Developmental Assets: A Profile of Your Youth

Executive Summary

Results from the Search Institute Survey
Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors

Hancock County Middle and High Schools
Lewisport, KY
July 2011

Search Institute SURVEY SERVICES

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Developmental Assets: A Profile of Your Youth

Hancock County Middle and High Schools

Over the past 20 years, Search Institute has surveyed nearly three million youth about how they experience the 40 Developmental Assets—a research-based framework that identifies basic building blocks of human development. We've found clear relationships between youth outcomes and asset levels in both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies.

The results are compelling: The more assets kids have, the better. Youth with high asset levels are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors (such as violence, sexual activity, drug use, and suicide), and more likely to engage in thriving behaviors (such as helping others, doing well in school, and taking on leadership roles).

Assets are crucial for the healthy development of all youth, regardless of their community size, geographic region, gender, economic status, race, or ethnicity. This report summarizes the extent to which *your* youth experience the Developmental Assets and how the assets relate to their behavior and overall health.

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The Developmental Assets were assessed in your school community in May 2011, using the Search Institute survey *Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors*. Below you'll find a brief summary of demographic data that describes the young people who participated in your study.

Table 1. Youth Who Were Surveyed

		Number of Youth	Percent of Total
Total Sample[1]		306	100
Gender[2]	Male	163	55
	Female	134	45
Grade[2]	6	0	0
	7	124	41
	8	0	0
	9	89	29
	10	0	0
	11	93	30
	12	0	0
Race/Ethnicity[2]	American Indian	5	2
	Asian	1	0
	Black or African American	1	0
	Hispanic or Latino/Latina	2	1
	Pacific Islander	0	0
	White	280	92
	Other	3	1
	More than one of the above	13	4

[1] Four criteria were used to determine whether individual responses were valid. Survey forms that did not meet one or more of the criteria were discarded. Reasons for survey disqualification include inconsistent responses, missing data on 40 or more items, reports of unrealistically high levels of alcohol or other drug use, and surveys from students in grades other than those intended. See full report for more information.

[2] Numbers may not add up to the "Total Sample" figure due to missing information on individual surveys.

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The Developmental Assets in Your Community

The Developmental Asset framework covers extensive territory, including the experiences of young people and their commitments, values, skills, and identity. Your youth were asked questions about their experience of each of the 40 assets. Their answers form the basis for this report. To grasp the range and depth of concepts measured by the asset framework, we can divide assets into two key areas: external assets and internal assets.

External assets are the positive developmental experiences that families, schools, neighborhoods, community groups, and other youth and family-serving organizations provide young people. These positive experiences are reinforced and supported by the broader efforts of society through government policy, health care providers, law enforcement agencies, civic foundations, and other community institutions.

Table 2. Percent of Your Youth Reporting External Assets

Category	Asset Name	Definition	Percent
Support	1. Family support	Family life provides high levels of love and support.	74
	2. Positive family communication	Young person and his or her parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek parent(s') advice and counsel.	27
	3. Other adult relationships	Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.	56
	4. Caring neighborhood	Young person experiences caring neighbors.	50
	5. Caring school climate	School provides a caring, encouraging environment.	42
	6. Parent involvement in schooling	Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.	28
Empowerment	7. Community values youth	Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.	34
	8. Youth as resources	Young people are given useful roles in the community.	29
	9. Service to others	Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.	66
	10. Safety	Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.	64
Boundaries and Expectations	11. Family boundaries	Family has clear rules and consequences, and monitors the young person's whereabouts.	50
	12. School boundaries	School provides clear rules and consequences.	68
	13. Neighborhood boundaries	Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.	57
	14. Adult role models	Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.	34
	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.	60
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.	13
	18. Youth programs	Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.	59
	19. Religious community	Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.	70
	20. Time at home	Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.	64

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Internal assets are the positive commitments, skills, and values that form a young person's inner guidance system. Youth make personal choices and actions based upon the degree to which their internal assets are developed.

