

CREATING



Social CHANGE...

THE GROWTH OF A STATEWIDE MOVEMENT

SUMMARY



Summary

In 1997, The Colorado Trust, in partnership with Search Institute, established the first statewide initiative in the country to promote the developmental asset framework. Assets for Colorado Youth (ACY) was funded by a \$10 million, six-year Colorado Trust grant.

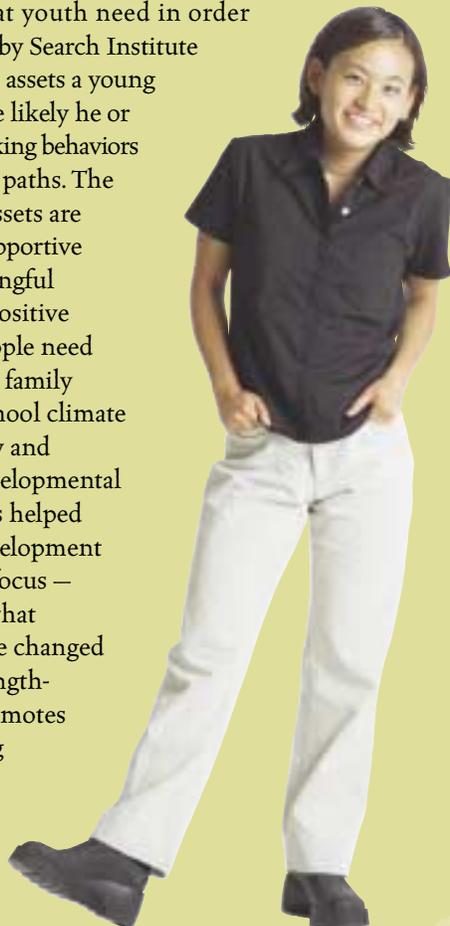
A public awareness campaign marked the beginning of the initiative in 1997, followed by grantmaking activities in 1998–1999. Grants were awarded to organizations ranging from traditional youth organizations to community coalitions to organizations working in communities of color. This grantmaking strategy recognized the need for a multi-level approach to spreading assets in the state.

In 2000, ACY evolved into an independent nonprofit organization, positioning itself to develop a local vision and sustain its efforts through new funding sources. ACY works in communities with educators, youth-serving organizations, government agencies, parent groups and youth to help strengthen relationships, improve organizational capacity and expand partnerships to improve the lives of youth.



DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

The developmental assets, identified by Search Institute (www.search-institute.org), are 40 developmental building blocks that youth need in order to thrive. Research by Search Institute shows that the more assets a young person has, the more likely he or she is to avoid risk-taking behaviors and choose positive paths. The 40 developmental assets are comprised of the supportive relationships, meaningful opportunities and positive values all young people need to succeed – such as family support, a caring school climate and having integrity and self-esteem. The developmental asset framework has helped move the youth development field from a deficit focus – or thinking about what behaviors need to be changed in youth – to a strength-based focus that promotes a vision for building healthy youth.



THE ACY EVALUATION

The Colorado Trust contracted with the OMNI Institute in 2000 to assess the work of ACY and the emerging asset-building movement in Colorado. Through interviews, participant observation, document reviews and surveys, the evaluation team explored four main areas:

- *ACY's role in helping individuals and organizations integrate the asset framework*
- *The process of integrating assets within an organization and the resulting effects*
- *The reach of the asset movement in Colorado*
- *The impacts of asset building on Colorado youth.*

Existing evaluation research in the field of positive youth development is limited. Evaluation tools tend to focus on the measurement of risk and problem behaviors, rather than the results of promoting positive youth development. As commonly observed by practitioners and evaluators, the asset approach does not offer a specific model for intervention, but rather a framework for social change. The evaluation findings summarized in this document may help researchers and practitioners better understand the asset-building process and measures of success.

KEY FINDINGS

ACY: A CATALYST FOR TRANSFORMATION

Assets for Colorado Youth (ACY) provides statewide leadership in developing and supporting innovative approaches to integrating the asset message. In its role as a statewide resource for asset builders, ACY provides guidance in how to apply the asset framework in different contexts. ACY serves as a catalyst by engaging diverse communities and organizations, creating a bridge from awareness to action and emerging as a strong, credible messenger for the movement.

