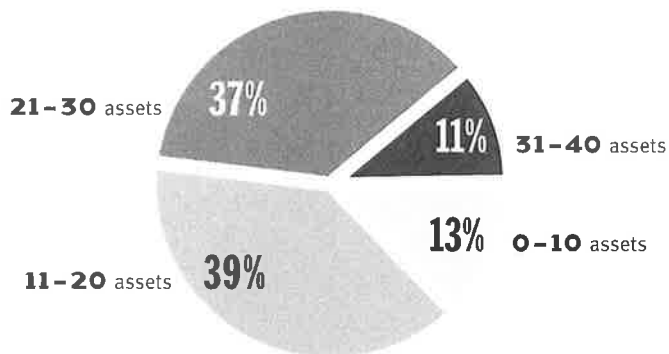
For more information go to www.searchinstitute.org: *A Fragile Foundation: The State of Developmental Assets among American Youth*, available as a download; and *Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development*, available as a printed book.

THE CHALLENGE

The good news is that the assets are powerful and that everyone can build them. (We call intentionally trying to help youth develop these strengths *building assets*.) The challenge for all of us is that most young people aren't experiencing enough of them.

THE GAP IN ASSETS AMONG YOUTH

While there is no "magic number" of assets young people should have, our data indicate that 31 is a worthy, though challenging, benchmark for experiencing their positive effects most strongly. Yet, as this chart shows, **only 11 percent of youth have 31 or more assets**. More than half have 20 or fewer assets.



AVERAGE NUMBER OF ASSETS BY GENDER, GRADE, AND GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

Search Institute's researchers have found that, **on average, young people report having 20.1 assets**. It may be tempting (and seem comforting) to think that *your* youth are different because of where they live, the schools they attend, their gender or ethnicity, and so on. But our research shows that young people from all walks of life have too few assets.

The chart here illustrates the overall consistency in levels of assets among boys and girls, younger youth and older youth, and young people living in urban, out of urban, and rural areas.

Overall, the average number of assets students report experiencing does not vary much by race or ethnicity. Our research shows that young people from all racial/ethnic groups, regardless of socioeconomic status, benefit from experiencing more of the 40 Developmental Assets. (For more information see the November 2003 [Vol. 1, No. 2] issue of *Insights & Evidence* at www.search-institute.org/research/Insights.)

TOTAL ASSETS

20.1

GENDER

FEMALES 21.3

MALES 18.8

GRADE

6 22.7

7 21.9

8 20.4

9 19.9

10 19.1

11 18.8

12 19.0

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

URBAN 20.2 [cities of at least 50,000]

OUT OF URBAN 20.4 [towns of 2,500 to 49,999]

RURAL 19.3 [farm, country, reservation, towns under 2,500]

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 assets

LOOKING CLOSER AT THE ASSETS

The Developmental Assets appeal to our common sense, so they are easy to understand. You may even be beginning to see how important *you* are—or can be—in the lives of young people. But how do assets translate into your daily life? We asked the experts—young people. A diverse group of youth ages 12 to 17 in the Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, metro area told us what others could do to help build their assets in each of the eight categories. Use the questions that follow to reflect on your potential to build assets.

what youth say about...

SUPPORT

"Never give up on me."

"Try to understand me."

ASK YOURSELF

- Are there people in your life who have always supported you through hard times? Who are they? How do they support you?
- Do you know a young person who doesn't seem to have a lot of support from adults outside her or his family? What can you do to reach out to her or him?

COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

"Feed my interests."

"Make school more like a community."

"Be excited about your subject."

ASK YOURSELF

- What is/was the best thing about your school? What is/was the worst thing?
- Do you enjoy reading? Is there a way to share your interests with a youth or an adult?

EMPOWERMENT

"Give me a voice." "Take me seriously."

"Help me change things for the better."

ASK YOURSELF

- Where are the places in our community where young people are valued and listened to? How do you know this?
- How can youth and adults work together on projects to create a safer community for everyone?

POSITIVE VALUES

"Help me act from my ideals."

"Listen when I talk about the things that mean something to me."

ASK YOURSELF

- What values are most important to you?
- What does it mean to act on your values?

BOUNDARIES AND EXPECTATIONS

"Set fair boundaries." "Be a role model."

