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Experience-Based Strategies for Putting Asset-Building Principles into Practice in Your Community

"Perhaps the most urgent task facing American society is rebuilding a sense of community, of village, in which everyone reclaims or accepts their shared responsibility to—and stake in—nurturing the youngest generation."

– Peter Benson, *All Kids Are Our Kids*, 1997

Across North America and around the globe, hundreds of communities have launched initiatives designed to build Developmental Assets® with and for children and adolescents. Grounded in the belief that youth will be healthier and experience more assets in a healthier community, these communities are bringing young people and seniors, schools and businesses, youth-serving organizations and government officials together to mobilize their communities on behalf of children and youth. In these towns and cities, building community is a fundamental component of their comprehensive asset-building vision and strategy.

As Search Institute has worked with and listened to these communities, several principles have been identified that can help to frame and focus how community leaders engage in their community-building efforts. This document highlights some of these principles and goes a step further: It offers tangible tips for putting these principles into practice, along with concrete examples of how communities are applying them.

Shared Vision Grounded in Shared Action

The framework of Developmental Assets® suggests a vision of a community in which every individual, organization, and network recognizes and acts upon its role and responsibility for contributing to young people's healthy development. Rather than suggesting specific, community-wide actions or programs that are needed, the asset-building approach emphasizes the importance of a community uniting around a common vision. It invites each individual, family, association, and organization to discover their own passion and capacity for strengthening community with and for young people.

1. Develop a common language.

A common language can bring people together, as is evident when the framework of Developmental Assets is used throughout a community. A common language allows people to connect and forge collaborations. While new concepts such as "assets" can be an initial barrier to engagement, as the new concepts are understood and internalized, they help people move from their familiar comfort zone to viewing youth in a new way. People then begin to feel an allegiance with other people who share their understanding—an allegiance that translates into an affinity for shared action. In the end, the common language assists in defining and directing a community's efforts.

In Kansas, the positive youth development movement has built a consensus to focus their efforts on making Kansas "the best place to raise a child." With one clear message incorporated into organizational missions and funding guidelines, the shared vision, articulated in a common language, has provided a foundation of collaboration among advocates for youth.

2. Regardless of the specific project, focus your mission on building community.

Strong community-building efforts consider proposed activity through the filter of "in what way does this build community?" The effort may look like a housing project, feel like an after-school program, or talk like an organizing campaign; but it is different because—by its design—it focuses on building relationships and connecting around a larger, strength-based vision among people of diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

3. Cultivate a community-building process that is flexible, permeable, changeable, and structured around shared vision, values, and principles.

Many consultants have designed solid processes to engage and empower all stakeholders. Then implementation starts, and it becomes ever more challenging to maintain those processes or levels of engagement and

empowerment. Community building happens in the social environment of people. This is an unpredictable environment. We need to be prepared to let new people come to the table, assume that other people will leave, and be open to meetings with emergent agendas. We stay on track not by sticking to specific agendas and action plans, but by continually grounding ourselves in a shared vision, common values, and agreed-upon operating principles.

4. Plan and do at the same time.

Planning is stepping with the left foot. Doing is stepping with the right foot. Hopping wears people out. Walking can evolve into skipping and eventually running. Integrate your planning and doing so that both planners and doers feel comfortable as part of your effort.

If your initiative focuses solely on planning, then only the planners will participate. When the time comes for action you will need to recruit a different group of individuals. On the other extreme, an exclusive focus on doing results in lots of disparate activity, and members drift away. By planning and doing at the same time, we can take advantage of the resources that both types of people bring to the task of community building.

5. Focus on activities that will make a difference.

Doing something gets something done. Or does it . . . really? We can exhaust ourselves on activities that don't make a difference in our communities. So we have to try things that we believe will really make a difference.

The biggest barrier to doing something meaningful is the fear of making mistakes. Don't be afraid of mistakes. We all learn the most from our mistakes. In fact, making a mistake together provides great opportunities to build community!

A Wisconsin mapping project showed that the youth and adults had very different pictures of their community. Adults had been thinking about placing a homework help location in a local school or library. Youth said they usually gathered at area parking lots and the local truck stop. The truck stop became the location for the homework help program most evenings.

This trial-and-error development process is vital, even when setbacks and failures can result in lost funding in a nonprofit environment. Early input from young people can help improve on decisions that affect them.

