

# "The Results Are In, and IT ALL ADDS UP"

By Louise Allen Brown

Chairperson,

Waterbury Prevention Policy Board

Of the 40 Developmental Assets found by the *Search Institute* to be key to the successful development of young people into healthy, caring, responsible adults, Waterbury youth possess 18.9 of those assets, on average. Among sixth graders alone, the figure is 20.0; the number falls to 17.7 for ninth graders. This data was released just last month by the Waterbury Prevention Policy Board (PPB). The data is based upon an analysis of the *Search Institute* Youth Survey conducted earlier this year among sixth and ninth graders at public and non-public Waterbury schools.

Higher numbers of assets have been associated with numerous positive outcomes for youth -- "thriving indicators" including school success, being a leader, and maintaining good health. Higher numbers of assets are also associated with youth possessing the skills and ability to avoid high-risk behaviors including the use of alcohol or drugs and violence. For these reasons, it can be said that with respect to developmental assets, MORE is better; that is, the MORE assets a young person has, the better off s/he will be. Clearly there is plenty of asset building that needs to be done to equip Waterbury youth to be successful adults.

Fortunately, EVERYONE CAN BUILD ASSETS! To help to build assets for youth it is time to make a conscious shift from focusing on young people's problems to focusing on their strengths, and building more of them. We need to shift from viewing building assets as the work of a limited group of professionals to building assets being everyone's work. Each person in the community has a role to play in raising Waterbury children. Smile at young people you meet, get to know their name. Ask them about themselves. Make these simple gestures with children in your neighborhood, on your bus route, or at your church. If you are a youth program provider, move beyond providing activities and work to build relationships with young

The percentage of Waterbury youth indicating the presence of each of the forty assets in their lives by their survey responses is detailed here:

External Assets		Internal Assets	
Support		Commitment to Learning	
Family support	74%	Achievement motivation	67%
Positive family communication	31%	School engagement	53%
Other adult relationships	36%	Homework	33%
Caring neighborhood	38%	Bonding to school	58%
Caring school climate	34%	Reading for pleasure	21%
Parent involvement in schooling	32%		
Empowerment		Positive Values	
Community values youth	26%	Caring	60%
Youth as resources	28%	Equality and social justice	61%
Service to others	49%	Integrity	66%
Safety	43%	Honesty	68%
		Responsibility	66%
		Restraint	54%
Boundaries and Expectations		Social Competencies	
Family boundaries	39%	Planning and decision-making	30%
School boundaries	64%	Interpersonal competence	45%
Neighborhood boundaries	51%	Cultural competence	54%
Adult role models	30%	Resistance skills	43%
Positive peer influence	68%	Peaceful conflict resolution	31%
High expectations	56%		
Constructive Use of Time		Positive Identity	
Creative activities	23%	Personal power	33%
Youth programs	49%	Self-esteem	50%
Religious community	58%	Sense of purpose	55%
Time at home	55%	Positive view of personal future	73%

Source: *Search Institute Report of Waterbury Youth Survey, 2007.*

people through a variety of activities. ALL YOUNG PEOPLE NEED MORE ASSETS!

No matter how many assets a particular young person has, nearly all can build more. While many individuals, schools, and youth programs are building assets as an incidental effect of their programs, it is also crucial to move our community to one that is very INTENTIONAL about building assets. REPEATED deliberate actions on the part of adults throughout the community can help youth to add to their individual set of developmental assets. The fact that Waterbury sixth

graders possess 20 assets and ninth graders demonstrate only 17.7 sounds a loud bell to tell us that it's not even good enough to help the very young to build assets; the process must continue as our children grow into adolescence in order to sustain assets once built.

The impact of having developmental assets is CUMULATIVE. That means that what is most important in building assets is that we work to build as many as possible among young people. The more assets young people have, the more they exhibit positive behaviors and the less they participate in high-risk behaviors.

Every action taken in the community by any one person that helps to build an asset or assets among youth ADDS UP. It adds up to more assets present in the lives of our younger residents.

According to the recent youth survey, among Waterbury youth, those with 0-10 assets had 3.1 (of 8) thriving indicators. Those with 11-20 assets had 3.9 (of 8) thriving indicators. Those with 21-30 assets had 4.8 (of 8) thriving indicators. Those with 31-40 assets had 5.8 (of 8) thriving indicators. Waterbury's data confirms the *Search Institute* theory that more is better when it comes to developmental assets.

Conversely, the survey data revealed that Waterbury students with the fewest assets demonstrate the highest average of risk-taking behaviors. Waterbury youth with 0-10 assets participate in 8.1 risk-taking behaviors on average. Those with 11-20 assets participate in 4.7 risk-taking behaviors. Those with 21-30 assets participate in 2.7 risk-taking behaviors. And those Waterbury youth with 31-40 assets participate on average in 0.9 risk-taking behaviors. Waterbury's data supports the *Search Institute* argument for building more assets among Waterbury children. Once again, it is clear that having more assets is better.

Strong youth, youth empowered with as many developmental assets as possible, will result in a stronger adult community prepared to meet employment needs of local employers, leadership roles in education and government, and whatever challenges the future holds for the City of Waterbury.

To learn more about developmental assets and to join the Waterbury Prevention Policy Board in Building Assets, contact Louise Brown at [lbrown@waterbury.k12.ct.us](mailto:lbrown@waterbury.k12.ct.us) or Amanda Hunyadi at [ahunyadi@waterburyyouthservices.org](mailto:ahunyadi@waterburyyouthservices.org) or 203-573-0264. For more information about the *Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets* and asset building, visit [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org). Some themes adapted from the *Search Institute* publication *The Asset Activist's Toolkit* (*Search Institute, 2005*).