"Challenge me to succeed and comfort me when I fail."

ASK YOURSELF

- Who are the people in your life whom you most admire? Why?
- Do you think that the boundaries others set for you are fair? Why or why not?

SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

"Be open to the possibilities of people."

"Teach acceptance and respect, and we won't have to learn tolerance."

ASK YOURSELF

- What do you enjoy most about being with people of different cultural or ethnic backgrounds? What is hard about it?
- What nonviolent actions can you take if someone treats you or someone else in a way you don't like?

CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME

"Let me play."

"Offer lots of fun things to do after school."

"Open up more places for young people to go."

ASK YOURSELF

- What opportunities do young people in this community have to be involved in positive activities or groups?
- Do you think it is important to regularly spend time at home with others in your family? Why or why not?

POSITIVE IDENTITY

"Tell me what's good about me."

"Help me hope and dream."

"Celebrate my uniqueness."

ASK YOURSELF

- What is one amazing or unique thing about you?
- What do you hope for in the future? What can you do now to make those dreams come true?

The poster series *In Our Own Words* inspired this activity and can also spark discussion, especially in classroom or other group settings. This resource is available from Search Institute.

THE POWER OF ONE

Helping young people get the assets they need is like exercising your right to vote: It's important, it's powerful, it can be done after a lot of deliberation or on the spot, it's relatively easy, and it's *your* power—no one can do it for you. Asset building is like voting in another important way: Not enough people do it! Studies show that while the majority of Americans say they believe it's a good idea to contribute to the healthy development of young people, very few actually take action.

Fortunately, unlike voting, you can build assets every day, everywhere, as many times as you want. Once you start looking, you'll find plenty of opportunities that fit your time, energy, resources, commitment, and comfort level. You'll probably surprise yourself by coming up with some unique ideas that fit your personality and lifestyle. Here are some examples, from simple and straightforward to challenging and complex. Some will work best for youth, some for adults. Most, though, can be modified or adapted by anyone.



In a Home

ANYONE

- Learn more about the assets by checking out Search Institute's Web site at www.search-institute.org. Or call **800-888-7828** for more information.
- Contact local media to encourage positive coverage of children and youth.
- Check out organizations that serve youth in your community and make a donation (whatever amount you are comfortable with) to one or more of them.

YOUTH

- Post the 40 Developmental Assets where you live. Choose a different asset each day and focus on ways to help build it for and with friends or siblings.
- Talk about the 40 Developmental Assets with your family. Which assets do family members think are the strongest in your family?
- If you have friends over, be sure to introduce them to your parents or guardians.

ADULTS

- If you entertain friends in your home, pick a time to include their children.
- Offer to help your children with their homework.
- Send a friendly note to a young relative or friend, just to say "you are on my mind."



In a Neighborhood

ANYONE

- Learn the names of your neighbors of all ages.
- Treat all neighbors with respect and courtesy; expect them to treat you the same way.
- Start or join a neighborhood watch or block club.

YOUTH

- Ask a parent or guardian to introduce you to neighbors you don't know.
- Discuss with other young people in your neighborhood what's good about where you live. Also talk about ways you could improve the neighborhood.
- Volunteer to help a neighbor with babysitting or chores around her or his home (such as yard work, pet care, or cleaning).

ADULTS

- Take time just to hang out with the young people on your block or in your building.
- Offer to help a young neighbor with a project or task (such as building or repairing something or a tough homework assignment).
- Let neighborhood youth know when their behavior is inappropriate or out-of-bounds.



In a School

ANYONE

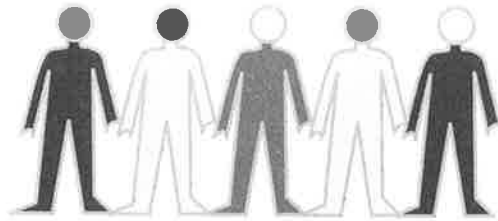
- Attend school-sponsored concerts, plays, or sporting events.
- Thank a teacher, principal, custodian, substitute, or anyone else for their efforts.
- Work with your school community to create a list of shared values for the school.
- Attend a school board meeting. Share information about the assets and direct board members and attendees to Search Institute's Web site (www.search-institute.org).