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH:

- Presentations, trainings and grantmaking
- The cultural adaptation of assets in work with communities of color, particularly Latino and Spanish-language communities
- Strategically targeting leaders in schools, youth-serving organizations and government agencies who can affect policy changes.

CREATING A BRIDGE FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION BY:

- Tailoring presentations, trainings and ongoing support to different community settings
- Convening asset builders to facilitate the exchange of ideas, experiences and successes
- Cultivating asset champions
- Developing resources that distill successes and lessons from the field to share with a wide audience
- Creating forums for policymakers to reflect on their role in meeting youths' needs.

SERVING AS A CREDIBLE MESSENGER BY:

- Demonstrating both a personal and professional passion for the asset framework
- Linking youth development research to community experiences
- Honoring diversity and highlighting different cultural approaches to asset building.

Colorado's experience suggests that a critical role for statewide organizations in promoting assets is to establish credibility as a messenger, guide individuals and organizations in how to apply the framework to their specific contexts and share success stories from the field.

COMMONLY USED "ASSET" TERMS

ASSETS – Values and experiences that help young people lead successful lives

ASSET BUILDING – Intentional actions that increase developmental strengths in youth

ASSET CHAMPIONS – Messengers who intentionally promote assets, successfully engage others in asset building and advocate for youth – especially in forums where youth voices might rarely be heard

ASSET FRAMEWORK – A way of understanding strengths that young people need in their lives to grow up healthy and responsible

ASSET INNOVATIONS – The tools and adaptations that organizations develop to make the asset message meaningful to their audiences

ASSET INTEGRATION – A process of incorporating assets into an organization to strengthen or reorient its structures, policies and activities for youth

ASSET MOVEMENT – The growing visibility and application of the asset framework across different sectors

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT – An approach that focuses on what is needed to help young people lead successful lives, rather than focusing on fixing what is wrong with youth

TRANSFORMATION – Changes that occur as a result of asset building

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT – Youth empowerment through active participation in positive programs, decisionmaking and relationship-building.



N D I N G S

PROMOTING ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Asset integration is the process of incorporating assets into an organization's culture and infrastructure. This may occur at multiple levels in an organization, influencing program development, management philosophy and structure, staff training, organizational materials, evaluation, fund development, and policies and procedures. Evaluation findings show that asset integration at multiple levels within an organization is associated with enhanced organizational effectiveness.

ASSET INTEGRATION HELPS ORGANIZATIONS:

- Articulate an organizational mission and promote the value added by its programs and services
- Align individual staff efforts with broader organizational goals
- Identify new partners and expand networks
- Heighten the awareness of teachable moments in everyday interactions with youth and families
- Engage youth.

Active engagement of youth is evidence that an organization embraces the asset framework and uses the asset philosophy to inform its work.

A key barrier to asset integration is the perception by staff or organizational leaders that asset building is just another program. This perception is linked to an insufficient commitment to the assets. When asset integration does not progress beyond the program level, the asset framework must compete with other programs for staff time and other organizational resources.

By contrast, when the asset framework influences the products and work at multiple levels within an organization, it has greater staying power and is less vulnerable to staff turnover or shifts in funding.

