



spurwink



Discovering what kids need to succeed



## Eight Principles for Starting a Community-Wide Initiative for Asset Building

One of the exciting, though challenging, aspects of launching a community-wide asset-building initiative is that each community goes about it in a slightly different way. Keeping the following principles in mind will help guide your efforts.

### **1. Engage people from throughout the community.**

Because the asset-building vision calls for community-wide responsibility for youth, involving many different stakeholders is important from the outset. Many communities have developed a “vision team” with representatives from all sectors (e.g. schools, government, law enforcement, congregations, service agencies, business, health care) along with young people, parents, and other citizens, including senior citizens and people from various racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

### **2. Start with a positive vision.**

A positive vision can energize a community for the long term. It can also help groups lay aside political and ideological agendas to work together because of their shared commitment to the well-being of children and adolescents.

### **3. Build on quality information.**

Many communities find that surveys of young people can be an important catalyst for creative and sustained action. Quality information gives people a shared reference point for reflecting on the needs, realities, and resources in the community as they shape their vision for the future.

### **4. Resist the temptation to create new programs.**

Because most responses to youth issues in recent decades have been programmatic, intentional effort will be needed to avoid simply developing another program to respond to a specific need. The most important tasks for the “vision bearers” of asset building are to keep the vision of a healthy community alive and prompt individuals and institutions to discover ways that they can integrate asset building into their own mission and commitments.

### **5. Take time to motivate and educate.**

Because asset building represents a new way of thinking about communities and youth, it is important not to assume that everyone automatically understands the framework and its implications. Unless people internalize the many dimensions of the asset framework, asset building can become a shallow campaign to “be nice to kids.”

### **6. Celebrate commitments and successes.**

Asset building is a long-term vision, not a quick fix. But as communities embark on this journey, it is important to notice, celebrate, and talk about the landmarks along the way. These stories renew energy and refocus commitment.

### **7. Embrace innovations from the community.**

Once people are aligned with the vision of asset building, their creativity in finding ways to nurture assets can be startling. Encouraging this innovation is key to breaking out of old patterns and discovering fresh approaches.

### **8. Network with other communities.**

While many communities have begun asset-building initiatives, the vision is only in its infancy. No one knows all the answers, and no one knows how everything will work. But each community is learning something new each day.