Table 3. Percent of Your Youth Reporting Internal Assets

Category	Asset Name	Definition	Percent
Commitment to Learning	21. Achievement motivation	Young person is motivated to do well in school.	74
	22. School engagement	Young person is actively engaged in learning.	60
	23. Homework	Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.	30
	24. Bonding to school	Young person cares about his or her school.	62
	25. Reading for pleasure	Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.	25
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.	57
	28. Integrity	Young person acts on convictions and stands up for his or her beliefs.	75
	29. Honesty	Young person tells the truth even when it is not easy.	72
	30. Responsibility	Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.	73
	31. Restraint	Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.	50
Social Competencies	32. Planning and decision–making	Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.	32
	33. Interpersonal competence	Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.	51
	34. Cultural competence	Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.	38
	35. Resistance skills	Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.	47
	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."	48
	38. Self-esteem	Young person reports having a high self-esteem.	53
	39. Sense of purpose	Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."	65
	40. Positive view of personal future	Young person is optimistic about his or her personal future.	75

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The External Developmental Assets (Assets 1–20)

Think of *external assets* as positive developmental experiences provided for youth by networks of supportive people and social systems in the community. They offer youth a consistent source of love and respect, opportunities for empowerment, leadership, service, and creativity, safe interpersonal and physical boundaries, and high expectations for personal achievement.

The table below summarizes the extent to which young people in your community experience each of the 20 external Developmental Assets.

Table 4. Percent of Youth Reporting External Assets by Gender and Grade

External Asset	Total Sample	Gender		Grade						
		M	F	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Support										
1. Family support	74	75	73		81		67		70	
2. Positive family communication	27	28	27		33		26		20	
3. Other adult relationships	56	58	54		54		55		59	
4. Caring neighborhood	50	53	49		52		48		51	
5. Caring school climate	42	43	41		48		30		45	
6. Parent involvement in schooling	28	31	25		38		28		15	
Empowerment										
7. Community values youth	34	38	31		35		36		30	
8. Youth as resources	29	36	21		31		29		25	
9. Service to others	66	66	68		73		63		60	
10. Safety	64	74	53		50		70		76	
Boundaries and Expectations										
11. Family boundaries	50	49	53		52		54		45	
12. School boundaries	68	66	72		81		61		59	
13. Neighborhood boundaries	57	56	59		63		56		49	
14. Adult role models	34	36	34		38		33		31	
15. Positive peer influence	68	65	70		79		70		51	
16. High expectations	60	61	62		63		55		62	
Constructive Use of Time										
17. Creative activities	13	10	16		12		13		14	
18. Youth programs	59	57	62		61		55		59	
19. Religious community	70	67	75		78		64		65	
20. Time at home	64	64	63		66		75		51	

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The Internal Developmental Assets (Assets 21–40)

The *internal assets* can be thought of as inner characteristics: a young person's motivation and commitment to academic achievement and lifelong learning; his or her positive personal values; social competencies (including relationship and communication skills); and characteristics of personal identity, including an optimistic future outlook and sense of purpose.

The table below summarizes the extent to which young people in your community experience each of the 20 internal Developmental Assets.

Table 5. Percent of Youth Reporting Internal Assets by Gender and Grade

Internal Asset	Total Sample	Gender		Grade						
		M	F	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Commitment to Learning										
21. Achievement motivation	74	69	79		81		73		66	
22. School engagement	60	55	68		60		57		63	
23. Homework	30	28	29		20		29		42	
24. Bonding to school	62	61	65		68		64		54	
25. Reading for pleasure	25	14	39		26		18		31	
Positive Values										
26. Caring	52	47	58		56		49		49	
27. Equality and social justice	57	50	67		60		57		53	
28. Integrity	75	75	76		78		69		77	
29. Honesty	72	67	78		73		67		76	
30. Responsibility	73	74	69		73		66		77	
31. Restraint	50	47	54		63		52		31	
Social Competencies										
32. Planning and decision-making	32	32	33		33		28		35	
33. Interpersonal competence	51	42	63		53		48		51	
34. Cultural competence	38	34	45		37		40		37	
35. Resistance skills	47	43	55		56		43		40	
36. Peaceful conflict resolution	44	37	51		40		48		44	
Positive Identity										
37. Personal power	48	51	47		44		49		53	
38. Self-esteem	53	60	46		55		49		53	
39. Sense of purpose	65	72	59		64		67		66	
40. Positive view of personal future	75	77	73		76		82		67	