6. Establish an informal structure to support resident action.

Community building happens best in the informal space between traditional structured programmatic efforts. It is like the mortar between the bricks. Unfortunately, organizations are rarely designed to support community building. Most community organizations are structured to deliver programs, and it's difficult to communicate community building as a program. This dilemma is made more difficult because most community organizations are funded by philanthropic or government organizations, which require a formal organizational structure to receive the funding. Community builders are challenged to find ways to support their efforts "between the bricks" while working with the bricks to provide necessary formal structure.

Many organizations that have incorporated community building on behalf of kids into their strategic plans and initiatives have found that intentional, direct, and meaningful resident involvement is essential. Strategies to support this involvement tend to be informal. That is, they are not encumbered by process and bureaucracy. Yet they are strategic and intentional in that they are incorporated into the very essence of the initiative. Many of these strategies provide frameworks for resident action to be supported by traditional philanthropic and government organizations.

Strengths More than Risks or Deficits

Instead of focusing on reducing problems, risks, or deficits, asset building focuses on nurturing strengths in young people. Similarly, John McKnight, John Kretzmann, and their colleagues in the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute at Northwestern University work with communities to realize the power of identifying and building on strengths and resources in communities.

7. Focus on revitalizing individual and community strengths.

For an accountant, a company's bottom line represents its assets over its liabilities. Healthy companies focus on their assets. Too often, communities focus on their liabilities, ignoring their assets or strengths. Asset-based community building focuses on fully utilizing existing (though often untapped) individual, family, associational, organizational, and community resources and strengths. The process of intentionally building the assets of youth is one way that a community can shift from focusing on what it doesn't have and re-focus on identifying and building on the strengths of its people, its places, and its relationships. Every community has challenges to face. Identifying strengths gives community members a platform from which to address those challenges.

8. Build on what is working.

One cannot reweave a blanket from the middle of the hole. Start from what's working, build on the strengths, enrich existing connections, and coalesce the energy of success to invest your efforts in targeted and strategic areas that are most likely to succeed.

Some asset-building initiatives emerge from a community prevention initiative, human service collaborative, or a character development curriculum. They then use the 40 Developmental Assets framework to engage the entire community in focusing on youth. They weave together existing programs with the thread of the asset approach. They strengthen existing efforts with connections to youth leadership and initiative.

As part of a "Vision to Action" workshop in Eastern Oklahoma, community leaders developed a list of existing programs and efforts working with youth. They identified how these programs were building assets. Next they identified how these programs could do a better job of building these assets if they worked together. The focus of their community initiative became building operational relationships between existing programs. They were building assets not by focusing on where there were problems to be fixed, but by leveraging what was working in their community.

9. Focus on discovering resources within your community, not on raising money.

Yes, everyone needs to pay the bills. But money and the process of raising financial resources can sap human resources—and, too often, the spirit that sustains effective community building. Outside infusions of financial resources can also set up dependencies that make it challenging to sustain efforts over the long haul. Instead of investing tremendous amounts of time and energy in raising money, focus on what resources are needed and creative ways the resources within the existing community network can provide that support.

A rural Pennsylvania community with an aging population and weakening economic base wanted to do something to demonstrate its commitment to youth. The goal became to paint the area high school. The initial bill was way too high, and no major donors were in sight. The effort might have been thrown into a tailspin, but instead of giving up, leaders organized an "asset registry" at the local hardware store where people could purchase a "gift" of a gallon of paint, a set of brushes and so on. Even an initial skeptic (who had said the effort was using youth as "slave labor") became a believer when he stopped by and saw how the community had rallied on behalf of the youth, and found youth and adults laughing and talking as they painted together.

10. Recognize that the most important resource for the community is spirit.

The spirit of community—the energy, enthusiasm, pride, and commitment—is much more important to sustaining asset-building efforts than funding or structure. Nurturing that spirit in residents and leaders is essential to effective community building.

Marketing firms that develop brand-building efforts understand the importance of building a spirit around a company. They understand that this spirit directly translates into sales. Similarly, a spirit about the community directly translates into residents' willingness to invest time and resources in their community.

