Tapping the Potential
Discovering Congregations’ Role in Building Assets in Youth

By Glenn A. Seefeldt and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain
Tapping the Potential is a resource of Search Institute's Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth initiative. This effort seeks to motivate and equip individuals, organizations, and their leaders to join together in nurturing competent, caring, and responsible children and adolescents. This mission will be accomplished through research, evaluation, resource materials, training, technical assistance, and networking opportunities based on Search Institute’s framework of developmental assets.

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Founded in 1958, Search Institute conducts research and evaluation, develops publications and practical tools, and provides training and technical assistance to support individuals, organizations, and communities in their efforts on behalf of children and adolescents. The institute collaborates with others to promote long-term organizational and cultural change that supports the healthy development of all children and adolescents.

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Practical research benefiting children and youth


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new voice is being heard in conversations and debates about America’s youth and their future. In the not-too-distant past, mention of congregations or religion as a resource for youth development would have been rare in public discussions. Today, that’s beginning to change.

More and more people are affirming that congregations have tremendous potential for helping young people grow up healthy, principled, and caring. The challenge for congregations is to discover new ways to realize this potential.

With major support from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund, Search Institute launched the Uniting Congregations for Youth Development pilot initiative to equip congregations of all faiths to build “developmental assets” for and with youth—to provide young people with the foundation they need to be successful in life. We had no idea how far-reaching the impact would be. Today, congregations in seven pilot communities, several other communities, and numerous national religious systems and denominations have committed to making asset building the foundation for their youth agendas. We also know that countless individual churches, synagogues, and other congregations across the country have also embraced this approach to youth development.

I believe the excitement and energy around asset building reflect congregation’s discovering or reclaiming their tremendous, undertapped potential for helping young people grow up healthy, principled, and caring. This booklet presents a vision for youth work in congregations that we hope captures your imagination, gives you ideas, and motivates you to take positive steps on behalf of youth.

Peter L. Benson, Ph.D.
President
Search Institute
en and Gloria have decided to move. As they search for a new home, they look for a community committed to caring for children and families... a community that works hard to be a community... a community with strong congregations and strong schools.

As they identify some possible places, they ask local educators, business leaders, clergy, youth workers, parents, and others one question: “What is your community doing to support and care for children and families?” In most communities, they hear of a smattering of programs that are available... if you look hard enough.

Ben and Gloria’s search brings them to St. Anthony Village, Minnesota. Here, they learn about a community that has been working toward a vision for healthier youth. Unlike communities that seem consumed with worries about youth, they see a community that is enthusiastic about young people. They hear how the community has held “Villagefest” celebrations to focus attention on positive ways the community supports young people. They hear how the schools and neighborhoods are talking about what they can do. They hear how community leaders have been gathering to create a plan for “asset building.”

On further investigation, they discover that a congregation was the initial catalyst behind the vision and effort. The congregation—whose slogan is “Healthy Families for the Future”—had adopted a strategy of nurturing developmental assets as a focus for its mission with youth and families, based on Search Institute research. It had gathered a community-wide steering committee and helped to shape a community vision.

As part of the focus, the congregation sponsored a series of “Thank-You Sundays” to honor different groups who contribute to community health, including teachers, firefighters, and police officers. The congregation also wanted to sponsor an after-school program requiring a gymnasium. The search for a gymnasium space provided an ice-breaking conversation with the director of community services, which in turn led to a cooperative effort between the congregation and community services called “Teen Time,” an after-school program for 7th, 8th, and 9th graders. Community services provides the space, and the congregation provides the staff and volunteers.
Guiding and inspiring all these efforts is a community-wide vision: In May 2007, the valedictorian of St. Anthony High School’s graduating class (those children who entered kindergarten in the fall of 1994) will say: “This graduating class has reached a goal: Seventy-five percent of us have [almost all of the] assets. . . . I want to say thanks to my parents for their love and support, and also to my classmates, teachers, and other adults in this community, because it took the whole village to raise us.”

THE POWER OF ASSET BUILDING

What does that congregation and community mean by “asset building”? And what is it about this strategy that has energized and united this congregation and community, as well as many others across the country?