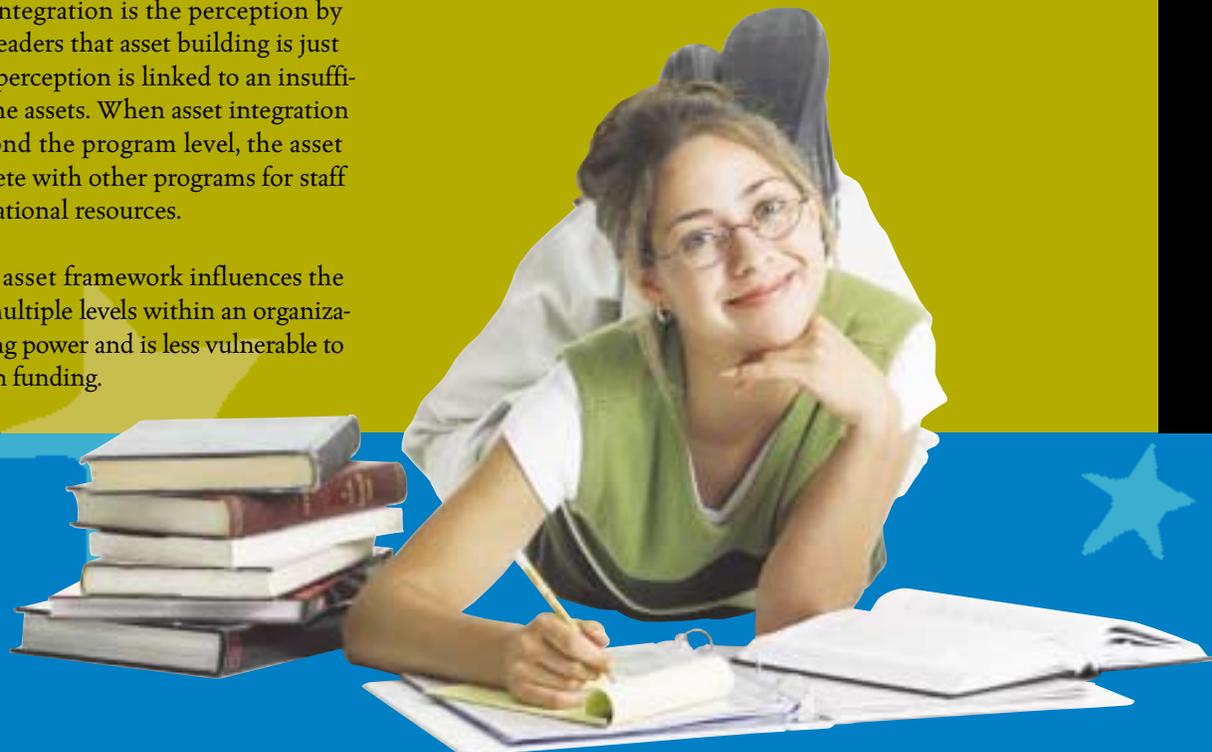
THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSET CHAMPIONS

Asset champions have played a significant role in the wide recognition and support of the asset framework and the intentional approach to positive youth development in Colorado. Asset champions serve as messengers in spreading the word about assets and engaging others in asset building. The presence of asset champions contributes to the unfolding of asset building within communities and organizations.

INDIVIDUALS THAT EMERGE AS ASSET CHAMPIONS EXHIBIT:

- A deep sense of commitment and connection to a community
- A social conscience
- A magnetic quality that draws people together on behalf of youth
- Legitimacy as a change agent and a messenger
- A heightened awareness of teachable moments
- The ability to apply assets in ways that helped individuals connect the asset message to their everyday lives.

Colorado's asset champions demonstrate a sustained commitment to and passion for assets and often serve as the hub for asset-building networks.





THE REACH OF COLORADO'S ASSET MOVEMENT

The evaluation identified six major catalyzing forces that have facilitated the spread of assets in Colorado.

SIX CATALYZING FORCES:

- *ACY's leadership in innovation and engagement of diverse sectors and communities*
- *Organizational and cultural innovations in applying the asset framework*
- *Asset champions who serve as local messengers, engage communities in asset building and advocate for youth*
- *Relationship building between individuals and organizations on behalf of youth*
- *Funding to support training, convening of asset builders and the development of asset-related products*
- *Youth engagement in asset-building organizations.*