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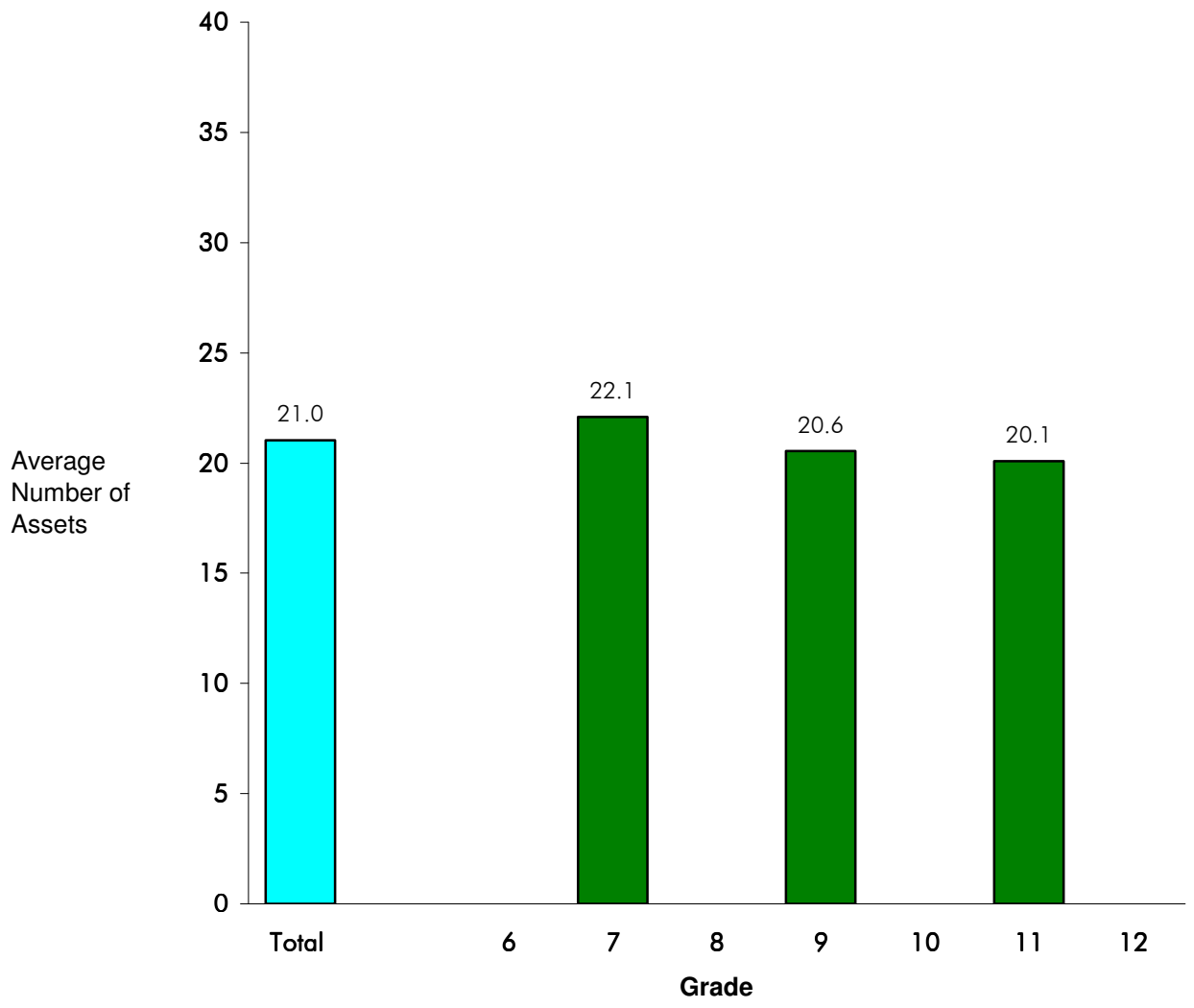
Average Number of Developmental Assets in Your Youth