Positive spirit builds on itself, and intentional efforts can help to sustain the spirit. In addition, celebration of the commitments that people make to their community helps to develop a community norm of engagement. In Creston, Iowa, for example, the local newspaper, radio station, and bank all joined in a community-wide recognition effort that recognizes the efforts of local asset builders. Each month, the person being recognized is announced during a live broadcast at the radio station. Then the paper publishes pictures of those who are recognized, and the bank flashes their names on the electronic marquee outside. In the same state, in Mason City, through the Mason City Mayor's Youth task Force, youth selected "Hidden Heroes" who were honored for how they built assets behind the scenes.

Relationships More than Programs

When communities learn about asset building, they often assume they need to start new programs. The danger in this approach is that people get the impression that the programs—not the people of the community—are responsible for raising the young people and building their assets. Young people spend small amounts of time in programs. They grow up in all the nooks and crannies of their communities—their families, the mall, school, parks, neighborhoods, congregations, and other gathering places—including programs. They need positive relationships with adults across all these settings, not just in one setting.

For over a decade Minneapolis has been experimenting with a neighborhood-based planning process and funding tool called the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP). Through the NRP, neighborhood associations facilitated the development of comprehensive plans for which there was a predetermined amount of money. Each neighborhood employed different strategies and approaches. Many neighborhoods developed their human development plans by bringing different social service agencies together. They focused on doing what they could to ensure that each type of need was met and all youth were served. Then the money was allocated to a menu of programs. When the funding ended, the programs either ended or spent significant time raising new resources.

In the Lyndale neighborhood—a national leader of the community building approach to community development—the money was all put into a program fund directed by parents and youth. The money was allocated four times a year to reflect the community priorities. Agencies were only eligible for the funding if they were active participants in the planning, coordination, and joint activities of the neighborhood’s Social Service Providers Council. As a result, programs became the product of intentional community building. Long after the NRP money had been spent, the Lyndale Program Fund and Social Service Providers Council were still going strong.

11. Always remember that it’s all about relationships.

Growing a strong community for young people is about building healthy relationships among diverse people and across generations. Healthy relationships are shared: people sharing what they have and receiving what is offered. They are also multileveled, dynamic, and challenging to our assumption and comforts. Remembering to focus on relationships is not only essential for building assets with and for young people, but also helps nurture and sustain a community’s asset-building efforts.

Sara, an older woman, became inspired about the role that she could play in the positive development of the youth in her neighborhood after hearing about the assets at her church. Each morning, she went for a walk around the block. Instead of walking by the youth waiting for their bus on the corner stop, she started to say, “Hi.” As the days passed, the “hi’s” became an exchange of names and then brief conversations.

One morning Sara missed her bus stop visit because she was home with a cold. About an hour later, her phone rang. It was one of her neighbors whose daughter had called from school, concerned by Sara’s absence. At that moment, Sara realized that the relationships she was building with the young people were reciprocal. They had grown to care about her as she had grown to care about them. It is important for all members of a community to be able to build and benefit from relationships with people older and younger than themselves, and a commitment to asset building can jump start those efforts.

12. Build community, not a community organization.

Build a neighborhood, not a neighborhood association. Build collaboration, not a collaborative. Too often we focus our efforts on the form rather than the function. When that happens, the means can become the end, and we focus all our energy on perpetuating structures, not building communities.

For many of us, years of working with community organizations have led to being comfortable with a board, staff, and a 501(c)3 structure. While this may be the appropriate form to accomplish specific functions, we have to be careful not to let it get in the way of doing the work we know needs to get done. Ad-hoc, unincorporated initiatives with advisory boards can leverage funds from partnered non-profits to effectively coordinate the spreading of an asset message. Some communities have found that having an initiative (not an organization) with little or no clearly identifiable budget has allowed them to steer clear of the traditional turf and political challenges that derail many community change efforts.

13. Be strategic and intentional about building community.

Community building is not a skill we are taught, and it doesn't come naturally for many people. For too long, it was assumed that communities just came together. All of the hard work of nurturing communities was just part of what we did. Because it was hidden and assumed, we didn't recognize its value. In a time when community doesn't happen "naturally," we must be deliberate and intentional in our community-building efforts, recognizing that everything we do is an opportunity to build community.

Many communities have learned that community-building efforts inevitably involve bringing diverse people together. Living in diverse community, knowing different types of people from different backgrounds and with different approaches to addressing family and community issues are an important assets for youth. For a community to be healthy, it's vital to weave together diverse communities, have different types of people at the table, and tap different backgrounds and approaches.

