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THE MISSION OF THE COLORADO TRUST
IS TO ADVANCE THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
OF THE PEOPLE OF COLORADO.



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ASSETS FOR COLORADO YOUTH

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Six years ago, with a commitment of more than \$10 million, The Colorado Trust created the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative. This statewide effort was designed to build on the positive youth development model developed by the Minneapolis-based Search Institute. Through a nationwide survey of more than 100,000 students in grades 6 to 12, the Search Institute identified 40 assets that help youth lead successful lives. These assets include skills, positive relationships and self-perceptions. The Search Institute found that the more assets young people have, the more likely they are to succeed in school and become socially competent. Additionally, the 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 young people.

Assets for Colorado Youth, or ACY, has reached out to young people – and the adults who work with and support youth – in a variety of ways. For example, ACY used Trust funding to provide grants to 45 youth-serving agencies and community groups across Colorado to learn about and incorporate the asset framework into their thinking and actions. They also provided technical assistance to these and other individuals and organizations to help ensure that the asset framework was tailored to their own unique needs. ACY provided numerous networking opportunities to communities, parents, schools and youth organizations, and they conducted an extensive public awareness campaign to put youth at the top of every community’s agenda.

The Trust contracted with OMNI Institute to assess the work of ACY and the asset-building movement in Colorado. Through interviews, participant observation, document reviews and surveys, evaluators determined that the asset framework has taken hold in Colorado. OMNI identified more than 600 organizations in Colorado that base their work on the 40 developmental assets. Groups integrating the asset framework report that they experience greater organizational effectiveness in terms of youth engagement, staff morale, articulation of goals and community networks. And, since evaluation in the field of youth development has largely focused on the measurement of risk and problem behaviors in youth, and rarely includes the results of promoting positive youth development, it is our hope that OMNI’s findings may help researchers and practitioners better understand the asset-building process and measures of success.

With a strong commitment to strengthening families by addressing the needs of children and youth, The Trust commends Assets for Colorado Youth for making great strides in giving Colorado youth the tools they need to grow up as healthy, caring and responsible people.



John R. Moran, Jr.
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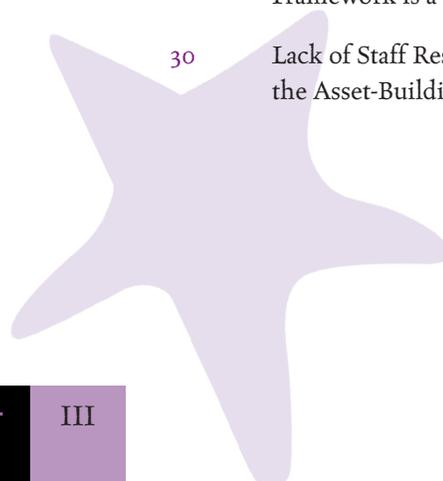
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COMMONLY USED “ASSET” TERMS

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

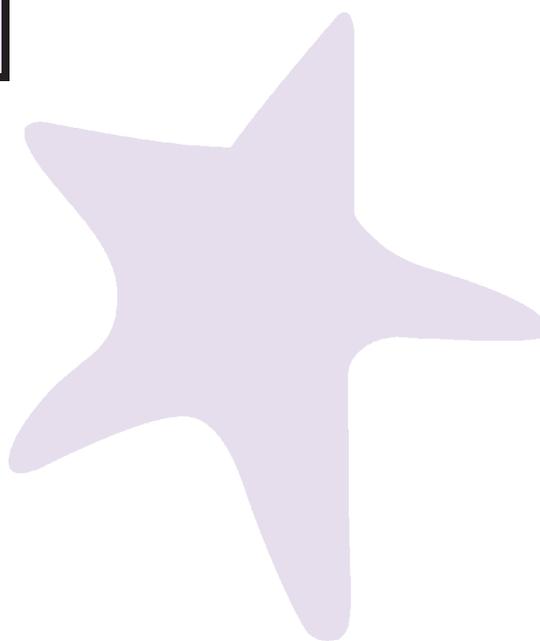
ASSET INTEGRATION – A process of incorporating assets into an organization to strengthen or reorient its structures, policies and activities for youth

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.



Chapter 1

BACKGROUND: ASSETS FOR COLORADO YOUTH

LIKE OTHERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY, COLORADANS WORKING IN THE PUBLIC AND NONPROFIT SERVICE SECTOR INCREASINGLY HAVE TURNED TOWARD POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND ITS EMPHASIS ON STRENGTH-BASED APPROACHES TO RENEW AND REKINDLE THEIR WORK WITH YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES. THE ASSET FRAMEWORK IS BASED ON THE 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS IDENTIFIED BY SEARCH INSTITUTE. AN INDEPENDENT NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION, THE SEARCH INSTITUTE GENERATES KNOWLEDGE AND PROMOTES ITS APPLICATION TO ADVANCE THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS. THE ASSET FRAMEWORK HAS GROWN IN VISIBILITY AND APPLICATION IN DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONAL SETTINGS AND COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT COLORADO. THE ASSET-BUILDING APPROACH SEEKS TO BUILD THE SUPPORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN COMMUNITIES THAT YOUTH NEED TO THRIVE.