YOUTH

- Come to class prepared (homework done, pens and paper for taking notes, and so on).
- Treat your classmates and your teachers with respect. Expect the same in return.
- Form study groups with your friends. Ask for help when you need it, and offer help when you can.
- Organize a book club. Read *Step by Step: A Young Person's Guide to Positive Community Change*, a guidebook written for youth by youth (available as a free download at www.search-institute.org/tools/free-e-product-downloads).

ADULTS

- Join a parent-teacher organization or other type of advisory group. Ask to give a brief presentation about the Developmental Assets.
- Volunteer your time (such as read to students, chaperon a field trip, or help out at an event).
- Organize a book club. Read *Great Places to Learn: Creating Asset-Building Schools That Help Students Succeed* (available from Search Institute).



In a Community

ANYONE

- Treat children, youth, and adults with respect.
- Volunteer in an organization that serves families and youth.
- Send your local officials (mayor, council members, and so on) information about the assets. Try *You Can Make a Difference for Kids* (available from Search Institute).

YOUTH

- Participate in at least one club, group, team, or sport—or find something creative that appeals to you, such as acting or music.
- Build a relationship with a child through baby-sitting, tutoring, or volunteering as a coach or coaching assistant.
- Become involved in a social issue that interests you, such as affordable housing, discrimination, hunger, child abuse and neglect, or the environment.

ADULTS

- Support local efforts to provide safe spaces for young people to meet and spend time together.
- Build at least one informal, ongoing, caring relationship with a child or adolescent.
- Model a positive, healthy lifestyle. This includes finding peaceful ways to resolve conflicts, being motivated to achieve, and advocating and working for equality and social justice.

THE POWER OF MANY

The assets provide a framework for action that encourages all individuals to make a difference, no matter who they are or what their lives are like. The power of one is strong, indeed; just look back at some of the great examples of asset building that were mentioned at the beginning of this booklet.

Imagine for a moment what young people experience when they have many, many people and places in their lives all committed to nurturing and strengthening them by building assets: families that communicate and enjoy spending time together, supportive teachers and school staff, elected officials who have worked diligently to protect rights and opportunities for all youth, and so on.

Experience has taught us that our asset-building power grows exponentially in this kind of environment. As we work *together* on behalf of young people we ensure that they receive consistent messages and treatment, and we ourselves benefit because we connect with people who share our ideals, our vision, and our commitments.

Residents in hundreds of communities across the country are discovering that embracing the asset framework brings them together in new and exciting ways. It serves as a call to action and cooperation, a catalyst for uniting people who never before had reason to work together. As they explore this new territory, there are a few principles that help guide the way:

- **Everyone can build assets.** Building assets isn't just about great families or schools or neighborhoods. It requires consistent messages across a community.
- **All young people need assets.** While it is crucial to pay special attention to youth who struggle—economically, emotionally, or otherwise—nearly all young people need more assets than they have.
- **Relationships are key.** Strong relationships between adults and young people, young people and their peers, and teenagers and children are central to asset building.
- **Asset building is an ongoing process.** Building assets starts when a child is born and continues through high school and beyond.
- **Consistent messages are important.** It is important for families, schools, communities, the media, and others to all give young people consistent and similar messages about what is important and what is expected of them.
- **Intentional repetition is important.** Assets must be continually reinforced across the years and in all areas of a young person's life.

You may find that there are people in your community who share your enthusiasm for positive youth development. Search Institute's Web site at www.search-institute.org/community can help you determine if there is a formal asset-building initiative where you live.

Whether you are acting on the power of one or rallying the power of hundreds, by focusing on the relationships, opportunities, skills, values, and self-perceptions—the *assets*—that young people need, you are laying the foundation for a great many wonderful things to come. For more information and resources, visit the Search Institute Web site at www.search-institute.org.

ABOUT SEARCH INSTITUTE

Search Institute® is an independent, nonprofit, nonsectarian organization committed to helping create healthy communities for every young person. Because we believe that "all kids are our kids," we create books and other resources that welcome and respect people of all races, cultures, genders, religions, economic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and abilities. For a free information packet, call 800-888-7828.

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THE ASSET APPROACH

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