Search Institute's research on adolescents consistently shows a small but meaningful difference in assets between older youth (grades nine through 12) and younger youth (grades six through eight), with younger youth reporting more assets than older youth. This result has been found in both "snapshot" and longitudinal studies. Regardless of age, gender, economic status, or geographic region, most young people in the United States experience far too few of the 40 Developmental Assets.

If one or more grade levels in your survey sample report particularly low average numbers of assets compared to other grades in your study, you may need to closely examine community conditions that affect asset development at those particular grade levels.

The following figure reflects the average number of Developmental Assets reported at each grade level by youth in your community.

Figure 1. Average Number of Assets Reported by Your Youth



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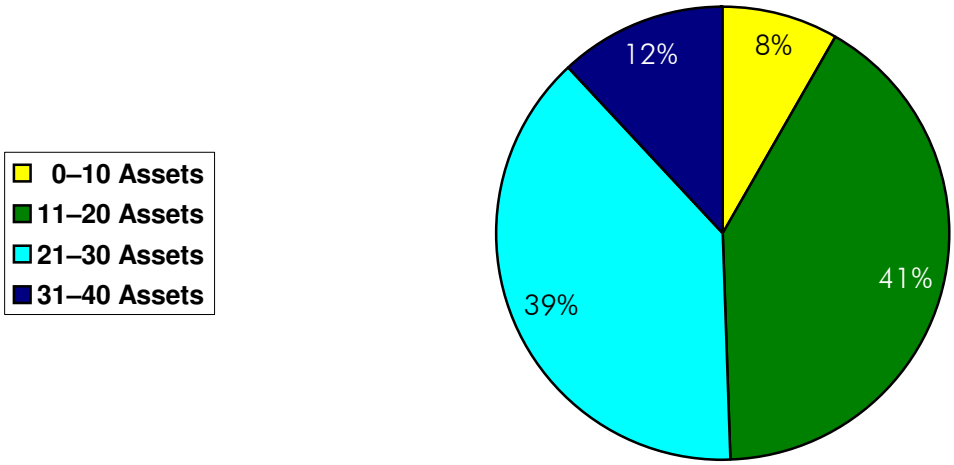
Your Community's Challenge

For optimal youth outcomes, the more assets youth have, the better. Having 31–40 assets is better than 21–30, which is better than having 11–20, and so on. In an ideal world, communities would strive to ensure that all youth eventually experience between 31 and 40 of the Developmental Assets. In your community, 12 percent of surveyed students report 31 or more of the 40 assets. Below in Figure 2 you'll find the percent of your young people who currently experience Developmental Assets (in asset groups of 10).

Figure 2. The Asset Challenge Facing Your Community



The Asset Challenge for All Communities

The state of Developmental Assets in your community is likely to be similar to the challenging asset pattern found throughout the country. The particular strengths and weaknesses highlighted in this report are a unique reflection of your community, but general patterns (of average numbers of assets, general decreases in asset levels, and relationships between assets and risk behaviors and between assets and thriving behaviors) are typical of other communities that have administered this survey to youth. Search Institute studies have found regardless of town size or geography that youth typically lack support. Communities can draw upon the inherent strengths of youth and adults to increase assets in young people and do the following:

- Give adequate adult support through long-term, positive intergenerational relationships;
- Provide meaningful leadership and community involvement opportunities;
- Engage young people in youth-serving programs;
- Provide consistent and well-defined behavioral boundaries;
- Help youth connect to their community; and
- Create critical opportunities to develop social competencies and form positive values.

