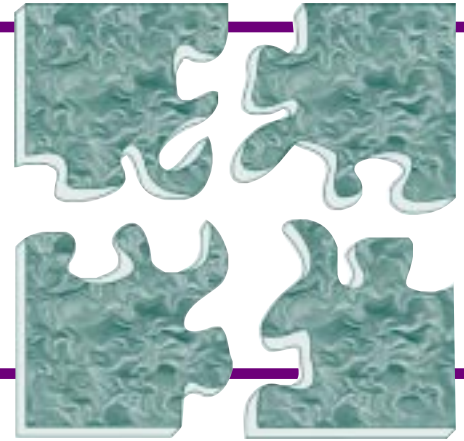


# BEST PRACTICE BRIEFS



## PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

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OUTREACH  
PARTNERSHIPS

MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY

## VALIDATING THE ASSETS APPROACH TO ACHIEVING GOOD OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

*Starting with the survey work of the Search Institute, communities have turned to the conscious development of assets in youth as a way to support positive outcomes and reduce risky behaviors. Developing assets in youth involves two primary components: (1) positive relationships with adults and (2) opportunities that facilitate the acquisition of values, skills, and competencies.*

*This **BRIEF** summarizes Search Institute data on developmental assets in more detail than was presented in previous **BRIEFS**. Then, as a way of assessing the rationale for conscious attention to the development of assets, this **BRIEF** reviews evidence from other-than-correlational research that validates the assets approach to positive developmental outcomes for children and youth.*

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF ASSETS AND RISKY BEHAVIORS

Using self-report surveys of middle school and high school youth, Search Institute has made visible to communities the extent to which their adolescents identify the presence or absence in their lives of 40 developmental assets. (See page 2-3 for an outline of the 40 assets.) This information is significant to communities: Search Institute analysis of data<sup>1</sup> has shown that the number of assets that an adolescent reports is correlated with the presence or absence of risky behaviors, as well as the absence or presence of thriving indicators:

More assets → fewer risky behaviors (e.g., violence, anti-social behavior, substance use, drinking and driving, depression, gambling, sexual intercourse)

- An adolescent with a high number of assets will tend to engage in few or no risky behaviors.
- An adolescent with few assets will tend to engage in many risky behaviors.

<sup>1</sup> From their initial surveys of more than 250,000 adolescents in grades 6 through 12.

# SEARCH INSTITUTE'S FORTY ASSETS

## EXTERNAL ASSETS

### ADULT SUPPORT

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Family support                | Family life provides high levels of love and support.  |
| 2. Positive family communication | Youth and parent(s) communicate positively; youth willing to seek parent's advice and counsel. |
| 3. Other adult relationships     | Youth receives support from 3 or more non-parent adults.                                       |
| 4. Caring neighborhood           | Youth experiences caring neighbors.  |
| 5. Caring school climate         | School provides a caring, encouraging environment.   |
| 6. Parent involvement in school  | Parent(s) are actively involved in helping youth succeed in school.                            |

### EMPOWERMENT

- |                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| 7. Community values youth | perceives that adults in community value youth. |
| 8. Youth as resources     | is given useful roles in the community.         |
| 9. Service to others      | serves in community 1 hour or more per week.    |
| 10. Safety                | feels safe at home, school and in neighborhood. |

### YOUNG PERSON

### BOUNDARIES AND EXPECTATIONS

- |                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 11. Family boundaries       | Family has clear rules and consequences, and monitors youth's whereabouts. |
| 12. School boundaries       | School provides clear rules and consequences.                              |
| 13. Neighborhood boundaries | Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring youths' behavior.             |
| 14. Adult role models       | Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.           |
| 15. Positive peer influence | Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.                    |
| 16. High expectations       | Both parent(s) and teachers encourage youth to do well.                    |

### CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 17. Creative activities | spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater or other arts.       |
| 18. Youth programs      | spends 3 or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community. |
| 19. Religious community | spends 1 or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.                         |
| 20. Time at home        | is out with friends "with nothing special to do" 2 or fewer nights per week.                      |

### YOUNG PERSON

## SEARCH INSTITUTE'S FORTY ASSETS

### INTERNAL ASSETS

#### COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

21. Achievement motivation
22. School engagement
23. Homework
24. Bonding to school
25. Reading for pleasure

#### YOUNG PERSON

- is motivated to do well at school.  
is actively engaged in learning.  
reports doing at least 1 hour of homework every school day.  
cares about her or his school.  
reads for pleasure 3 or more hours per week.

#### POSITIVE VALUES

26. Caring
27. Equality and social justice
28. Integrity
29. Honesty
30. Responsibility
31. Restraint

#### YOUNG PERSON

- places high value on helping other people.  
places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.  
acts on convictions and stands up for his or her rights.  
tells the truth even when it is not easy.  
accepts and takes personal responsibility.  
believes it important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.

#### SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

32. Planning and decision making
33. Interpersonal competence
34. Cultural competence
35. Resistance skills
36. Peaceful conflict resolution

#### YOUNG PERSON

- knows how to plan ahead and make choices  
has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.  
has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.  
can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.  
seeks to resolve conflict non-violently.

#### POSITIVE IDENTITY

37. Personal power
38. Self-esteem
39. Sense of purpose
40. Positive view of future

#### YOUNG PERSON

- feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me”.  
reports having a high self-esteem.  
reports that “my life has a purpose”.  
is optimistic about his or her personal future.

More assets → more thriving (identified by Search Institute as school success, leadership, helping others, physical health, delay of gratification, valuing diversity, and overcoming adversity).

Search Institute surveys also identified that

- Boys have fewer assets than girls, and engage in more risky behaviors.
- Risky behaviors are present in clusters.
- Violent behaviors decrease from grade 6 through grade 12, but involvement with alcoholism, drugs and sex increase.

A community that takes action to increase the number of developmental assets for its youth will have fewer youth who evidence risky behaviors and more youth who thrive, according to Search Institute.

## HIGH RISK BEHAVIORS BY NUMBER OF ASSETS FOR ADOLESCENTS

PERCENT IN EACH ASSETS CATEGORY  
ENGAGING IN THE HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOR

	NUMBER OF ASSETS:			
	<u>0-10</u>	<u>11-20</u>	<u>21-30</u>	<u>31-40</u>
<b>VIOLENCE</b> 3 or more acts of fighting, hitting, injuring a person, carrying or using a weapon, threatening physical harm in past year	61%	35%	16%	6%
<b>USE OF ALCOHOL</b> 3 or more times in last month or got drunk once or more in past two weeks	53	30	13	3
<b>ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR</b> 3 or more incidents of shoplifting, trouble with police, or vandalism in past year	52	23	7	1
<b>USE OF TOBACCO</b> 1 or more cigarettes every day	45	21	6	1
<b>SCHOOL PROBLEMS</b> Skipped school 2 or more days in the past month and/or has below a C average	43	19	7	2
<b>DRINKING AND DRIVING</b> Has driven after drinking or ridden with a drinking driver 3 or more times in the past year	42	24	19	4
<b>USE OF ILLICIT DRUGS</b> 3 or more times in past year	42	19	6	1
<b>DEPRESSION/SUICIDE</b> Frequently depressed or has attempted suicide	40	25	13	4
<b>GAMBLING</b> 3 or more times in the past year	34	23	13	5
<b>SEXUAL INTERCOURSE</b> 3 or more times in lifetime	33	21	10	3

Unpublished Search Institute data, 1996-97, for 99,462 sixth to twelfth grade students in 118 communities. Adapted from Scales and Leffert, p. 8.

## THE EVIDENCE FOR THE ASSETS APPROACH

As communities embark on the process of consciously developing the identified assets in their youth, skeptics raise the question: “How do you know that this effort will pay off? What is the evidence?”

The research from which Search Institute initially derived the 40 assets is documented in overwhelming detail in a book entitled *Developmental Assets*.<sup>2</sup> For each asset, research studies are cited to document its relevance in positive youth development, indicating the associations with other assets as well as outcomes.

Many of the research studies cited are correlational—they compare adolescents **without** high-risk behaviors to adolescents **with** high-risk behaviors. This research shows that at the point in time at which data was gathered, the presence or absence of certain characteristics (assets) was associated with the absence or presence of certain behaviors. A correlation implies a relationship but does not prove that one factor (assets) causes the other factor (lack of risky behavior). To the skeptic (and from a strictly research perspective), the conclusion that “...and therefore, if we develop these assets, we will have fewer children indulging in high risk behavior” is not justified and may appear to be an unwarranted act of faith.

So, what evidence is there that good outcomes will result if a community consciously promotes a high level of the 40 developmental assets for their youth?

The answers may be found in three types of research that identify other-than-correlational relationships between assets and behavior:

- **Longitudinal research** follows a cohort over a period of years, documenting the life circumstances that maintain or change their life course.
- **Ethnographic research** draws conclusions from an in-depth study of the life course of a few individuals.
- **Intervention research** applies an intervention to a group with unwanted behaviors and identifies outcomes.

These research findings can give us clues by documenting change over time in relation to the assets identified by Search Institute. Of particular interest are those

situations where the development of assets for high-risk children or adolescents changed their trajectory toward a positive outcome.

## LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH

Longitudinal studies follow a cohort of children or adolescents over a period of time, into adulthood or at least to the period of school completion, in order to identify the circumstances associated with good or poor outcomes. Although longitudinal studies do not provide information on the presence or absence of all of the 40 assets, they represent significant validating data for some of the factors that change the outcomes for high-risk children.