The concept of developmental assets grows out of research conducted by Search Institute on youth across the United States. Instead of focusing on problems (such as violence or drug use), the research focuses on 40 developmental assets—positive things young people need to grow up healthy, principled, and caring (see box on page 6). These assets are divided into two broad categories:

• **External assets**—Twenty assets come primarily from outside of young people—from families, other people, and institutions—and surround them with the support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time they need to thrive. These external assets are like the nest in which young birds are carefully nourished, nurtured, and protected as they mature and become independent.

• **Internal assets**—The other 20 assets are commitments, attitudes, values, and skills that support our youth from within. To continue our analogy, they are the wings that provide strength and skills to enable growing birds to thrive and fly.

Most people agree that these assets make intuitive sense. When they first hear about the concept of assets, they often say: “This helps me put together a lot of what I’ve been thinking and feeling. It makes so much sense!” In addition, people from many faith traditions see asset building as compatible with their theology and mission.

But are the assets really important? Do they really make a difference? Research suggests that they are and do—and that’s why so many people and organizations are joining the asset-building movement.
Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets

**Search Institute’s research has found that these 40 assets powerfully protect young people from a wide range of risky behaviors, including premature sexual activity, anti-social behavior and violence, alcohol and other drug use, and more. The more of these assets our youth have, the less likely they are to get involved in each of these problems. Furthermore, youth with these assets are more likely to make positive choices and commitments (see charts, page 8).**

Yet as important as these assets are, far too few youth in America have enough of them in their lives. Indeed, the average young per-
son we surveyed has only about 18 of the 40 assets. No wonder so many people are worried about youth: young people don’t have many of the building blocks that guide them to make healthy, positive choices.

The power of the research often motivates people to focus on asset building. In addition, assets also attract people’s energy and commitment because:

• **They give a framework**—Most congregations build assets, even though they may never think of what they do in those terms. The asset-building concept provides a framework for understanding the connections between many different emphases and efforts. It gives a focus to your congregation’s mission for youth, reducing a sense of fragmentation by helping you put the pieces together.

• **They are shared**—People with many different perspectives find that they can unite behind the assets. They form a common ground on which diverse communities can start working together toward shared values and commitments.

• **They are hopeful**—Most efforts on behalf of youth have focused on problem solving. And while there certainly is a need to solve problems, the emphasis on problems tends to drain energy. It doesn’t take long before people burn out or become frustrated. In addition, the problem-centered approach is rarely effective in promoting long-term, positive change.

Because asset building focuses on young people’s strengths, sees youth as resources, and focuses on the positive possibilities, this approach can give energy and a vision that will sustain efforts. Furthermore, this hopeful perspective is consistent with the theology of most faith traditions.

• **They are effective**—People want to do things that they believe will make a difference. They want a return on their investment of time and energy. With asset building, people easily see how they can make

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**WHAT’S DIFFERENT ABOUT ASSET BUILDING?**

When congregations adopt an asset-building perspective, it can change many things about the way they work with youth and families. Here are some ways it may be different:

**COMMON APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS YOUTH WORK**

• Program is made up of many seemingly unrelated activities without a clear mission or purpose.

• It’s often unclear what the congregation needs to do that will make a difference in youth’s lives.

• The focus is primarily on youth-to-youth relationships.

• Children and youth in the congregation are the responsibility of the youth leader, volunteers, and parents.

• Parents are only superficially involved in the youth program (providing refreshments or being informed).

• Energy is consumed by reacting to problems after they occur.

• The focus is almost exclusively on running the congregation’s own youth program.

• The youth worker is primarily a program leader, planner, and mentor for youth in the congregation.

**AN ASSET-BUILDING APPROACH TO YOUTH WORK**

• The framework helps to integrate diverse activities into a larger framework of positive outcomes.

• The framework gives concrete things the congregation can do to make a lasting difference for youth.

• The focus broadens to building intergenerational community.

• Everyone in the congregation recognizes her or his responsibility for children and youth—and her or his power to build assets.