THE FORTY DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 Family support | 12 School boundaries | 24 Bonding to school | 35 Resistance skills |
| 2 Positive family communication | 13 Neighborhood boundaries | 25 Reading for pleasure | 36 Peaceful conflict resolution |
| 3 Other adult relationships | 14 Adult role models | 26 Caring | 37 Personal power |
| 4 Caring neighborhood | 15 Positive peer influence | 27 Equality and social justice | 38 Self-esteem |
| 5 Caring school climate | 16 High expectations | 28 Integrity | 39 Sense of purpose |
| 6 Parent involvement in schooling | 17 Creative activities | 29 Honesty | 40 Positive view of personal future |
| 7 Community values youth | 18 Youth programs | 30 Responsibility | |
| 8 Youth as resources | 19 Religious community | 31 Restraint | |
| 9 Service to others | 20 Time at home | 32 Planning and decisionmaking | |
| 10 Safety | 21 Achievement motivation | 33 Interpersonal competence | |
| 11 Family boundaries | 22 School engagement | 34 Cultural competence | |
| | 23 Homework | | |

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Incorporation of the asset framework promotes a shift from focusing on troubled youth to focusing on all children and adolescents; from viewing youth as problems to seeing them as resources; and from relying on professionals to involving everyone in the lives of young people. In Colorado, the 40 developmental assets and the accompanying framework for asset building have inspired new community partnerships and the reinvention of organizations on behalf of youth. An important factor in the state's growing base of practitioners and community leaders embracing assets has been the statewide initiative Assets for Colorado Youth.

HISTORY OF THE INITIATIVE

Launched in 1997, The Colorado Trust's Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative was the first statewide asset-building effort to be established in the country. This six-year, \$10 million initiative was formed in partnership with the Search Institute to introduce the asset approach to organizations and communities across the state. The initiative is part of a larger effort by The Trust to promote positive youth development in the state. The Trust also has committed \$11 million to a six-year after-school initiative, designed to promote positive youth development through after-school programming.

The establishment of the statewide office of Assets for Colorado Youth and a public awareness campaign marked the beginning of the Assets for Colorado Youth initiative. Between 1998 and 2000, 45 agencies from across the state were selected for funding through a number of grantmaking strategies (see page 3), including community mobilization, statewide partnerships, innovation in asset building, communities of color contracts and associational partnerships (see page 10 for additional information on these grantmaking strategies).

A range of agencies were funded, including neighborhood-based organizations such as Planned Parenthood's partnership with Denver's Cole Neighborhood; local and state governmental agencies such as Foothills Parks and Recreation District and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment; and grantmaking organizations such as The Colorado Children's Trust Fund and The Wright Stuff Foundation.

The initiative was designed to fulfill the need for a multi-leveled approach to spread the assets philosophy in the state. Multiple grantmaking strategies created different roles for grantees in building Colorado's asset movement. Ultimately, the purpose of all grants was to build the assets of youth living in Colorado's communities and to support them in becoming successful adults. Grantees were expected to share lessons learned about the use of the asset framework and specific strategies employed. Additionally, ACY hoped to learn more about how to support community mobilization and innovation, as well as the adoption of the framework by statewide agencies, communities of color and school systems. The design of the initiative underscored the importance of innovation and the engagement of communities of color for Colorado's asset-building initiative.

In the third year of the initiative, ACY evolved into an independent 501(c)3 organization with statewide reach. This transition positioned the new organization to increase local asset-building resources and sustain