In Santa Clara County in California, Project Cornerstone conducted a "listening project" to be sure that the language of assets resonated with their diverse groups that make up the county. They conducted 47 focus groups reaching nearly 1,000 people within the Latino, Vietnamese, GLBT, African American, Filipino, and Restorative Justice communities; in the process of listening, they both affirmed the relevance of the framework and determined that there was a need to add a "4th asset" to specifically address "celebrating and understanding one's cultural identity." In the process, asset-building partnerships were formed across all parts of the county.

14. Programs can also have major roles in asset-building efforts.

Relationships can be built in programs, too. And programs can motivate and equip people to build assets. They can be a means toward relationships, but not a substitute for relationships. If we are intentional about making relationship development a priority, we can connect not just youth and adults, but the different organizations and interests that weave a strong community. The opportunity is to integrate relationship building into the heart of programs, then look for enhancements that strengthen relationships across and among community sectors and organizations. Those links have potential for enriching the relationship networks for young people and enriching asset building throughout the community.

In Georgetown, TX, the Georgetown Project realized that a growing number of children, who were served by the free and reduced lunch program during the school year, would be going without a nourishing lunch during the summer. The school district agreed to file the paperwork, local parks provided the space and activities that added an incentive for children to show up, and churches helped provide volunteers to serve the meals. This brought many additional caring adults into the lives of the children as well as assuring that they were well fed during the summer months.

15. Create interactive rituals.

Rituals bond communities and groups at a deeper level by engaging people in reliving their shared myths, stories, or heritage. An organization or initiative committed to empowering unheard voices may, for example, light candles at the beginning of each meeting in honor of people unable to be in the room. This is a powerful ritual. It binds us to each other and to those around us.

The youth in a Montana community have written a play that tells the story of "The 40." It is performed each year at the annual event. It has become a ritual for people to hear the play each year. The youth look forward to the event and jockey for which part they will get to play. As part of the final act, the audience becomes engaged by committing to work with a specific young person on the development of a specific asset.

All adults and youth, not just professionals and parents

Asset building emphasizes inspiring, inviting, and equipping *all* types of people—including professionals, parents, other adults, and youth—to contribute to the well-being of children and adolescents.

16. Honestly meet people where they are.

This sounds easy: address people's real concerns; support people to do what they want; engage people where they are in their own journey. But it's one of the most difficult things to do. Too often we *recruit people* to do what we want them to do. Too often we rally people toward *our* passions. Too often we look for subscribers to *our* vision. When we build community, we come together to discover new places together. The best community-building efforts invite people to engage in a manner that connects with their current commitments, concerns, and passions.

A community organization in Minneapolis was suffering from block club leadership burn-out. After trying volunteer management techniques from recognition to time commitment contracts, the leaders tried a different approach. Using a youth interview team, they identified who people went to when they had concerns, issues, or needed information on specific issues. They then asked those informal leaders how the organization could help them do a better job of being a resource for their neighbors. The result was a great expansion of the leadership base as these community leaders became a long-term feeder for the leadership councils.

17. Build on what motivates people to become and stay involved.

Self-interest is good. Enlightened self-interest is even better. Nurture it. Pay attention to people's interests and engagement to help determine where new energy should be invested to support their engagement.

Building skateboard parks has been a priority for many Healthy Community • Healthy Youth initiatives because it addresses a real issue for the involved youth leaders, the youth skaters, and those that tend to be involved in youth organizations and leadership opportunities. It also often engages the business community and city government officials, who welcome safe alternative spaces for skaters to use.

18. Recognize that individual contributions of time and money change people's priorities.

We often go through formal prioritization processes that result in master plans designed to guide other people's actions. Such approaches can undermine community building. Instead, plan for who is in the room to do the work. Build around what the people in the room are willing to invest their own time and money in implementing. If the planners are different from the doers, or the people who will have to pay for doing, it will be difficult to sustain the effort.

In a community in Southern Ohio, a community park planning process was forced to choose between updating the playground and improving the softball fields. After a contentious meeting, a close vote determined that the annual volunteer project would be to improve the softball field. But then not many people showed up, and the project languished for weeks. On her own, one of the neighbors organized to upgrade the playground. More than enough volunteers showed up on the volunteer day for the playground. The community's priorities clearly emerged as the time for commitment arose.