• Parents are active partners in the youth program, through family activities and parent education.

• Energy is put into nurturing skills and values that help to avoid problems before they start.

• Congregations become committed to cooperating with others in the community.

• The youth worker also serves as a networker and voice for youth in the community.
The Importance of Increasing Assets

Nurturing assets has tremendous potential for reducing many of the problems that we worry about among youth. Based on a Search Institute study of nearly 100,000 6th- to 12th-grade youth, the following charts show that youth with more assets in their lives are much less likely to be involved in a range of at-risk behaviors, and more likely to be involved in positive, prosocial behaviors. Percentages indicate youth who reported involvement in each area.

For definitions of each behavior, see Peter Benson, All Kids Are Our Kids (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

a positive difference, creating healthier families and healthier communities.

- **They are manageable**—Asset building isn’t dependent on cumbersome bureaucratic processes. One person or one group can begin immediately. Building the 40 assets can be seen as 40 goals or priorities. Each one makes a difference, and each one builds on the other, creating more strength as the number of assets increases.

- **They empower**—Everyone can build assets, so every congregation member has a role to play. In this way, positive youth development becomes the responsibility of all members. People take creative action and make changes on their own, based on their own concerns and interests.

When you begin understanding the asset-building idea, it can refocus energy and give a new perspective for youth work (see box, page 7). In the process, it can challenge congregations to reenergize their
youth programs and develop innovative strategies to build strengths for youth in the congregation and community.

**ASSET BUILDING AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT**

While people from many faith traditions have affirmed the compatibility of asset building with their theology, some have questioned its relationship to congregations’ historical focus on spiritual development and socialization into a specific faith tradition. They worry that asset building could deflect energy from a primary focus on nurturing young people’s religious identity. Some may have a tendency to say, “Our role is to focus on the religious aspects of development and leave the rest to families and others.”

These perspectives raise important questions that are worthy of reflection and discussion among leaders, parents, and youth. Several points help clarify the issues:

- Most theological traditions affirm that religious youth work involves addressing young people’s spiritual needs in the context of their whole lives, which includes the developmental issues identified in the assets.
- Many asset-building themes are rooted in a basic philosophy of religious youth work, including the importance of relationships, caring community, intergenerational relationships, and more.
- Many asset-building strategies are also important strategies for nurturing faith. These include involvement in service, creating a warm and caring climate for youth, supporting families, developing thinking skills, developing friendship-making skills, and others. Thus asset building can actually enhance faith development efforts.
- Many faith communities already have a tradition of being at the forefront of efforts to address the well-being of young people. Asset building is a natural expression of those commitments.
- All major faith traditions seek to guide young people away from various problem behaviors, such as alcohol or other drug use, premature sexual activity, and violence. Asset building can be seen as an effective strategy to employ in addressing these issues with youth.

Of course, not all congregations have a clear commitment to developing strategies that address all aspects of young people’s development. Thus, for some, asset building can be seen as a call to reclaim or reaffirm their tradition in nurturing the development of the whole child. For others, it may be a challenge to consider an intentional focus on youth development and asset building in their programming.

**10 ASSET-BUILDING STRATEGIES FOR CONGREGATIONS**

Once you begin to see the possibilities of this new perspective for youth work, specific strategies emerge that build the assets, thus enhancing young people’s lives and futures. While each congregation is unique, here are ten strategies to begin the process.

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*See Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *The Teaching Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993)."
1. **Assess current needs and programs**—As you begin thinking about how asset building might fit into your congregation, assess young people’s needs and how they are being addressed through your congregation. Use the framework to evaluate existing programs—religious education, parent support, youth group, outreach, worship experiences, and other opportunities—and to begin identifying possibilities for innovative strategies. Also celebrate and strengthen congregational efforts that already nurture assets. Use the checklist on page 11 as a tool in your assessment.

2. **Build a shared vision**—Asset building can be particularly powerful in helping to shape a vision that gives focus and direction to youth work. When youth, parents, volunteers, congregational leaders (including clergy and the congregation’s governing body), and other members all have a role in shaping your vision, it can unite and energize the whole congregation. Then, with vision in place, you can develop the concrete strategies that will move the congregation closer to that vision.