## THE CHILDREN OF KAUAI

The most significant of these longitudinal studies, undertaken by Emily Werner and Ruth Smith,<sup>3</sup> documents the life course of a low-income cohort on the island of Kauai, Hawaii, from birth through age 32. Werner and Smith’s documented outcomes were three-fold: school success/completion and employment, avoidance of delinquency, and avoidance of mental dysfunction.

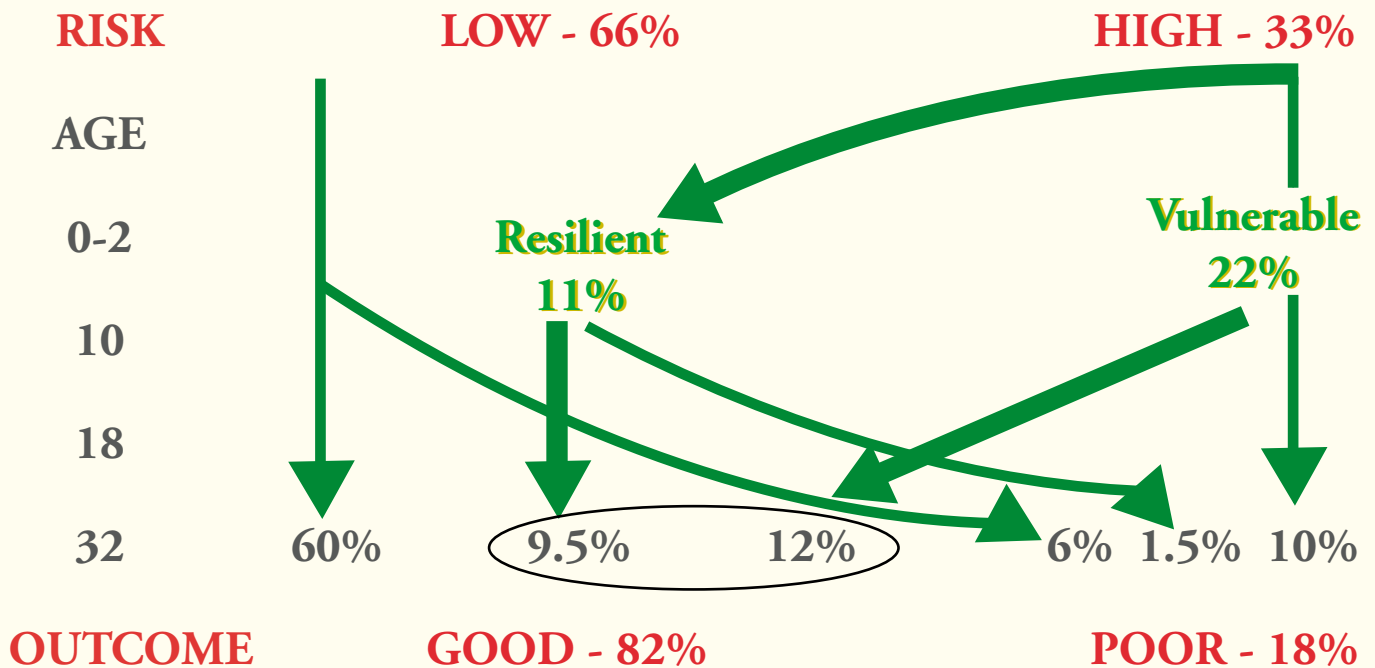
Their conclusions:

- A child’s risk for poor outcomes was increased by
  - health and physical characteristics resulting from birth complications.
  - dysfunctional family factors, e.g., parental mental illness or alcoholism, low education, chronic discord, chronic poverty, multiple stressors.
  - lack of parental support, e.g., separation from caregiver during infancy; parents absent during adolescence.

<sup>2</sup> P.C. Scales & N. Leffert, (1999), *Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development*, Minneapolis: Search Institute.

<sup>3</sup> E.E. Werner and R.S. Smith, (1992), *Overcoming the Odds: High Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. This longitudinal study is one of the progenitors for the risk and resiliency approach to youth development and prevention programming, of which the Search Institute approach is an offshoot. See also: E.E. Werner and R.S. Smith, (1982), *Vulnerable but Invincible: A Longitudinal Study of Resilient Children and Youth*, New York: McGraw Hill.

## LIFE TRAJECTORIES AND OUTCOMES FOR 1955 BIRTH COHORT, ISLAND OF KAUAI



Derived from Werner, E.E. & Smith, R.S. (1992). *Overcoming the Odds: High Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

■ Despite this, **two-thirds of these high-risk children** experienced good outcomes. These children had the following characteristics:

■ **adult support:** positive nurturing during the first two years and ongoing support during childhood—often from siblings, relatives and adults in the community and school. Parental support was facilitated by a delay in the birth of the next child.