Engagement *with* youth, more than services *for* youth

Community initiatives can too quickly focus on how to “serve” youth or “meet young people’s needs”—which assumes that young people are the consumers or recipients of services, not resources, contributors, and leaders. Engaging youth as partners gives authenticity and energy.

19. Don’t do for people; do with people.

No clients. No constituents. No customers. Rather, neighbors working with neighbors. “Doing for” people reinforces relationships characterized by power dynamics; “doing with” people empowers and releases the possibility for cultivating social capital. We must strive to transform our relationships into equitable transfers of resources and needs. One type of asset young people need is empowerment. They are no different from adults. We all need opportunities to know we are valued and valuable. Working *with* people builds that value.

Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, popularized the idea of social capital. Social capital emerges through community engagement. There is a strong correlation between a community’s social capital and the health, wealth, and happiness of people in a community. Putnam advocates that social capital is as important as financial capital to the health of a community, but it cannot be developed within the context of doing “for.” Rather, it emerges out of relationships in which people are working together.

20. Engage young people in meaningful ways in meaningful things.

Meaningfully engaging young people is an excellent way to diversify our community. Forcing them to do the same things as adults is not. Most meetings are not very meaningful. Often the most effective long-term action comes from agreeing to simultaneously and separately invest in both strategies that are supported by adults and those supported by youth.

In Hampton, Virginia, the city government includes youth on commissions and on boards as voting members; this is meaningful participation. Youth are engaged in surveying their peers, doing research on transportation and other topics that affect them, and presenting their findings to the full commission or board. Young people do care about their communities and can be contributing members of the organizations that impact them.

Hampton takes this a step farther by realizing that not all youth want to serve on a commission, just as not all adults do. Hampton has a three-tier strategy for youth engagement. The first tier provides many opportunities for short-term community service activities. The second tier creates opportunities for youth to step into advisory roles on groups that report to district principals and the superintendent. The third tier offers opportunities to serve as a voting member of boards and commissions. Students receive training so they can be successful in any of these roles.

Unleashing, Not Controlling or Directing

As individuals and organizations begin shaping their own approaches and priorities for asset building, it's important not to try to control or manage their efforts.

21. Cultivate and celebrate multiple points of entry.

Different learning styles, different engagement models, different comforts with structures, and different histories with other people all compel us to open as many doors to our community-building efforts as possible. Forcing everyone to be engaged in the same manner drains energy—even for the people who choose to be involved. Think about creative ways to engage different people in appropriate ways.

Children First in St. Louis Park, MN, has seen asset builders step up for specific projects or roles. The city manager and superintendent of schools talk regularly to stay current on youth issues of mutual concern. A local artist worked with children to paint picnic tables and benches, but chose not to attend meetings. A group of skaters worked with the city planning department on the development of a local skate park that would best meet their needs. Individuals volunteer in their churches or at the nature center with young people after learning about the Developmental Assets. A group of police officers host evening basketball at a local park in the summer. A teller at a local bank always invites youth to see how the coin counting machine works, and a local florist provides carnations to children living in a local housing project just before Mothers' Day each year, so they all have a gift for their moms. There is room for everyone to find the role that fits for them.

22. Remember that consensus is *not* a necessary component of effective action.

Consensus is nice. Getting everyone on the same page is wonderful. But consensus is often confused for sameness and conformity. Communities must be diverse in ideas and strategies in order to move their shared vision forward.

In one western state, two different styles for facilitating an asset-building initiative emerged. In the northern part of the state, a grassroots model engaged working groups in lots of small towns. The southern part of the state brought together key stakeholders to develop an overlaying action plan. As they came together to form a statewide coalition, they worked hard to work one way, to find consensus on a strategy for the entire state. This contentious push for consensus was devaluing the work of one half while promoting the work of the other. The breakthrough came when the group realized that it didn't need consensus on an approach to move forward. They could do both strategies simultaneously as they worked toward a common vision of a strong, caring state for young people.

23. Establish many ways to communicate.

When you don't control or direct everything, it can be harder to know what's happening. So it's important to develop a wide range of formal and informal communication strategies that keep people in touch with each other. That way they can learn from and with each other, share ideas, celebrate successes, struggle through challenges, and build trust. Remember, too, that different people hear and share in different ways; find a variety of ways to connect with them.