3. **Create awareness and commitment**—All members in a congregation may not lead the youth group or go on retreats, but they do influence young people’s asset base. As adults accept responsibility for asset building, the congregation can truly become a place where young people are nurtured by the entire community of faith.

   Get out the message that **everyone** is an asset builder, and encourage members to make personal commitments to some kind of asset building. Do this by:
   - Placing articles and announcements in newsletters, worship bulletins, bulletin boards, and special mailings.
   - Talking about the ideas with the congregation’s governing body and the planning group for youth activities.
   - Sharing the ideas in adult and youth education classes and groups.
   - Having a special event or retreat to create a shared vision for asset building.

   In addition to building a general commitment to asset building, identify or form a group that will take the lead in assuring that your asset-building strategies move forward. Though an existing committee may be able to serve in this role, it may be more effective to form a special asset-building team of people who are eager to move the vision forward. Include leaders, parents, youth, older members, and representatives of other subgroups in the congregation.

4. **Nurture the support assets**—Congregations have great potential for building the support assets by nurturing positive relationships in families, with peers, with younger children, and with adults of all ages. Indeed, most faith traditions see creating a caring, affirming place for young people as central to their mission.

   However, too often the focus in youth work has been on developing relationships within a youth group and only with those few adults who commit themselves to working with youth. Others in the congregation may rarely see—much less talk with—young people. Too often, youth don’t experience the community of care that congregations could offer.

   Thus, it is vital to break down the barriers that tend to isolate youth. To do this will require promoting a youth-friendly environment in which adults know the names of youth, talk and listen to youth, and engage in activities with youth.

   A goal might be for every child and adolescent in the congregation to have a sustained relationship with at least two non-parent adults in the congregation from age 5 to age 18. These relationships might be fostered by providing opportunities for

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**USING THE CHECKLIST**

The worksheet on page 11 can be used for personal reflection or with youth and adults to develop a shared vision for asset building.

1. Identify how important you think each strategy ought to be for your congregation’s work with youth (1 = not important; 5 = top priority).

2. Evaluate how well your congregation nurtures each element of an asset-building characteristic or strategy (1 = not well at all; 5 = very well).

3. Think about ways you can focus more energy on the strategies that are most important to you, yet are not effectively addressed (i.e., the ones with the largest difference between the two columns).
### Identifying Asset-Building Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSET-BUILDING STRATEGIES</th>
<th>HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK THIS OUGHT TO BE? (1=NOT IMPORTANT; 5=TOP PRIORITY)</th>
<th>HOW WELL DO WE DO NOW? (1=NOT WELL AT ALL; 5=VERY WELL)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ASSESS CURRENT NEEDS AND PROGRAMS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowing and celebrating what is currently being done to build assets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having a clear sense of the needs of youth in the congregation and community.</td>
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<td>2. BUILD A SHARED VISION</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing a clear vision for children and youth programs that blends promoting assets with spiritual development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involving many people in shaping the congregation’s asset-building vision.</td>
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<td>3. CREATE AWARENESS AND COMMITMENT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating the vision for asset building to all members.</td>
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<td>Having many members who intentionally seek to build assets among youth.</td>
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<td>Involving youth in identifying priorities and developing action plans for asset building.</td>
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<td>4. NURTURE SUPPORT ASSETS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building sustained relationships between adults and youth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nurturing caring relationships among youth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building sustained relationships between teenagers and children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nurturing a youth-friendly environment throughout the congregation.</td>
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<td>5. EMPOWER YOUTH THROUGH SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP</td>
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<td>Engaging every young person, ages 5 to 18, in at least one service activity per year.</td>
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<td>Integrating youth as leaders throughout the congregation.</td>
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<td>Helping everyone in the congregation see youth as positive resources.</td>
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<td>6. INVOLVE YOUTH IN CONSTRUCTIVE ACTIVITIES</td>
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<td>Connecting all 6th- to 12th-grade youth to a weekly program.</td>
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<td>Providing social opportunities for youth and their friends.</td>
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<td>Providing a safe place where youth can gather after school.</td>
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<td>7. ARTICULATE AND NURTURE POSITIVE VALUES</td>
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<tr>
<td>As a congregation, articulating core values to pass on to the younger generations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educating the congregation and community regarding these commonly held values.</td>
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<td>8. DEVELOP SOCIAL COMPETENCIES AND POSITIVE IDENTITY</td>
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<td>Provide opportunities for youth to lead and make decisions within the congregation.</td>
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<td>Intentionally building life skills through education programs.</td>
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<td>9. EDUCATE AND SUPPORT PARENTS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nurturing parents’ skills in areas of asset building and spiritual development.</td>
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<td>Providing opportunities for families to serve others together.</td>
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<td>Supporting parents by building relationships among families and across generations.</td>
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<td>10. REACH OUT TO THE COMMUNITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing strategies for reaching out to unconnected youth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working with other clergy and youth workers to promote positive opportunities for youth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting community efforts to nurture healthy youth through strong schools, strong parks and recreation programs, enforcement of alcohol laws, and so on.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serving as a partner in or a catalyst for a community-wide asset-building initiative.</td>
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adults and youth to share meals, do service projects side by side, participate in sports and music together, worship together, and share congregational leadership.