*See Assets: 1- Family support, 3- Other adult relationships, 4- Caring neighborhood, 5- Caring school climate.*

■ **boundaries and expectations:** if not from parents, from the school, providing structure, discipline, and high expectations. *See Assets: 11- Family boundaries, 12- School boundaries, 16- High expectations.*

■ **a responsible role:** in the family and the school.

*See Asset: 8- Youth as resources.*

■ **activities and opportunities for growth** resulting in the development of **problem-solving skills, self-esteem, a sense of purpose, and expectations for the future.** The school was key in this as were opportunities to join the armed forces or to seek higher education.

*See Assets: 17- Creative activities, 18- Youth programs, 19- Religious community, 32- Planning and decision making, 38- Self-esteem, 39- Sense of purpose, 40- Positive view of personal future.*

■ **ability to detach from a dysfunctional family.**

## OTHER LONGITUDINAL STUDIES

Other research following cohorts over time corroborate or add to this information.

- **Adolescents in London High Schools.** Rutter<sup>4</sup> undertook a longitudinal study of adolescents from low-income neighborhoods in London. He found that schools with **responsive teachers, high expectations, and opportunities for students to take responsibility** had students with positive behavior, consistent attendance, and scholastic attainment. He found that delinquent behavior was a function of the number of low performing students in the school. This study reinforces the significance of context in shaping behavior.<sup>5</sup>

*See Assets: 5- School climate, 8- Youth as resources, 12- School boundaries, 15- Positive peer influence, 30- Responsibility.*

- **Non-Delinquent, Low-Income Males.** Vaillant<sup>6</sup> followed a cohort born in the early '30s and living in high crime neighborhoods in Boston, from age 14 to age 47. He found that mental health and career success in adulthood were related to
  - **higher IQ**
  - **childhood experiences that facilitated the development of trust, autonomy, and initiative**
  - **part-time jobs, household chores**
  - **school achievement**
  - **extracurricular participation**
  - **opportunities** offered by military service and the GI bill to learn skills and competencies

*See Assets: 1- Parental support, 8- Youth as resources, 18- Youth programs, 22- School engagement, 32 to 36- Social competencies.*

- **Adult Women Reared in Foster Care.** Among a group of women whose childhood experiences in foster care would characteristically place them at risk for poor marital and parenting outcomes, Rutter and Quinton's follow-up study<sup>7</sup> identified some who had a supportive spouse and exhibited good parenting skills. These women had had **positive school experiences in academic subjects or in sports, drama, arts** that enabled them to acquire a **sense of their own worth** and of their **ability to control what happened to them.** As a result they exercised **planning** in the choice of their husbands.

*See Assets: 17- Creative activities, 18- Youth programs, 22- School engagement, 32- Planning and decision making, 37- Personal power, 38- Self-esteem.*

## ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES

Ethnographic studies explore intensively the situation and outcomes of one or more individuals in an effort to understand the experiences and dynamics that have led to particular outcomes.

## VIOLENT BOYS

Garbarino's intensive interview-study<sup>8</sup> of violent incarcerated young men, identifying the deficits in their life histories, led him to suggest eight lines of defense against the development of violent behavior in youth:

- home visiting for high risk families during pregnancy and infancy
- promoting positive parenting practices
- intervention to deal with attachment problems
- high quality early childhood education
- early intervention in response to bad behavior and aggression
- violence prevention programs in the schools
- character education
- peer mediation and conflict resolution.

*These suggestions are related to Assets: 1- Family support, 2- Positive family communication, 5- Caring school climate, 11- Family boundaries, 12- School boundaries, 16- High expectations, 26- Caring, 28- Integrity, 29- Honesty, 30- Responsibility, 31- Restraint, 32- Planning and decision making, 36- Peaceful conflict resolution.*

<sup>4</sup> M. Rutter, (1979/80), *Changing Youth in a Changing Society: Patterns of Adolescent Development and Disorder*, London: Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust /Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>5</sup> See M. Gladwell, (2000), *The Tipping Point*, New York: Little, Brown and Company.

<sup>6</sup> G.E. Vaillant & E.S. Milofsky, (1980), Natural History of Male Psychological Health, IX, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 137, pp.127-133; G.E. Vaillant and C.O. Vaillant, (1981), Natural History of Male Psychological Health, X, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 138, pp.1433-1440.

<sup>7</sup> M. Rutter & D. Quinton, (1984), Long-term Follow-up of Women Institutionalized in Childhood: Factors Promoting Good Functioning in Adult Life, *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 18, pp. 225-234.