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Young people may face complex social forces, including:

- High levels of parental absence;
- Adult silence on positive values and healthy boundaries;
- Fragmented family and community social systems;
- Neighbors who are isolated from one another and separated by age barriers;
- Adult fear of becoming involved and the sense that young people are someone else's responsibility;
- Public disengagement from the important work of building meaningful connections with youth;
- Youth overexposure to media saturated with violence and sexual situations;
- Poverty and lack of access to supportive programs and services;
- Inadequate education and poor economic opportunities that cause families to be unable to provide for their children's needs;
- Schools, religious institutions, and other youth-serving organizations that are not adequately equipped to be supportive, caring, and challenging in a positive way.

By working to eliminate these barriers and conditions, communities can fortify young people against the allure of risk-taking behaviors, negative pressures, and undesirable sources of belonging in order to prepare them to become the next generation of parents, workers, leaders, and citizens. While this combination of social factors suggests that we have much work to do, a concerted effort by all members of the community to build assets in youth can strengthen our capacity to be caring, connected and committed to the common good.

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The Power of Developmental Assets to Promote Thriving in Youth

Youth who report higher levels of assets are not only less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors, but they are also more likely to consistently report higher numbers of eight thriving indicators, according to Search Institute's research. These indicators offer a brief look at thriving, which is a much more comprehensive concept.[3] Figure 3 reflects the power of assets to promote the eight specific thriving indicators among young people.