In addition to fostering positive relationships in general, congregations can introduce programs that are specifically designed to nurture intergenerational relationships. These might include:
- Regular intergenerational programs (educational events, choir, plays, etc.).
- Intergenerational social activities and festivals (softball games, picnics, etc.).
- Intentional efforts to engage all ages in worship experiences.
- Formal mentoring programs that match youth with adults for long-term, intentional relationship building.
- Peer-helping programs in which youth learn skills to provide care and support to each other.
- Opportunities for youth to relate to children in leadership and caring roles.

5. **Empower youth through service and leadership**—Because of their commitment to service to others, most congregations already involve young people in service projects. In addition to the benefit to people being served, these opportunities can be instrumental in the healthy development of youth, particularly in nurturing in young people caring values, commitments, and skills.

Because service involvement can be a powerful asset-building strategy, a goal for congregations might be to engage every young person—ages 5 to 18—in at least one service project each year. At the same time, these efforts should involve opportunities for youth to interact with caring adults as they work side by side.*

In addition, a shift to an asset-building approach includes integrating young people into the leadership of the congregation. Involving youth as leaders builds important skills and competencies in young people, gives them a sense of real ownership of their programs and the congregation, and provides the congregation with new energy, ideas, and enthusiasm.

6. **Involve youth in high-quality, constructive activities**—In 1992, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development drew national attention to the fact that about 40 percent of young adolescents’ waking hours are discretionary. In too many cases, the free time provides opportunities for experimenting with and developing negative behaviors—particularly when young people live in places that are unsafe or have few constructive opportunities.**

Congregations have great potential for meeting young people’s need for constructive activities. Efforts should be made to connect all 6th- to 12th-grade youth with a weekly program, paying particular attention to maintaining involvement through high school. Congregations can provide:
- Safe, positive places to spend time after school or in the evenings, particularly if the congregation is in a unsafe neighborhood.
- Opportunities for recreation, athletics, or socializing with friends (both those within the congregation as well as others they might invite to participate).
- Opportunities for youth to build skills (for example, through computer training), enhance their education (through tutoring), and nourish their creativity (through music, theater, or other arts).

7. **Articulate and nurture positive values**—While schools and other nonsectarian youth organizations often shy away from discussions of values, shaping values is at the core of the congregation’s mission. By articulating and nurturing positive values (such as compassion, honesty, equality, respect, and responsibility), congregations help provide a foundation for many of the life choices young people will make.

Though articulating values may be an obvious task for congregations, it can also be a difficult one. Many congregations may assume shared values among youth and adults, only to discover divisiveness when those values are clearly articulated. However, the process of gaining clarity will have important benefits to young people, parents, and other adults.