Garbarino's experiences with young men in correctional facilities also led to his conclusion that the provision of an opportunity for personal development and for reflection on one's experiences—which he terms spirituality—can turn lives around. The **capacity to reflect** is also embodied in Werner's observation that high-risk children who succeeded were able to detach themselves from dysfunctional families. The capacity to reflect is not included in the Search Institute list of assets.

## EVALUATION OF INTERVENTION OUTCOMES

A powerful source of information about the consequences of building assets comes from evaluation studies of interventions. These studies document the outcomes when one intentionally builds assets for infants, toddlers, children, and adolescents who are in high-risk situations or whose behavior requires societal action.

These evaluation studies provide definitive information because

- They contrast long-term, or in some instances intermediate, outcomes for individuals who received asset-building services with those who did not
- Randomly assigning individuals to the two conditions permits one to say that the differences in outcomes was a result of the intervention (5 studies)
- Using meta-analysis across multiple intervention studies provides cumulative evidence (1 study)
- The documentation of outcomes identifies the presence or absence of risky behaviors, and one can use assets language to define the characteristics of the intervention.

<sup>8</sup> J. Garbarino, (1999), *Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them*, New York: The Free Press.

### INTERVENTION STUDIES

#### POPULATION RECEIVING SERVICES

##### Infants/Toddlers/Preschool

- **Prenatal and Infancy Home Visitation**  
Nurse Home Visitation Program
- **Preschool/child care**  
Chicago Child-Parent Center Program

High/Scope Perry Preschool

##### Adolescents

- **Middle school marginal students**  
School Transitional Environment
- **Participants in adventure education**
- **Delinquents**  
Functional Family Therapy

#### OUTCOMES DOCUMENTED

Child abuse/neglect  
High-risk behaviors at age 15

Child maltreatment  
Arrests by age 17  
High school completion  
Arrests  
High school graduation

Dropout  
High school graduation  
Competencies, skills  
Positive identity

Recidivism  
Initiation of delinquent behavior  
by younger siblings



# NURSE HOME VISITATION PROGRAM

First time mothers: poor, single and/or adolescent

## THE DIFFERENCE

RECEIVED  
SERVICES

DID NOT RECEIVE  
SERVICES

### Reduced child abuse

Substantiated cases by age 2 .....4% .....19%  
*made a difference for 15%*

### Reduced risky behaviors by age 15

Arrests .....20% .....45%  
*made a difference for 25%*

**Also reduced number of sex partners and use of alcohol, tobacco**

## WHAT IN NURSE HOME VISITATION PROGRAM MADE THE DIFFERENCE?

Nurses began weekly home visits during pregnancy and continued every other week until the infant's second birthday. Nurses received training and ongoing supervision concerning the content and process of visits.

The visits were characterized by

- developing a **trusting relationship** between nurse home visitor and parent
- promoting responsive **parent-infant interaction**
- helping parents clarify goals and develop **problem-solving skills**
- helping parents build **supportive relationships** with family, friends

*See Assets: 1- Family support, 3- Other adult relationships, 32- Planning and decision making.*

Olds, D.L., Henderson, C.R., Kitzman, H., Eckenrode, J.J., Cole, R.E., & Tatelbaum, R.C. (1999). Prenatal and Infancy Home Visitation by Nurses: Recent Findings. In *The Future of Children: Home Visiting: Recent Program Evaluations*, Vol. 9 (1), pp. 45-65.

# HIGH SCOPE / PERRY PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

Low income, African-American

## THE DIFFERENCE

IN PERRY  
PRESCHOOL

DID NOT RECEIVE  
SERVICES

### Reduction in Arrests

Through age 19

Ever detained or arrested .....31% .....51%

*made a difference for 20%*

### Increase in Education

Graduated from high school .....71% .....54%

*made a difference for 17%*

College or vocational training .....38% .....21%

*made a difference for 17%*

## WHAT IN PERRY PRESCHOOL MADE THE DIFFERENCE?

Children attended preschool mornings for half a day four days a week. Programming was flexible but emphasized

- **high degree of interaction** with adults
- **problem solving and active learning.**

At the beginning of each day, children were asked to plan their “work” for the morning. Teachers did not tell children what to do but asked each child to estimate what he/she would accomplish and to take responsibility for carrying out plans.

Weekly home visits were made to **involve parents** and create interest in and attention to child’s learning.

*See Assets: 5- Caring school climate, 6- Parent involvement, 32- Planning and decision making.*

Berruta-Clement, J.R., Schweinhart, L.J., Barnett, W.S., Epstein, A.S. & Weikert, D.P. (1984). *Changed Lives: The Effects of the Perry Preschool Program on Youth Through Age 19*. Ypsilanti: MI: High/Scope Press.