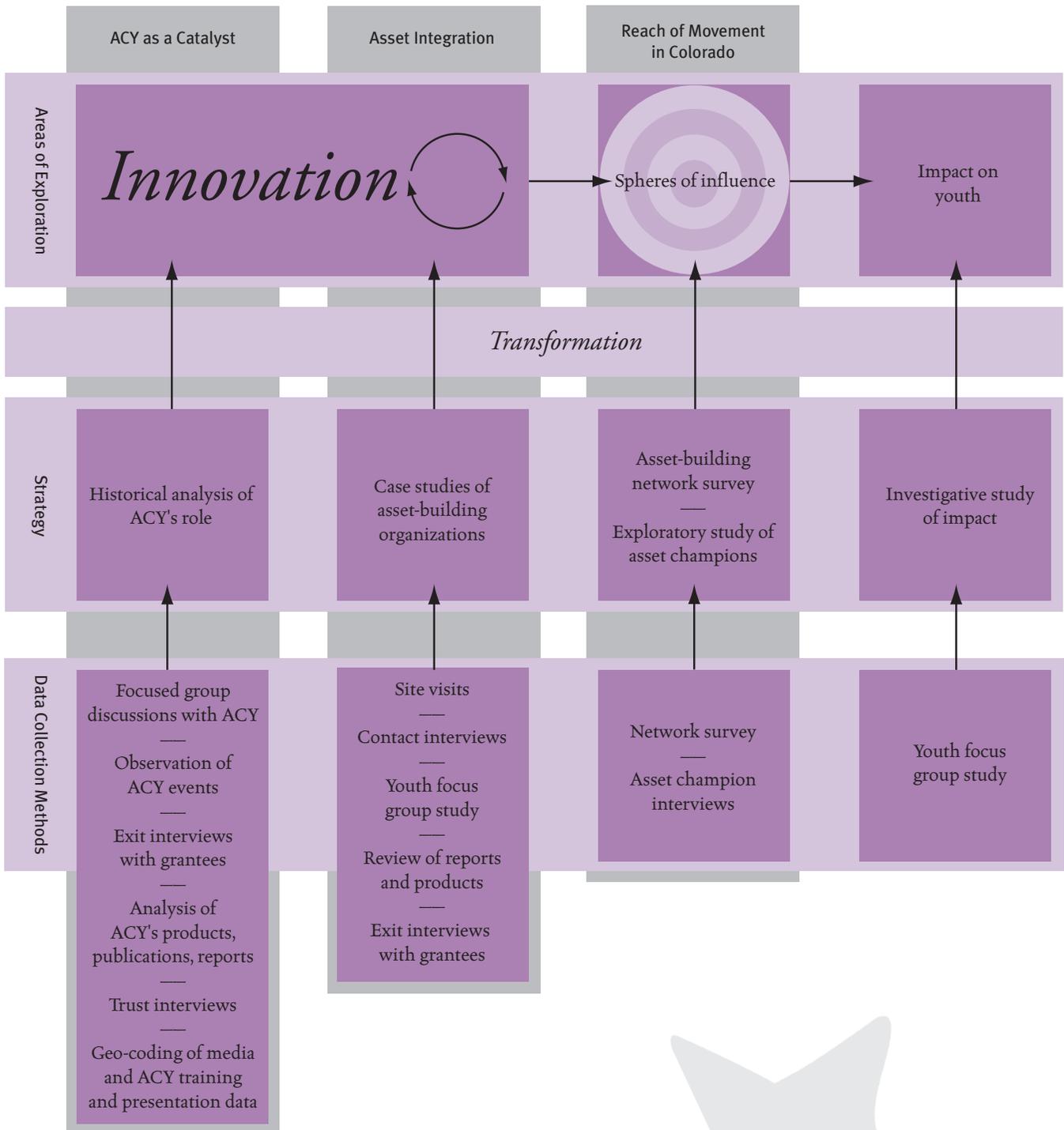
Launched in 1997, The Colorado Trust's Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative was the first statewide asset-building effort to be established in the country.

ALL GRANTEE ORGANIZATIONS THAT TOOK PART IN THE ASSETS FOR COLORADO YOUTH GRANTS PROGRAM

- Asian Pacific Development Center, Inc.
- Asset Building Coalition of Larimer County
- Boulder County Prevention Connection
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- Catholic Charities Mulroy Neighborhood Center
- Cheltenham Elementary School
- Cherry Creek School District
- City of Aurora Office of Youth Development
- City of Longmont
- Cleo Parker Robinson Dance
- Colorado Children's Trust Fund
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
- Colorado Parks and Recreation Department
- Colorado Springs Assets for Youth
- Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, 4-H Youth Development
- Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition
- Cross Community Coalition
- Denison Montessori School
- Denver Indian Center
- Eagle Lodge
- Family Visitor Program of Garfield, Pitkin and Urban League of Pikes Peak Region
- Foothills Parks and Recreation District
- Full Circle Intergenerational Project, Inc.
- Girl Scout Councils of Colorado
- Globeville Community Justice Council
- Grand Futures Prevention Coalition of Routt County
- Greeley Youth Initiative
- Healthy Mountain Communities
- Las Animas Community Center
- Latino Anglo Alliance
- Mi Casa Resource Center for Women
- Northeast Women's Center
- Northeast Colorado Health Department
- Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains
- Rainbow Alley
- Seniors! Inc.
- Sojourner Charter Middle School
- Southern Ute Community Action Programs, Inc.
- Summit Prevention Alliance
- Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative of Montrose/Olathe
- Thompson Valley Preschool, Inc.
- The Wright Stuff Foundation for Rural Youth and Community
- Urban League of Metro Denver
- Western Eagle Counties
- YMCA of Metro Denver



FIGURE 1: LOGIC MODEL OF THE ACY INITIATIVE AND RELATED EVALUATION STRATEGIES



its efforts in the state by pursuing additional sources of local funding. It also raised important questions for The Colorado Trust and ACY staff about how to document the unique strategies employed by ACY and the spread of assets in the state. At this juncture in the initiative, The Colorado Trust contracted with OMNI Institute to assess the work of ACY and the emerging asset-building movement within the state.