Initiatives have used creative ways to communicate with people: flash e-mail or Tweets of meeting notices; table top displays in restaurants; meeting notices on bathroom stalls; newspaper columns; radio spots; Tupperware-style parties; Facebook groups; block club leaders; and more.

24. Focus on your community's shared myth or story.

Telling the stories of everyday asset building can be a positive and inspiring part of a community's asset-building strategy. Stories have a way of capturing the imagination and translating complex ideas into achievable next steps.

In telling these stories, it's as important to tell the community's shared story as it is to share stories of change. What is the story of your community? How did it become a community? How does this story speak to the basic needs and passions of our common human experience? What does this story tell about who you are? Embedded in this story should be the language of assets and the action of individuals building assets for youth. This story is your myth. It is a very powerful component of community change.

25. Trust community.

Yes, community building is messy. And, yes, it can seem out of control. But trusting the community to grow and strengthen based on its own gifts and story is how authentic change happens. We have all been in situations where the process-heavy decision making of the community seems to get in the way of a perfect solution. Outrageous ideas are proposed. But if the community is strong, and the process open and engaging, then the eventual solution will tap into the wisdom that is the community.

Long Term, Not a Quick Fix

The Developmental Assets provide a framework for long-term action that recognizes the importance of ongoing, positive opportunities and relationships across at least the first two decades of life. Similarly, building community is a long-term process.

26. Understand that community building is an organic, unpredictable process.

Building community is not like building a house. There is no plan that can be followed where the foundation is laid, a frame built on it, and each system added. Communities are like gardens, where each season you can add a little more, but outside elements always impact what you can do and how you can do it. In gardens your most important resource is the soil. The soil of communities is relationships. Communities change in a nonlinear manner. Sometimes you can work and work with no results. And then the flowers bloom all at once. Sometimes you will be expanding and growing; other times you will be in hibernation. This is okay. It's part of the organic process.

27. Pay attention to renewing leadership.

Leadership must be dynamic and respond to the constantly changing environment. Effective community leadership is not institutionalized through formal positions. It involves providing support to the people who can guide, frame, and inspire in this moment for this project. Long-term community building efforts invest significant resources in cultivating new leadership.

Too often this is done only when new leaders are needed. The most important time to invest in cultivating new leadership is when you have strong leadership. This strong leadership is a resource for mentoring and easing new leaders into the full role of responsibility. An important task of an initiative is building an environment that nurtures leaders in all phases. This occurs in two ways. First, allow, support, and celebrate people as their leadership roles change (including those who need to step away right now). Second, provide leadership opportunities outside of the structural positions of organizations. Creative leadership opportunities include task force leadership, coordinating key community events, and developing strategic partnerships on behalf of the initiative.

28. Be intentional in shaping efforts that will become sustainable.

Our culture doesn't invest much in sustainability. By design, we build throw-away items. But building community requires that we think for the long term and invest in the relationships, networks, rituals, and systems that will undergird the ongoing process of strengthening community for and with young people. Sustainability is more than an issue of time; it's an issue of how resources are used. A sustainable community grows with a balance of human and financial resources.

29. Remember that good evaluation is rooted in good planning, which is rooted in good evaluation.

At its core, evaluation is an opportunity to reflect on whether we're doing what we set out to do. So if we're not clear about what we were really trying to do, our evaluation efforts will be frustrating. Keeping the end in mind will also sharpen and focus our efforts. Evaluation is intended to improve our effort on behalf of the community. Our constituents in the community are the true customers of evaluation.

Essex County, Vermont, launched its prevention coalition in the late 1980s. Through the years, it has changed and adjusted to increase its effectiveness. One of the most defining features of the initiative is that leaders are continually refining their model to make it stronger. This learning—and the application of the learning—is the essence of good evaluation.

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About Search Institute®

Search Institute is an independent, nonprofit, nonsectarian organization whose mission is to provide leadership, knowledge, and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities. The institute collaborates with others to promote long-term organizational and cultural change that supports its mission.

About Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth™

Search Institute's Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth initiative seeks to motivate and equip individuals, organizations, and their leaders to join together in nurturing competent, caring and responsible children and adolescents. Initial corporate support for this initiative was provided by Lutheran Brotherhood, a faith-based, member-owned financial services organization of 1.2 million Lutherans nationwide. Lutheran Brotherhood merged and is now part of Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.