

40 ASSETS

By Ashley Young

The Power of a Program Called 40 Assets

One of the goals of every Christian youth group should be to bring students to a closer relationship with Christ, and to help them to more accurately reflect God's image. To strive towards a reflection of God, students must first have a firm foundation of values. In youth ministry the goal is to make lifelong, mature disciples. Search Institute, a company based out of Minneapolis, Minnesota, says that there are forty opportunities, skills, relationships, values, and self-perceptions that all young people need in order to succeed as persons. In this paper we will take a brief look at those forty assets and suggest some ways to integrate them into a youth group and to help youth to maturity.

The Forty Developmental Assets are categorized in two ways – external assets and internal assets. External assets are then divided into four categories: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time.

The first category, support, has six assets: family support, positive family communication, other adult relationships, caring neighborhood, caring school climate, and parent involvement in schooling.

The second category, empowerment, has four assets: community values youth, youth as resources, service to others, and safety.

The third category, boundaries and expectation, contains six assets: family boundaries, school boundaries, neighborhood boundaries, adult role models, positive peer influence, and high expectations.

The fourth category, constructive use of time, contains four assets: creative activities, youth programs, religious community, and time at home.

The internal assets are also categorized into four categories: commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity.

In the first category, commitment to learning, there are five assets: achievement motivation, school engagement, homework, bonding to school, and reading for pleasure.

The second category, positive values, contains six assets: caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and restraint.

The third category, social competencies, contains five assets: planning and decision making, interpersonal competence, cultural competence, resistance skills, and peaceful conflict resolution.

The fourth and final category, positive identity, contains four assets: personal power, self-esteem, sense of purpose, and positive view of personal future.

Once a youth group leader has gained an understanding of these assets, they can put that knowledge to use. The first step is to discuss it with the youth group and ask the youth to identify whether or not they experience each of the assets. It is interesting to see which assets are experienced the most and which are experienced the least. In the youth that the Search Institute surveyed, less than 30% said that they experienced the assets of parent involvement in schooling, planning and decision making, adult role models, positive family communications, caring school climate, youth as resources, reading for pleasure and community values youth. The lowest was creative activities with only 19% of those surveyed experiencing it.

More than 60% of those surveyed said that they experienced assets such as responsibility, positive peer influence, honesty, achievement motivation, integrity, school engagement, religious community, and family support. The highest was positive view of personal future, with 70% saying that they experience that asset.

Opposite of the forty assets are developmental deficits. Developmental deficits are described in Peter L. Benson's *All Kids Are Our Kids: What Communities Must Do to Raise Caring and Responsible Children and Adolescents* as "negative influences or realities in young people's lives that make it more difficult for them to develop in healthy, caring, and productive ways. They are liabilities that may not do permanent harm but make harm more possible."

There are five main deficits that the Forty Asset study identifies. They are: drinking parties, being alone at home, victim of violence, TV overexposure, and physical abuse. In the youth who were surveyed, drinking parties were the most popular deficit, with 51 % of youth saying that they attended one or more parties in the past year where other kids their age were drinking. The lowest number of reported experienced deficits is physical abuse, with 29% of youth surveyed saying that they experience it.

There are also ten high-risk behavior patterns that include: problem alcohol use, tobacco use, illicit drug use, sexual intercourse, depression and suicide, antisocial behavior, violence, school problems, driving and alcohol, and gambling. Of those surveyed, youth reported that they experienced violence the most (33%) and sexual intercourse the least (18%).

The deficit numbers drastically decrease with the higher number of assets that youth experience. According to the findings of Peter Benson, 33% of youth with 0-10 reported assets have sexual intercourse, while only 3% of youth with 31-40 assets have sexual intercourse. Over 60% of youth with 0-10 assets experience violence while only 6% of youth reporting 31-40 assets experience violence. Youth with more assets also stay healthier. Only 25% of youth with 0-10 assets report good health while 88% of youth with 31-40 assets report good health. Only 7% of youth with 0-10 assets report success in school while 53% of youth with 31-40 assets report success in school. Also, less than 70% of youth with 0-10 assets report that they help others while 96% of youth with 31-40 assets report that they help others.

It's obvious that the benefits of these assets to youth are huge. It may seem that assets with this much potential to make a positive impact on youth must be incredibly hard to integrate into a youth group. Actually there are quite a few easy ways to integrate the 40 assets into a program. *Pass It On! 150 Tip Sheets for Asset Builders* has a list of ways to integrate assets into a youth group. I will list ten of them here.

- 1** Post the list of assets in key, high-traffic areas throughout your congregation's building.
- 2** Educate congregational staff and lay leaders – in addition to the congregation at large – about asset building. Discuss the implications that asset building has for your congregation, and brainstorm ideas together.
- 3** Create a book study group that gives children, youth, and adults opportunities to read and reflect on books with asset-building teams.
- 4** Reinforce positive values and morals. Talk with young people about why these are an important part of your faith tradition.
- 5** Plan ways for families and other intergenerational groups to spend time together, such as having a weekly or monthly meal, picnics, dances, concerts, or sports tournaments.

- 6 Integrate asset building into worship in ways that fit with the specifics of your faith tradition. Create worship experiences for entire families. Think about how to include children and youth.
- 7 If your community has an asset-building initiative, get involved. If there isn't an initiative, take a leadership role in getting one started.
- 8 Provide responsible, meaningful roles for youth. These could include being teaching assistants for young children, volunteering for child care, and pledging financial support from their allowances and part-time jobs; as well as worship activities, such as handing out bulletins, serving as readers of liturgies, and being involved in music or other aspects of worship.
- 9 Collaborate with other congregations and youth-based organizations to learn about and build assets.
- 10 Provide opportunities for young people to volunteer in the community. Afterward, discuss the experience from your faith perspective.

While the previous ten examples of how to integrate the 40 assets into a youth program are helpful, I would think that a youth pastor would have to go beyond these to a different realm – the realm of parents and significant adults. If wishing to start incorporating the 40 Assets into a youth ministry, the youth pastor should educate the church, the parents, and as many in the community who are willing to learn. If assets are worked on in many different aspects of an individual's life, and encouraged by many different people, the program will work so much better! If the parents are educated about the assets and their importance and how to work on them at home, youth would have help developing the assets in more categories of their lives. An adolescent's parents and family have a tremendous impact on him or her, and if the purpose and information of the 40 Assets could inspire the parents to be involved, even more success would be evident in the lives of youth.

Surveys show that experiencing the 40 Assets does make a difference in the lives of youth, and looking at the youth of today it is fairly easy to identify which youth experience higher levels of the 40 Assets. If youth consciously strive to experience more of the assets the evidence will appear in their everyday lives. The 40 Assets are a foundation that, once laid, could change the entire youth group. By experiencing more assets, youth will be changed as well, and will gain values and principles that they can build on and appreciate for the rest of their lives.

Works Cited:

Pass It On! 150 Tip Sheets for Asset Builders, copyright 1999 by Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN.

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