EVALUATION DESIGN

OMNI worked in collaboration with The Colorado Trust and ACY to design an evaluation that would address key issues for the statewide initiative and contribute to the growing field of positive youth development. Specifically, the evaluation was designed to explore five interest areas that represented important facets of the initiative and the positive change that The Colorado Trust and ACY desired for the state and its youth:

1. The role of ACY as a catalyst for asset building within the state
2. Motivations and events that led organizations to integrate the asset framework, and the dynamics of asset integration and innovation within these organizations
3. Transformations or new practices that organizations and individuals exhibited as they championed the asset framework
4. Spheres of influence and reach of the movement in the state
5. Potential impact of this movement on Colorado youth.

The logic model of the ACY initiative and the evaluation, Figure 1, highlights the areas of focus in the evaluation, evaluation strategies and data collection methods employed to assess the initiative. As the diagram shows, four overarching evaluation strategies defined OMNI's evaluation approach:

1. A historical analysis of ACY's role as a catalyst for asset building
2. Case studies of asset-building organizations
3. Asset-building network survey and an exploratory study of asset champions
4. An investigative study of youth impacts.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF ACY'S ROLE AS A CATALYST FOR ASSET BUILDING

The logic model depicts ACY (the organization) as the logical starting point for examining the effects of the initiative. An evaluation strategy, consisting primarily of a historical analysis, was developed to determine the role that ACY played in the promotion of assets in Colorado, including its contributions to innovation, dissemination of the framework and asset integration in Colorado. The methodology included an analysis of documents and products developed by ACY, geographically-coded maps of media and community presentations in the state and interviews of and focus groups with ACY staff. Interviews with grantees and staff of The Colorado Trust supplemented these data.

CASE STUDIES OF ASSET-BUILDING ORGANIZATIONS

A second major area of evaluation interest was the process of asset integration and transformation. The second evaluation strategy developed was a case study approach that involved a focused, in-depth study of the asset integration and transformation process at 10 sites. This methodology was designed to explore





unique contexts for asset building (e.g., educational settings and organizations serving youth of color); organizational changes or transformation resulting from integration of the asset framework (e.g., policy and procedures, involvement of youth) and unique characteristics of asset-building organizations.

Participant observation and in-depth interviews were the primary methods used to develop case studies. Survey and youth focus group data supplemented the gathered information.

ASSET-BUILDING NETWORK SURVEY AND AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF ASSET CHAMPIONS

The third evaluation strategy that OMNI developed involved two components: a network survey and a study of asset champions. Organizations involved in asset building were surveyed to trace asset-building networks and to assess the reach of the emerging movement within Colorado. Information about networks between grantees and other entities not funded through the initiative was gathered. The second component of this strategy consisted of interviews with a small sample of asset champions. The purpose of these interviews was to learn more about the role of asset champions in the movement and the transformational process on an individual level.

INVESTIGATIVE STUDY OF IMPACT

A focus group study comprised the fourth major evaluation strategy; this study was designed to explore the effects of asset building on youth. Seven focus groups were conducted with a total of 34 youths at case study sites. A general set of focus group questions was developed and individual guides were tailored based on information about local asset-building efforts and youth involvement strategies. Through this focus group study, the evaluation team examined what could be learned from youth about the impacts of asset building.

The largely qualitative design of the evaluation reflected the exploratory nature of these inquiries and the status of evaluation research in the positive youth development field. The asset approach does not offer a specific model for intervention but rather a framework for social change. This requires evaluators to assess processes and outcomes outside of the more typical context of programs. Another challenge for evaluators is that existing tools tend to focus heavily on the measurement of risk and problem behavior and, therefore, fall short of capturing the range of outcomes promised by asset building.

While it is difficult to adequately measure asset building and its outcomes, the findings summarized in this report will help researchers and practitioners better understand the asset-building process and measures of its success.



Chapter 2

ACY: A CATALYST FOR ASSET BUILDING

DURING ITS TRANSITION FROM AN INITIATIVE INTO AN INDEPENDENT AGENCY, ACY RELEASED A NUMBER OF PROFESSIONALLY PACKAGED PRODUCTS TO SUPPORT ITS WORK AND THAT OF ASSET BUILDERS NATIONALLY AND IN COLORADO. ACY ALSO PROVIDED COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS AND TRAININGS TO ASSET BUILDERS. THROUGHOUT THE INITIATIVE, ACY CONVENED ASSET BUILDERS (AT GRANTEE NETWORKING MEETINGS, TWO STATEWIDE CONFERENCES AND SUMMITS) TO PROMOTE NETWORKING AND SHARE RESOURCES. IMPORTANT OUTCOMES OF ACY'S WORK WITH ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDED THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW INNOVATIONS FOR ASSET BUILDING WITHIN SPECIFIC POPULATIONS AND SECTORS OF THE PUBLIC AND NONPROFIT SERVICE.