8. **Develop social competencies and positive identity**—Young people need a set of social competencies or life skills to thrive. These include being able to make good decisions, being comfortable with people who are different, knowing how to make friends, having high self-esteem, and


having a sense of hope and purpose. Congregations have opportunities to build these competencies, particularly if intentional efforts are made. Some approaches that can make a difference include:

- Involving youth in challenging leadership positions in the youth program and congregation where they practice decision-making and assertiveness skills.
- Providing a caring, supportive, and affirming climate that nurtures a positive self-image.
- Building friendship-making skills (and other competencies) into religious education classes, youth group meetings, retreats, and other youth programs.
- Emphasizing the hopeful dimensions in the congregation’s faith tradition.

Building social competencies and a sense of identity may be particularly important in communities where young people have fewer opportunities to develop these skills—and where some skills may be particularly critical. For example, Cass Community Church in Detroit developed a series of four retreats to help youth discover alternatives to violence. By participating in the program, young people examined their own attitudes toward violence, looked at the role of violence in the world, studied nonviolence, and developed their own strategies for addressing violence in their schools and community.*

9. Educate and support parents—While it is true that everyone in a community has responsibility for raising young people, the family is the primary shaping influence. Congregations have unique access to families, since they maintain ongoing contact with many parents who often look to the faith community for education, guidance, and support.

### WHY JOIN WITH OTHERS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

Linking with other sectors in the community and with community-wide initiatives takes time and effort, and congregational leaders already have plenty of other things to do. Why add something else? Here are some benefits such an approach brings both to the congregation and the community.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>WHAT CONGREGATIONS CAN GAIN FROM COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT</th>
<th>WHAT THE COMMUNITY CAN GAIN FROM CONGREGATIONS’ INVOLVEMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMMITMENT TO SERVICE—All major faith traditions include a commitment to serve others. Reaching out to build assets for the community’s youth (particularly those most vulnerable) can be a significant and lasting outreach. (VALUE)</td>
<td>COMPASSION—Congregations are filled with many willing and motivated hearts and hands that want to make a difference—and that can be mobilized effectively. (VALUE)</td>
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<td>CONNECTION—Connecting with teachers, youth workers, city leaders, social service agencies, and other residents can help you identify resources for the young people and families in your congregation, while also providing opportunities for personal support and professional growth.</td>
<td>COMMUNITY—Congregations model intergenerational community in action. Congregations can provide settings where children and youth can learn from an older generation’s wisdom and values. (VALUE)</td>
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<td>COORDINATION—A common complaint is that different sectors in a community don’t know what others are doing, so conflicts in schedules and priorities inevitably emerge. Partnerships can ease some of these problems.</td>
<td>CONTACT—More parents and other adults are involved in congregations than in any other institution in a community. Congregations can access these adults to bring them onto the asset-building team.</td>
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<td>COMMUNITY CLIMATE—As more and more sectors in a community adopt the asset-building vision, the whole community is strengthened, creating a better place for all youth and families, including those in your congregation.</td>
<td>CLARITY—The congregation appropriately provides an ongoing safe place for people to test, reflect on, and articulate their values.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLOUT—Joining with people in other sectors can heighten your congregation’s visibility and influence in the community.</td>
<td>CATALYST—As congregational energy and excitement build around asset building, the energy becomes contagious to others in the community.</td>
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<td>CREDIBILITY—In many communities, congregations maintain an important leadership role. Their support of an asset-building vision can be important in gaining support for the efforts.</td>
<td>CREDIBILITY</td>
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Unfortunately, too few congregations do an effective job of involving, equipping, and empowering parents. A study of mainline Protestant congregations by Search Institute found that only 10 percent of those congregations offer regular parent education.

However, some congregations—like Beth El Synagogue in Minneapolis—have made family support a focal point for youth programming. The congregation regularly offers workshops and study sessions for parents. It also sponsors mini-retreats for families. As a result, parents are highly motivated and supportive of the overall youth program.