Schweinhart, L.J., Barnes, H.V., & Weikert, D. P. (1993). *Significant Benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 27*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

Schweinhart, L.J. & Weikert, D.P. (1997). *Lasting Differences: The High/Scope Preschool Curriculum Study Through Age 32*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

# CHICAGO CHILD-PARENT CENTER PROGRAM\*

Predominantly African-American, low income, single parent families

## THE DIFFERENCE

IN CHILD-PARENT  
CENTER PRESCHOOL  
PROGRAM

ATTENDED AN ALL-  
DAY KINDERGARTEN

### ■ Improved School Achievement

- special education placement .....14.4% .....24.6%  
*made a difference for 10.2%*
- years in special education .....0.7 .....1.4
- grade retention .....23.0% .....38.4%  
*made a difference for 14.6%*
- dropout (boys) .....51.0% .....67.7%  
*made a difference for 16.9%*
- high school completion by age 21 .....61.4% .....51.5%  
*made a difference for 9.9%*

### ■ Reduced Arrests

- had any juvenile arrest by age 18 .....16.9% .....25.1%  
*made a difference for 8.2%*
- arrest for violent crime .....9.0% .....15.3%  
*made a difference for 6.3%*

## WHAT IN THE CHILD-PARENT CENTER PROGRAM MADE THE DIFFERENCE?

The Child-Parent Center for preschool and kindergarten was attached to a neighborhood elementary school. Children as 3 to 5 year olds attended preschool and kindergarten.

Child-to-teacher ratios were low: 17 children to 2 staff in preschool, 23 to 2 in kindergarten. Program included language-based instructional activities and speech therapy. Children received health screening and free breakfasts and lunches. A school-community representative provided outreach for recruitment, linkage to community resources, and home visits. Parents had access to a staffed family resource room that provided information and support, and encouraged volunteering in the classroom and completion of high school. A Head Teacher coordinated all facets of the program.

*See Assets: 5- Caring school climate, 6- Parent involvement, 7- Community values youth/parents, 16- High expectations.*

\*Identified as the Chicago Longitudinal Study. Children attending Child-Parent Centers were compared to similar children attending full day kindergarten in other low-income neighborhoods.

Reynolds, A.J., Temple, J.A., Robertson, D.L. & Mann, E.A. (2001). Long-Term Effects of an Early Childhood Intervention on Educational Achievement and Juvenile Arrest: A 15-year Follow-up of Low-Income Children in Public Schools. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 285 (18), pp. 2339-2346.

# SCHOOL TRANSITIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Low-income marginal students entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade in a large urban high school

## THE DIFFERENCE

ASSIGNED

NOT ASSIGNED

- By the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade:
  - academic performance .....no decreases .....decreases
  - absenteeism .....no increases .....increases
  - self-concept .....no decline .....decline
- Dropped out by grade 11 .....4% .....19%  
*made a difference for 15%*
- Graduated from high school .....79% .....57%  
*made a difference for 22%*

## WHAT IN SCHOOL TRANSITIONAL ENVIRONMENT MADE THE DIFFERENCE

20-25 students were assigned to a home room in a section of the school that provided for separation from the influence and bullying of older students. Students moved as a group to the same core courses, reducing the level of stimulation and adaptation required. Homeroom teacher, who also taught a core course, counseled each student 15 minutes every 4-5 weeks and contacted family if student was absent.

*See Assets: 5- Caring school climate, 6- Parent involvement in schooling, 10- Safety, 12- School boundaries.*

Felner, R.D. & Adan, A.M. (1988). The School Transitional Environment Project, In R.H. Price, E.L. Cowan, R.P. Lorion & J. Ramos-McKay. *14 Ounces of Prevention: A Casebook for Practitioners*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, pp. 111-122.

# ADVENTURE EDUCATION

Meta-analysis of 96 adventure programs involving 12,057 participants\*

## THE DIFFERENCE

- Increased self-control, including confidence, self-efficacy, self-understanding, independence and assertiveness
- Improvement in problem solving and decision making
- Improvement in academic performance
- Improvement in social competence, cooperation, communication skills

Gains increased over time.  
Greatest gains were made by adolescents who were delinquents.

## WHAT IN ADVENTURE EDUCATION MADE THE DIFFERENCE?

- **Supportive relationships** with competent instructors
- **High expectations** that challenge and motivate
- **Challenging goals**
  
- Group mastery of challenging tasks requires frequent and intense **group problem solving and decision making**
- **Meaningful participation** and contribution
- **Mutual peer support**
- Intensity of immediate experience (participants are **fully involved**)
  
- **Amount and quality of feedback**

**Longer experiences**, providing opportunities for relationships to develop, had better outcomes (i.e., one-day experiences were not effective).

*See Assets: 3- Other adult relationships, 15- Positive peer influence, 16- High expectations, 18- Youth programs, 32- Planning and decision making.*

\*Evaluations were not in all instances randomized trials.