The assessment of ACY's role in Colorado's emerging asset-building movement was an important component of the evaluation and was designed to promote understanding of the challenges and opportunities that statewide asset-building initiatives may encounter in their efforts to promote assets. A significant part of the evaluation also focused on the strategies and outcomes of ACY's work with communities and the public and nonprofit infrastructure. Of particular interest to the positive youth development field were the innovations that ACY developed to support asset building within diverse organizational settings and communities of color. Through a variety of methods including interviews, participant observation, document review and surveys, OMNI explored ACY's leadership role in raising public awareness about the asset framework, supporting local asset-building efforts to integrate the framework and strategically targeting new groups and institutions to engage in asset building.

Findings about ACY's role in the asset building movement converged across different methodological approaches and data sources. Semiannual progress reports to The Trust were an important source

of information about ACY and helped document information about its trainings and presentations. OMNI developed a document review form that facilitated collection of data from these progress reports and ACY publications to help clarify and record areas of research interest. OMNI also conducted two focus groups with ACY staff about organizational identity and related issues — one shortly after beginning the evaluation and one toward the close of the evaluation period. Some of the greatest insights into ACY's work came from participant observation of grantee networking meetings, a summit for asset builders, trainings and forums for policymakers. OMNI developed a contact summary form with which to document observations and facilitate subsequent analysis. Collectively, data were examined in order to develop a historical picture of ACY and its contributions to the initiative.

STATEWIDE MOBILIZATION

Statewide mobilization was a central charge of the Colorado initiative; and, as Assets for Colorado Youth emerged as a resource for community asset-building efforts, it continued to fulfill this influential role. During

the first years of the initiative, ACY's efforts were largely devoted to two major strategies to mobilize people and organizations statewide: a public awareness campaign and a community grants program. Launched in 1997, the public awareness campaign targeted the general public and community groups through presentations, keynote addresses and media coverage. Presentations and media events were designed to raise awareness about youth issues, to generate greater name recognition of the developmental assets and to spark interest and support for asset-building approaches to youth development. A second major effort to mobilize people and organizations in the state around youth and to disseminate the asset framework was begun in 1998. Funding from The Colorado Trust allowed ACY to implement a statewide community grants program to support the development of local asset-building initiatives and innovative applications of the framework.

PUBLIC AWARENESS

Presentations on the 40 developmental assets to community leaders were a critical first step in generating public interest. During the first two years of the initiative in particular, presentations tended to target the communities and surrounding regions in which selected grantees would later initiate local asset-building projects. Many participants in the presentations found the Search Institute's *Profiles of Student Life: Attitude and Behavior Survey*, administered communitywide to middle and high school students in local school districts, to be useful for continuing the dialogue with community members following ACY's presentations. Presentations and continued dialogue between ACY and local communities helped promote community readiness for project implementation.

Presentations and community forums for dialogue extended beyond ACY community grants to raise general public awareness and engage key organizations and professional groups. Over the course of a four-and-a-half-year period, presentations by ACY were delivered in far-reaching corners of the state. Presentations, in combination with media coverage and more in-depth trainings, allowed ACY to blanket much of the state with information about the asset-building approach.

By mid-year 2002, ACY had reached more than 41,000 people through presentations and other activities such as training workshops, networking forums and statewide conferences. Table 1 provides a year-by-year count of the individuals who attended presentations delivered by ACY.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF ATTENDEES AT ACY PRESENTATIONS AND TRAININGS	
YEAR	ATTENDEES
1997	3,638
1998	9,221
1999	9,335
2000	7,354
2001	7,335
2002	6,308
Total	41,817

Note: Figures from 1997 represent a six-month period only. The numbers in the table likely represent a duplicated count of attendees, as individuals may have attended more than one of ACY's presentations or trainings in the state.