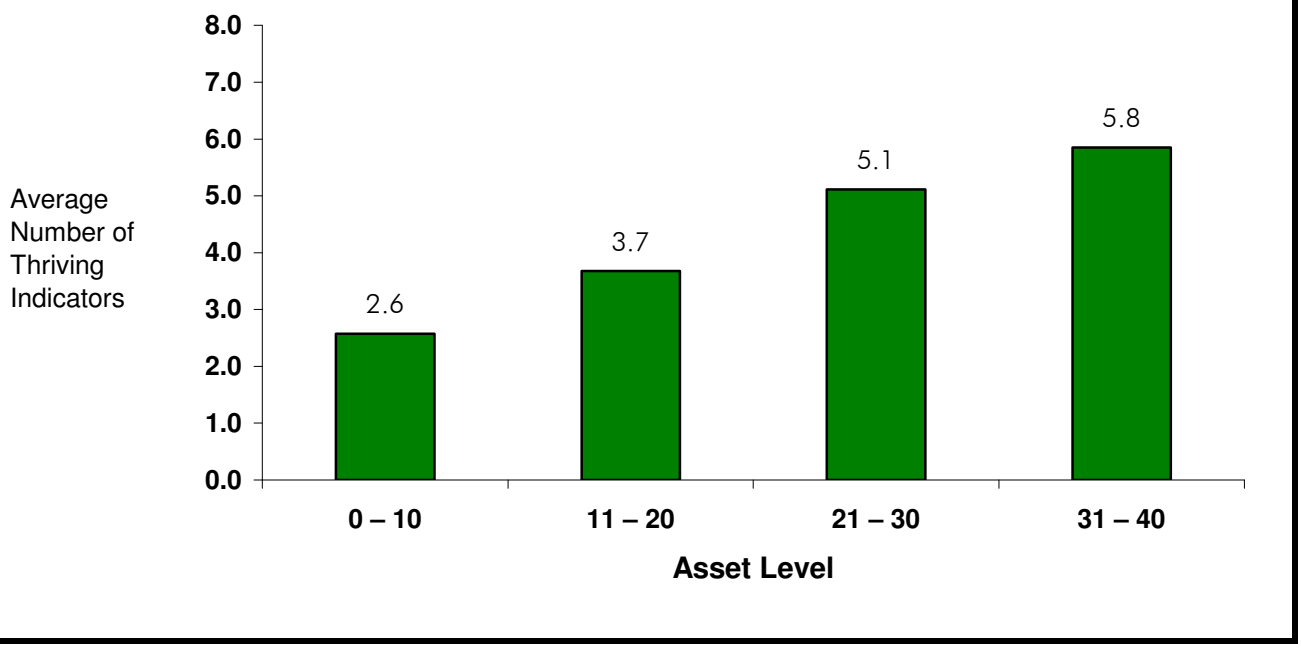
Eight Indicators of Thriving Youth

Youth:

- Experience school success
- Help others informally
- Value diversity
- Maintain good personal health
- Exhibit leadership
- Resist danger
- Controll impulsive behavior
- Overcome adversity

In the figure below, each bar represents a relationship between the average number of thriving indicators reported by your youth and the total number of assets (in asset groups of 10) reported by the same youth.

Figure 3. The Power of Developmental Assets to Promote Thriving Indicators



[3] For more details regarding the definition and measurement of thriving, see *Sparks: How Parents Can Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers* by Peter L. Benson, Ph.D. (Jossey-Bass, 2008). See also Benson, P. L., & Scales, P. C. (2009). The definition and preliminary measurement of thriving in adolescence. *Journal of Positive Psychology 4*(1), 85-104.

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The Protective Power of Developmental Assets

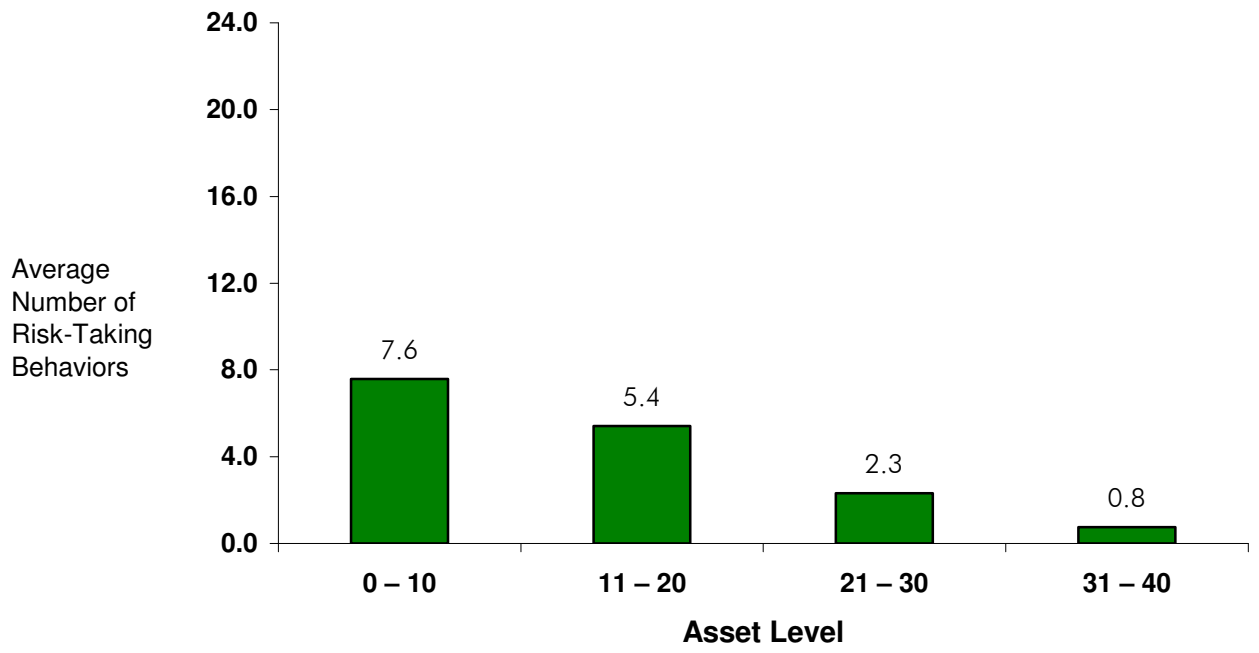
Search Institute's research consistently shows that youth with higher levels of Developmental Assets are involved in fewer risk-taking behaviors and experience higher levels of thriving indicators. Developmental Assets have the power to protect youth from engaging in the following 24 risk-taking behaviors:

Risk-Taking Behaviors

- Alcohol use
- Binge drinking
- Marijuana use
- Smokeless tobacco use
- Illegal drug use
- Driving while drinking
- Early sexual intercourse
- Vandalism
- Inhalant use
- Smoking
- Shoplifting
- Using a weapon
- Eating disorders
- Skipping school
- Gambling
- Depression
- Getting into trouble with police
- Hitting another person
- Hurting another person
- Fighting in groups
- Carrying a weapon for protection
- Threatening to cause physical harm
- Attempting suicide
- Riding with an impaired driver

Each vertical bar in Figure 4 represents the average number of risk-taking behaviors reported by your youth at particular asset levels (in asset groups of 10). *Note the average number of risk-taking behaviors reported by students who experience assets at both the highest and lowest levels.*

Figure 4. The Power of Developmental Assets to Protect Against Risk-Taking Behaviors



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Take Action!

This report provides educators and administrators, parents, neighbors, community members, and leaders with insight into the behaviors, opportunities, and challenges facing young people in your community. Use this information as a powerful basis for ongoing, community-wide discussions about how best to improve the well-being of your youth.

Set a Community-Wide Asset Goal

It is important for each community to establish and work toward the goal of a higher average total number of assets that each of its young people experience. This goal-setting process can provide a critical opportunity for community members to create a shared vision for healthy youth. As you begin your goal-setting process, keep in mind the barriers and challenges noted above, as well as the protective power of Developmental Assets and their power to help youth thrive.

The good news is that everyone—parents, grandparents, educators, neighbors, children, teenagers, youth workers, employers, health care providers, business people, religious leaders, coaches, mentors, and many others—can build Developmental Assets in youth. Ideally, an entire community will become involved in ensuring that its young people receive the solid developmental foundation they need to become tomorrow's competent, caring adults.

Begin With First Steps

As a Neighbor or Caring Adult, You Can . . .

- ☐ Invite a young person you know to join you in an activity: play a game, visit a park, or go for a walk together.
- ☐ Greet the children and adolescents you see every day.
- ☐ Send birthday cards, letters, "I'm thinking of you" notes, or e-messages to a child or adolescent with whom you have a connection.

As a Young Person, You Can . . .

- ☐ Challenge yourself to develop a new interest on your own, or try a new activity through school, local youth programming, cocurricular activities, or faith community youth program.
- ☐ Strike up a conversation with an adult you admire, and get to know that person better. See adults as potential friends and informal mentors.
- ☐ Look for opportunities to build relationships with younger children through service projects, tutoring, or baby-sitting.

As a Parent or Family Member, You Can . . .

- ☐ Consistently model—and talk about—your family's values and priorities.
- ☐ Regularly include all children in your family in projects around the house, recreational activities of all kinds, and community service projects that benefit people with needs greater than your own.

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- Post a list of the Developmental Assets and talk to children about them. Ask teens for suggestions of ways to strengthen their assets as well as yours.

As an Organization Member and/or Businessperson, You Can . . .

- Highlight, develop, expand, and support programs designed to build assets, such as one-on-one mentoring, peer helping, service learning, and parent education.
- Provide meaningful opportunities for young people to contribute to the lives of others, in and through your organization.
- Develop employee policies that encourage asset building in youth, including flexible work schedules for parents and other employees that allow them to volunteer in youth development programs.

For detailed information about building Developmental Assets or starting an asset-building initiative in your community, visit Search Institute at *www.search-institute.org* or call (800) 888–7828.

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