Bernard, B. & Marshall, K. (1999). *Adventure Education: Making a Lasting Difference*. Minneapolis: National Resilience Resource Center, University of Minnesota.

## FUNCTIONAL FAMILY THERAPY

Delinquent youth age 11-18 who were referred by the courts or youth who were considered at risk for delinquency with respect to violence and/or substance abuse.

### THE DIFFERENCE

Depending upon the study, youth were randomly assigned to Functional Family Therapy, no treatment, traditional juvenile court services, or alternative services in the community

	FFT	NO TREATMENT	JUVENILE COURT	ALTERNATIVE TREATMENT
■ Recidivism rate*				
■ 1998 study	.32%	.40%	.50%	.63%
■ 1977 study	.20	.50	.43	.62
■ 1973 study	.23			.72
<i>made a difference for</i>		.8-30%	.18-23%	.31-49%
■ Siblings three years later (1977 study)				
■ Little or no delinquency				

### WHAT IN FUNCTIONAL FAMILY THERAPY MAKES THE DIFFERENCE?

FFT is a complex structured short-term (3-month) intervention with families.

Families with lesser problems participate in 8-12 one-hour sessions; families with more difficult situations are involved for up to 26-30 hours.

The three-phase process (i.e., engagement and motivation, behavior change, and generalization) emphasizes promoting expectation of change, reducing negativity, training in communication and in basic parenting skills, contracting, and school relationships.

*See Assets: 1- Family support, 2- Positive family communication, 6- Parent involvement in schooling, 11- Family boundaries, 12- School boundaries, 21- Achievement motivation, 32- Planning and decision making, 17 to 20- Constructive use of time.*

\*Comparison studies showed similar differentials (from 25% to 50%).

Alexander, J. M. et al. (1998). *Blueprints for Violence Prevention. Book Three: Functional Family Therapy*. Golden, CO: Venture Publishing. [www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/model/chapt/FFTExec.htm](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/model/chapt/FFTExec.htm)

Sexton, T.B. & Alexander, J.M. (2000). Functional Family Therapy. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Delinquency Prevention. [www.nncjrs.org/pdffiles/ojdp/184743.pdf](http://www.nncjrs.org/pdffiles/ojdp/184743.pdf).

## OBSERVATIONS

These documented conclusions and outcomes support the validity of the strength-based assets approach. The examples represent evidence from a range of ages, settings and situations. Because observers and evaluators impose their own views on reality, and because resources often limit the scope of evaluations, we can assume that not all of the assets in play in the examples cited have been captured.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless this material suggests conclusions of relevance to community decision-makers:

- Asset building occurs along the **entire continuum** of the growing up process. Asset-building communities can **not limit** their planning and programming **to adolescents**.
- At younger ages, asset building requires maximizing the **positive impact of parents and caregivers** on children.
- **Child care settings and schools can be major influences** in building assets for children in poverty and other situations of risk who may not experience these assets in other settings.
- Interventions cited **represent models that are soundly based and carefully implemented**. Lisbeth Schorr identified characteristics of effective interventions for children in poverty<sup>10</sup> through a careful assessment of outstanding programs. Her findings can be translated into assets language. Effective interventions for children in poverty incorporate

### ■ *Support*

- ▮ Relationship of trust and respect with child and parent; continuity of relationship
- ▮ Supporting the parent to be supportive and responsive to the child
- ▮ Involving the parent in promoting child competencies
- ▮ Developing a support network from family, neighbors, friends, community

### ■ *Boundaries and expectations*

- ▮ High expectations—strength-based
- ▮ Modeling behavior and values

### ■ *Social competencies*

- ▮ Involving parent/youth in determining what will happen
- ▮ Providing practice in problem solving

### ■ *Other characteristics*

- ▮ Broad spectrum of services in response to child/family's needs, crossing traditional boundaries
- ▮ Services are individualized, flexible, user friendly, intensive
- ▮ Concerned with the child in the context of the family and the family in the context of the neighborhood

