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Creating Positive Change through Community Initiatives

Since the Developmental Assets[®] framework was introduced in 1990, communities have been learning how they can be more intentional about building assets for and with young people. In 1997, Search Institute launched the Healthy Communities · Healthy Youth[®] Initiative (HC·HY). This effort currently guides and supports more than 600 cities, towns, counties, and school districts across the United States and Canada—from San Jose California, to Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania, and from Orlando, Florida, to Edmonton, Alberta—that are forging ahead using the Developmental Assets[®] as a tool to make their shared vision a reality. We welcome you to join them and to use the knowledge we've acquired as you develop and enhance your own unique efforts.

After years of studying community change and learning alongside communities committed to making change happen, Search Institute has named five action strategies that new and ongoing initiatives can use to guide the work they do in their own towns, cities, or regions.

Using the Five Action Strategies

Community initiatives based on the Developmental Assets involve the efforts of people who thoughtfully work to determine how people in all spheres of life can be involved. What keeps an initiative vibrant are the relationships that develop between adults and young people in each sphere and in the networks of adults formed across those spheres.

The five action strategies provide a practical approach to identifying, encouraging, and linking all the important people, places, activities, and programs necessary for a powerful collective effort. With a focused initiative, you can intensify your efforts to:

- **Engage adults** from all walks of life to develop sustained, strength-building relationships with children and adolescents, both within families and in neighborhoods.
- **Mobilize young people** to use their power as asset builders and change agents. This means listening to their input and including them in decision making.
- **Activate sectors** of the community—such as schools, congregations, businesses, and youth-related, human service-related, and health-care organizations—to create an asset-building culture and to contribute fully to young people's healthy development.
- **Invigorate programs** to become more asset rich and to be available to and accessed by all children and youth.
- **Influence civic decisions** by influencing decision makers and opinion leaders to leverage financial, media, and policy resources in support of this positive transformation of communities and society.

As you think about these five actions strategies, you will notice that they are not tasks to complete one by one in sequence. Instead, as you strengthen relationships within and between these spheres of influence across the community you will build a web of interconnected efforts that support one another. Long-lasting success happened by merging the asset-building capacities of all community members – in all the settings where the lives of adults and youth intersect. It takes the combination of all five action strategies to make lasting positive change.



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Discovering what kids need to succeed



Guiding Principles for Healthy Communities · Healthy Youth Initiatives

Healthy Communities · Healthy Youth initiatives find guidance for their work by drawing on the following principles:

- **Everyone can build assets.** Building assets isn't just about great families or schools or neighborhoods. A thoughtful librarian, restaurant owner, or construction worker can also deliver positive messages to young people.
- **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. As one tactic, schools can include the more “average” students in problem solving and on hiring committees.
- **Relationships are key.** Strong relationships between adults and young people, young people and their peers, and teenagers and children are central to asset building. A relationship with an adult mentor, for example, gives a young person a chance to explore values and build social competencies.
- **Asset Building is an ongoing process.** The work may start within a few small programs, but it eventually expands to include other places, such as the city council and community centers. A neighborhood association may get the ball rolling, but the impact is greater as other community leaders and organizations continue to join the effort.
- **Consistent messages are important.** Families, schools, the media, and others all need to give young people similar messages about what is important and what is expected of them. For example, when coaches, physicians, and adults in faith communities all encourage young people about their schoolwork, it sends a stronger message about the importance of learning.
- **Intentional repetition is important.** Assets must be continually reinforced over the years and in all areas of a young person's life. Instead of simply having one discussion about integrity and responsibility, a parent or teacher will have more influence by repeatedly pointing out relevant examples in everyday life.

Beginning with You and Your Community

We hope this introduction to Developmental Assets and the five action strategies for communities will motivate you and spark new ideas for building, energizing, and sustaining your unique vision for putting “assets in action” in your community. For more detailed information and strategies, check out Search Institute's *Assets in Action: A Handbook for Making Communities Better Places to Grow Up*.