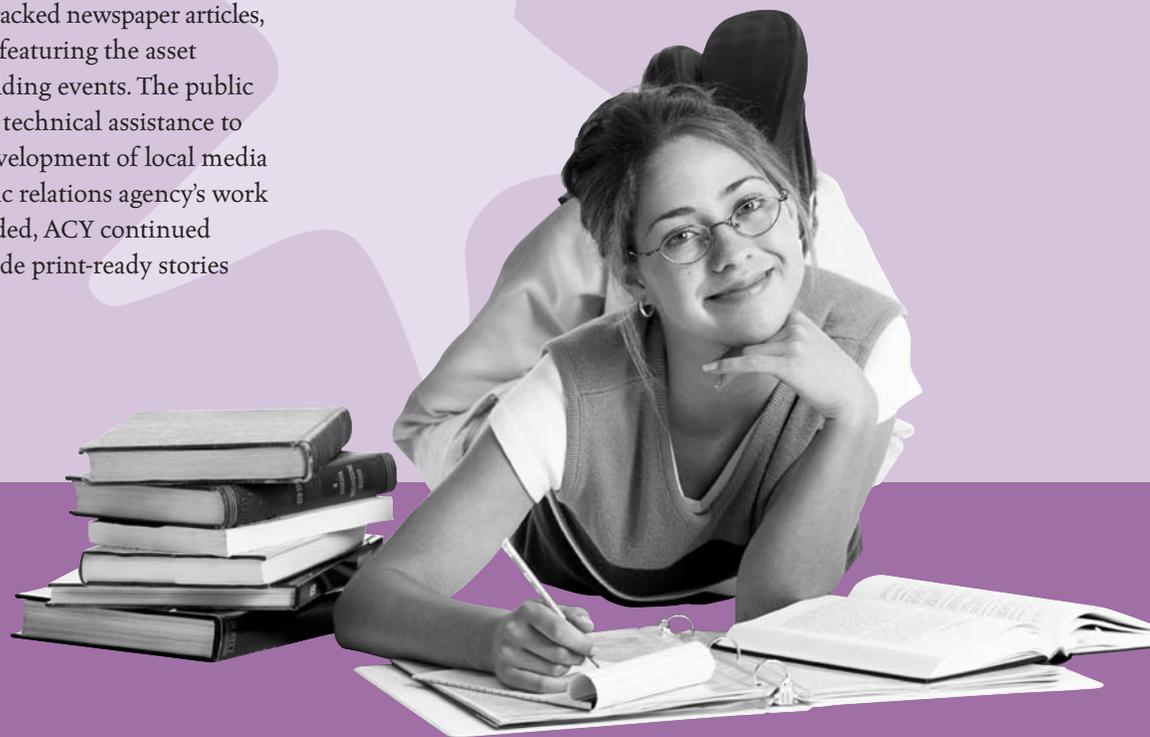
Presentations and community forums for dialogue extended beyond ACY community grants to raise general public awareness and engage key organizations and professional groups.

Presentations made it possible to reach large numbers of community leaders and professional groups working in the public and nonprofit service sectors. Increasingly throughout the time period, 1997–2002, ACY provided presentations and training across the country as well. These numbers are not reflected in Table 1. However, in 2002 alone, ACY reached a national audience of over 3,500 participants.

The regional and national requests for keynotes and presentations by ACY staff may be an indicator of the organization's growing visibility and credibility within the national movement for positive youth development. Moreover, out-of-state presentations and activity at the national level also had positive consequences for garnering recognition within the state. Interviews with ACY staff suggest that the growing trend in out-of-state presentations can be expected to continue.

Another significant component of the public awareness campaign was the development of media strategies. Early in the initiative, a public awareness task force was developed, consisting of ACY and Search Institute staff representatives, The Colorado Trust's communications staff and representatives from a public relations consulting agency. A primary goal of the public awareness campaign was to obtain media coverage of asset presentations, activities and events. In addition to assisting in the development of a strategic media plan, the public relations consulting firm also tracked newspaper articles, and television and radio spots featuring the asset framework and local asset-building events. The public relations agency also provided technical assistance to initiative grantees with the development of local media plans. In 2000, when the public relations agency's work with the initiative had concluded, ACY continued to work with grantees to provide print-ready stories for local media.

Because media was a major focus of resources during the first three years, the evaluation examined some measures of the media's role in raising public awareness. Documentation of the media coverage of ACY presentations and other asset-related activities throughout the state indicates that there was broad-based exposure to the framework. During the first three years of the initiative, the agency's count of media impressions (estimated number of times members of the public were exposed to information about the asset framework) provided some benchmarks against which to measure the success of the public awareness campaign. By the end of 2000, the public relations agency counted 11 million media impressions based on the placement of print, television and radio spots and size of the reader- or listenership. Some media coverage occurred in most of Colorado's counties during the four-and-a-half year period. Continued media coverage of the assets beyond 2000, when the contract with the agency concluded, indicated that the public awareness campaign was sustained through the end of the evaluation period, despite ACY's shift to a more indirect role in media relations, involving the support of media placements by its grantees.



THE COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM

In addition to the statewide public awareness campaign, the initiative created a community grants program to facilitate mobilizing people and organizations in the state for asset building. In collaboration with The Colorado Trust, ACY developed five grantmaking strategies to support the introduction of the asset approach throughout the state.