## CRITICAL LINKAGES

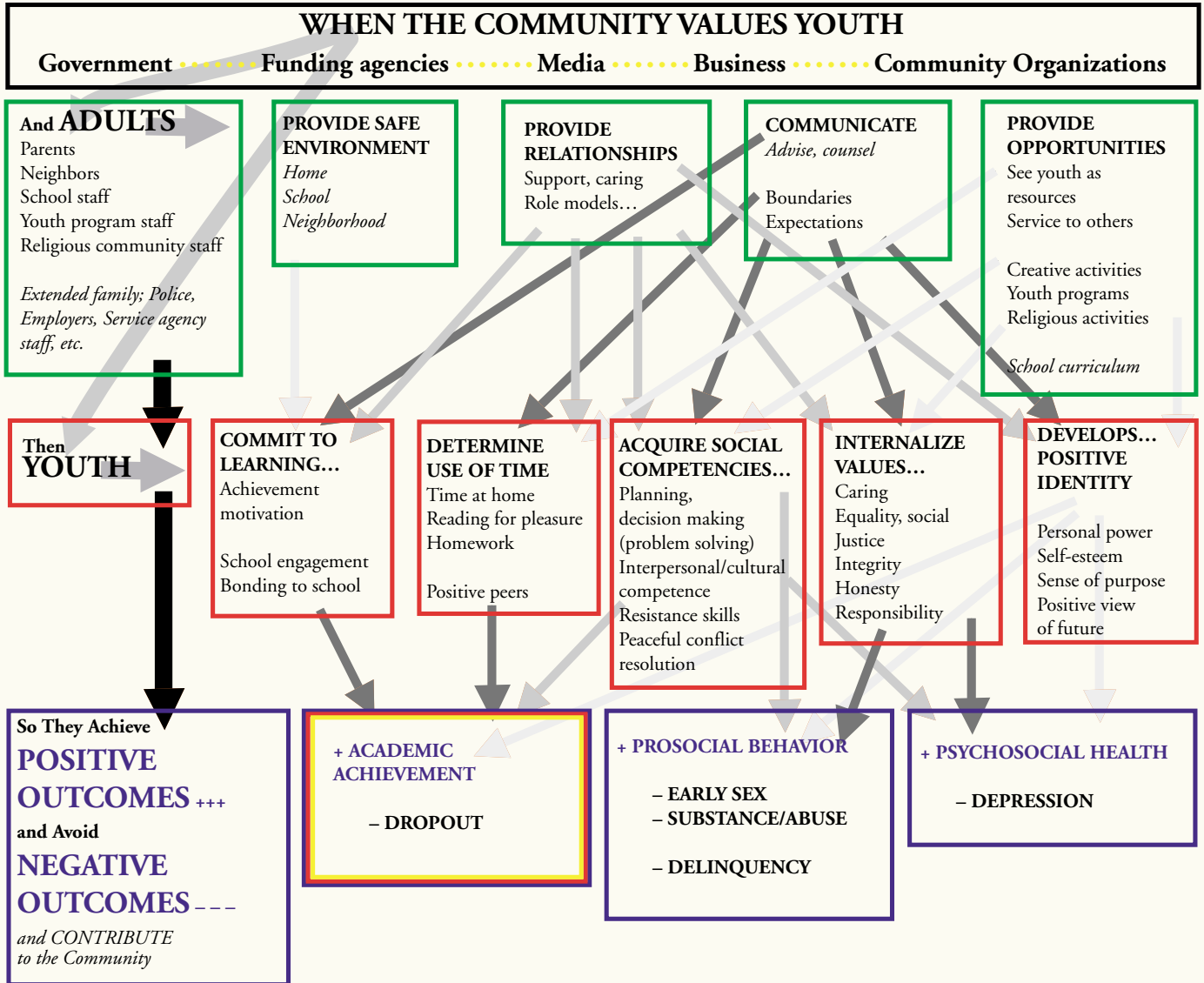
While none of the interventions cited make a difference for all at-risk children, each substantially changes outcomes for an appreciable percentage. From various vantage points, the examples cited reinforce the significance of **relationships** and **opportunities** in enabling children and youth to build appropriate values, skills, and competencies.

What is clear, and what may not be sufficiently emphasized in the Search Institute material, is that there are critical linkages and relationships between the various assets. The chart on the next page outlines an overall schematic for these relationships. Material in italics has been added to the Search Institute listing; those assets that seem to be the most significant are in bold. The material in *Developmental Assets*, previously cited, summarizes the direct and indirect associations of each of the 40 assets with outcomes and with other assets, and this material can be useful for deciding where to focus community efforts.

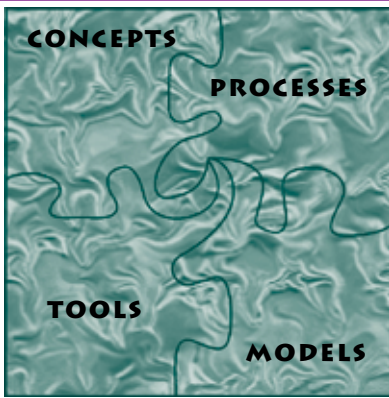
<sup>9</sup> Even Search Institute's 40 assets are constrained by the research literature and by the technicalities of asking questions of youth. Some of the 40 assets have been more fully researched than others; some of the outcomes (notably substance use/abuse) have been of more interest to researchers than others.

<sup>10</sup> Lisbeth B. Schorr, (1989), *Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage*, New York: Doubleday. See also: Lisbeth B. Schorr, (1997), *Common Purpose: Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods*, New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday.

# SCHEMATIC OF RELATIONSHIPS AMONG DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS







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