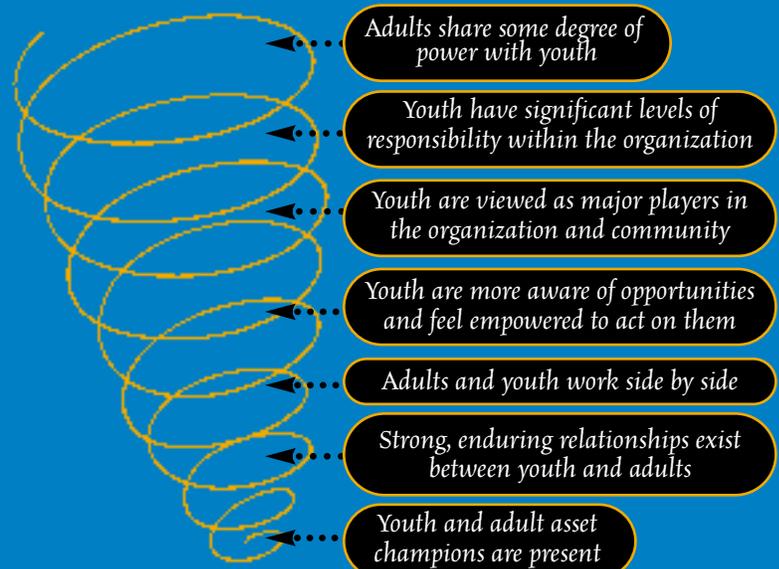
These interdependent forces have led to more than 600 organizations statewide reporting that they use, or fund the use of, the 40 developmental assets. Grantees of the initiative report successes in obtaining new sources of funding for their asset-building efforts — an important endorsement of assets that helps legitimize asset-building approaches. The establishment of ACY as a permanent office to support local asset-building efforts further indicates the staying power of the statewide asset initiative.

IMPACT ON COLORADO YOUTH

Focus groups with youth from selected asset-building organizations revealed that the asset framework facilitated youth engagement in organizations. Furthermore, youth engagement led to new supports and opportunities for young people — often identified and created by the youth themselves.

The dimensions of youth engagement can be envisioned as an upward-moving spiral.

FACTORS PROMOTING MOVEMENT UP THE YOUTH-ENGAGEMENT SPIRAL:



The evaluation also identified several areas of positive impacts from the testimonies of youth.

POSITIVE IMPACTS ON YOUTH:

- *A sense of belonging*
- *Relationships with others*
- *Social skills*
- *Self-confidence*
- *Positive view of the future*
- *Empathy for others*
- *Values regarding the importance of community service*
- *Ability to positively impact their own circumstances and that of others.*

One outcome unanticipated by the study was that youth reported intentionally building assets in others. Many considered themselves asset champions. Similar to adults, when youth witnessed the transformation of other youth they became inspired and motivated to continue this work.



IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

The evaluation of the Assets for Colorado Youth initiative clarifies what is needed to further support positive youth development. With these components in place, the asset framework can become the common language and common practice in organizational and community settings. Implications of the evaluation for state initiatives and for the field include:

A NEED FOR STRONG LEADERSHIP TO:

- Generate widespread recognition and support of the asset framework
- Support the growing base of asset builders
- Contribute to new innovations, including cultural adaptations of the framework
- Work with policymakers in strategically targeted arenas.

MAKING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INTENTIONAL BY:

- Tying the asset message to everyday, culturally familiar experiences
- Developing partnerships between organizations and youth
- Unifying organizational policies and programming around asset building
- Utilizing the asset framework to build new community partnerships on behalf of youth
- Heightening individuals' awareness of teachable moments
- Celebrating achievements and rewarding asset builders
- Witnessing and sharing the transformations of youth.



This summary of selected findings is part of a two-year study of Assets for Colorado Youth and the asset movement in Colorado by **OMNI INSTITUTE** (www.omni.org). The full report of evaluation findings will be available January 2003 from The Colorado Trust.

ASSETS FOR COLORADO YOUTH (ACY) champions change for positive youth development by building capacity, focusing on individual and community strengths and increasing developmental assets in youth. For more information on ACY, the asset framework or how assets are transforming lives in Colorado, go to www.buildassets.org.

THE COLORADO TRUST is a grantmaking foundation dedicated to advancing the health and well-being of the people of Colorado. Within this mission, one of The Trust's main goals is to provide resources to strengthen families by addressing the needs of children and youth. To learn more about The Colorado Trust and its grantmaking initiatives, go to www.coloradotrusted.org.

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