Each grantmaking strategy was designed to fulfill a different function. For example, community mobilization grants were awarded to community-based organizations

to disseminate the asset framework and to develop local resources and partnerships for asset building in the county or service area. Organizations serving communities of color were encouraged to apply for any grant category. In addition, however, a specific grant category, communities of color contracts, was designed to fund asset-building projects that would serve youth of color and their families. The purpose of this grant award was to learn, through partnerships with grantees, about the cultural resources and barriers in these communities to asset building. Table 2 outlines the funding level, number of awards and specific purposes of each of the grantmaking strategies.

TABLE 2

GRANTMAKING STRATEGIES TO BUILD ASSETS FOR COLORADO'S YOUTH				
GRANTMAKING STRATEGY	YEARS OF FUNDING	FUNDED AGENCIES	FUNDING LEVELS	PURPOSE OF GRANTS
Community mobilization	3	13	\$75,000 (average)	Assist communities to begin or continue their efforts to build awareness about asset development principles. Awarded to community-based organizations to create local strategies that encourage youth involvement and participation in local asset-building activities across all community members and sectors.
Statewide partnership	2	9	\$40,000	Facilitate the work of nonprofit organizations, governmental agencies and associations in implementing the asset framework within each branch office. Awarded to agencies with statewide reach to create and disseminate asset-building resources within a particular sector or audience and leverage existing resources to initiate or expand asset-building strategies.
Innovation in asset-building	2	13	\$20,000	Develop new and effective asset-building strategies with the potential for replication. An asset-building innovation may include efforts that either work directly with youth as partners in planning and implementation; enhance strategies such as service-learning, building intergenerational relationships, mentoring or youth empowerment; or provide deeper integration of the asset-building framework in specific communities.
Communities of color contracts	1	12	\$10,000	Apply and integrate the asset framework into the organization's daily work with young people in communities of color.
Associational partnerships	Varied	1 (implementation) 2 (planning)	Varied	Apply and integrate the asset framework into the daily work and educational environment of schools and school districts.



The community grants program provided funding to a wide range of organizations to facilitate disseminating the asset framework to people and organizations statewide. By supporting community mobilization, the incorporation of assets into systems, innovations and targeted work with communities of color and educational associations, ACY and The Colorado Trust sought to engage Colorado's communities in asset building. ACY also supported funded organizations through grantee networking meetings, targeted trainings and resource development. These efforts provided a foundation for work with other organizations in the state that were not funded through the initiative. The community grants program therefore supported mobilization of the organizations and people in the state directly through funding, and indirectly through the development of resources and expertise needed to work with Colorado's communities to apply the asset framework.

Cultural Competency Training
ACY developed a day-long workshop on cultural competency, *The Spirit of Culture*. The training was based on an ACY publication with the same title. *The Spirit of Culture* training provided participants with interactive opportunities to learn, share and explore the role of culture and diversity in adolescent development. In 2002, groups taking part in the trainings included Aurora Public Schools, the Early Childhood Education Advisory Council and Leadership Denver.



SUPPORTING THE GROWING BASE OF ASSET BUILDERS

As awareness of the asset framework increased throughout the state, so did the obligation of ACY to assist organizations and individuals in translating new ideas into positive action for youth and communities. Organizations that requested assistance included those funded through the initiative, and other agencies and professional groups that had encountered assets through ACY's public presentations and activities, agency networks or Search Institute national conferences. The feedback received indicated ACY:

- Needed to respond to the wide-ranging needs of individuals and organizations in the state
- Should develop training programs to allow individuals and organizations to continuously improve their local asset-building efforts
- Should create forums for asset builders statewide to network, share resources and lessons, and celebrate individual and collective achievements.

As a result of this feedback, asset-building meetings and forums became a central function of ACY in its support of positive youth development in the state.

BRIDGING AWARENESS TO ACTION

Beginning in 1998, ACY provided trainings on asset building to communities across Colorado. The general purpose of these trainings was to support individuals in becoming asset builders in their personal and professional lives. Trainings emphasized how to integrate assets or how to start asset-building personally or professionally. As one staff member said, "Trainings involved more than just increasing awareness; they provided a bridge from awareness to action." The small size and focus of the trainings made them conducive to helping individuals envision how assets could enhance their work within the community and with youth. Within trainings, storytelling and interactive processes encouraged individuals to practice application of the framework and supported the learning process. The objective of the trainings was to empower asset builders to share the framework with others and to champion assets within their organizations and communities.

In addition to providing needed support to grantees of the community grants program, ACY's trainings were an important vehicle through which to reach non-funded

community groups. ACY provided many trainings to non-funded community groups and professional organizations, including the Fourth Annual Latino Youth Leadership Conference, Monaco Elementary School, the Latino Mental Health group and the University of Colorado at Boulder Pre-collegiate Program. Training the membership of such organizations positioned ACY in new and wide-reaching networks that could be leveraged to influence local and state leaders.