By strengthening parents’ abilities to build assets in their families, congregations can have a tremendous and lasting impact on young people. Several strategies may be appropriate:

- Providing educational and support groups for parents in which they examine their own parenting, explore developmental issues, and support each other in their parenting roles.
- Emphasizing family involvement (youth and adults together) in service projects in the community.
- Offering opportunities for youth and parents to talk together within the context of the congregation (in classes, retreats, or other settings).
- Distributing videos, audiotapes, and printed resources parents can use at home.
- Building support networks that include people from multiple generations for parents to depend on, particularly in times of crisis or stress.

10. Reach out to the community—In addition to reshaping the congregation’s work with youth, an asset-building vision challenges your congregation to reach into your community to create a healthier place for all youth. Building bridges can happen on many levels. You can . . .

- Advocate with and on behalf of youth when public issues that affect their lives need to be addressed. This might include support for education, employment opportunities, health services, recreation and arts activities, and other positive opportunities.
- Connect with congregations of many faith traditions to nurture a shared commitment to asset building. Building relationships can open doors for joint training, support, programming, and advocacy.

- Network with secular youth workers and educators to develop mutual respect and a shared understanding of asset building and to pool resources.
- Develop strategies for reaching youth who are not connected to congregations or other positive socializing systems in the community. These young people are often the most vulnerable youth in communities, yet they are often the youth for whom the least is available.
- Join existing community-wide efforts by sitting on task forces or vision teams. Work together to identify priorities and establish strategies for many sectors in the city or town.
- Initiate community-wide efforts if your community isn’t already involved in asset building. This role might begin with convening community influencers and other residents to learn about asset building and explore possibilities. Then the congregation might provide ongoing coordination to see the vision begin to turn into concrete action.

RENEWED COMMITMENT

As American society has become more pluralistic, the influence of the religious sector has diminished in many communities throughout the nation. Too often, congregations are reluctant to work with other sectors for fear of compromising their priorities or values. Too often, congregations are not seen as resources for youth in their communities. Too often, the religious community is ignored in discussions of youth issues. And too often, congregations don’t make it a priority to work with others in the community.

These realities represent real challenges. But as congregations and other institutions in communities discover a new, positive vision for asset building, communities have the opportunity to commit to working through differences toward a shared vision for young people. When that begins to occur, the faith community will rediscover and begin to tap its tremendous potential for leading communities toward a hopeful future for youth in the congregation, the community, and the nation.
Building Assets in Congregations
A Practical Guide for Helping Youth Grow Up Healthy
This in-depth practical guide offers a discussion of developmental assets, an easy planning guide for creating an asset-building congregation, and worksheets, strategies, and ideas for infusing assets into youth programs, work with families, congregation-wide activities, and work in the broader community.

A Foundation for Success
Video and Leader's Guide
This motivational and educational video offers ideas and examples from all faith traditions on how asset building can be integrated into the activities and life of a congregation.

Building Assets Together
135 Group Activities for Helping Youth Succeed
This book gives creative, easy-to-use activities to introduce developmental assets to youth. It includes 94 interactive group activities for 6th- to 12th-graders, and 41 attractive, reproducible worksheets that help youth understand their own assets.

What Kids Need to Succeed
Proven, Practical Ways to Raise Good Kids
What Kids Need to Succeed introduces the 40 assets and shows practical and specific ways everyone can build each of the assets. It includes more than 900 commonsense ideas for building assets at home, in the congregation, at school, and in the community, and offers checklists to help parents and others identify the assets of their own young people.

All Kids Are Our Kids
What Communities Must Do to Raise Caring and Responsible Children and Adolescents
In his book, Peter L. Benson presents a comprehensive vision of what children and adolescents need to grow up healthy and what everyone in a community must do to build this foundation for healthy development. Included is a complete description of 40 developmental assets and practical steps for creating an asset-building community.

Ideas for Parents
Newsletter Master Set
This set of 50 newsletter masters is designed for schools, community groups, or other organizations to copy and distribute to parents. It focuses practical tips on how parents can help their children grow into responsible, successful adults. Master set includes a users guide with an overview of each newsletter and helpful suggestions for customizing, promoting, and distributing the series.

Note: This product is not intended for individual sale.

These and other resources and services on asset building are available from:

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