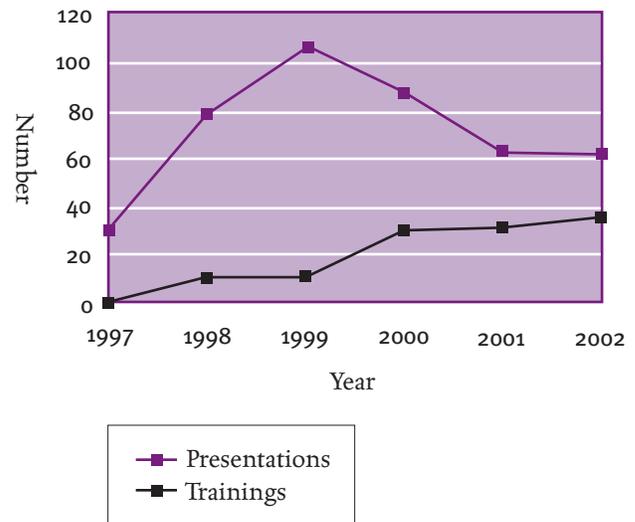
ACY's trainings helped facilitate new partnerships for innovation and more effective engagement of diverse communities. In a number of cases, an initial training developed into a longer-term partnership to transform the organization and its relationships in the community. One example of such a partnership was between ACY and Philips Preparatory School. Philips teachers, administrators and other school personnel, including bus drivers and cooking staff, were trained in the asset framework, and a broader strategic planning process for developing an asset-building school was initiated. A Winter Diversity Fair showcased and engaged families in the school's new vision. This project helped lay the groundwork for an innovative project with Denver Public Schools to increase parent involvement in low-scoring schools on the Colorado Statewide Assessment Program (CSAP) tests. This is one example of how trainings deepened the reach of assets within targeted organizations, networks and sectors, once initial mobilization had begun.

By June 2002, more than 400 people had participated in in-depth trainings delivered by ACY staff about the asset framework and philosophy. Graph 1 shows that the number of trainings ACY provided increased three-fold between 1999 and 2000, as the organization became its own 501(c)3. The number of trainings offered by ACY has continued to rise; by mid-2002, ACY already had exceeded the number of trainings from the previous year by 50%.

RALLYING ASSET BUILDERS

ACY also provided significant support to the growing base of asset builders in Colorado by creating forums for the exchange of ideas, the sharing of major events and new developments in the field, and the celebration of asset champions. At a national level, these opportunities already existed through Search Institute's annual Healthy Communities/Healthy Youth Conference. ACY and

GRAPH 1: ACY TRAININGS AND PRESENTATIONS



“Trainings involved more than just increasing awareness; they provided a bridge from awareness to action.”

– An ACY staff member



a number of other organizations in Colorado participated in this national conference to share Colorado's experiences in conference trainings and sessions and to bring new materials and ideas back to the state. While ACY recognized the importance of taking part in the national dialogue and movement, the organization also anticipated the growing need within Colorado to gather asset builders locally for coalition building and the advancement of assets in the state.

In 2000 and 2001, ACY organized statewide conferences for asset builders. The conferences offered in-state opportunities to build the capacity of asset builders, share strategies and experiences, network, exchange ideas and rejuvenate enthusiasm for working with youth. Participants in these conferences included grantees, professional associations, schools and newcomers to the field of youth development. Although no conference was anticipated for 2002, asset builders came together at a summit hosted by ACY to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the asset initiative in Colorado. Conferences and other events provided individual asset builders with the sense of being part of a larger effort in the state. These forums celebrated and showcased achievements of the Colorado initiative.

2002 Spring Asset Summit

ACY hosted a summit at Copper Mountain that brought together more than 80 asset builders from 50 schools, agencies and businesses across Colorado to celebrate the five-year anniversary of the asset initiative in Colorado. Highlights included:

- A celebration dinner and Outstanding Asset-Builder Award ceremony
- Performances by young dancers from Folklorico Mexicana and the Kaiser Permanente Educational Theater Program, X-Change
- A facilitated discussion with Dr. Vincent Harding of the Iliff School of Theology on the makings of a movement.

In addition to organizing conferences, ACY convened asset builders by establishing work groups and leadership forums. For example, in spring and fall of 2001, ACY brought together agencies with a history of working with Spanish-language communities to talk about ways to share the asset-building approach with community members. The first of these workgroups convened participants from 12 organizations in four different states to strategize about how to integrate the asset framework in Spanish-language communities. This resulted in the ACY publication *Conexiones* and a second meeting of the Spanish work group at the 2001 Search Institute Healthy Communities/Healthy Youth Conference.

ACY also sponsored the Educator's Forum and Conversations for Kids. The forums were designed to assemble leaders in the education sector for the purpose of identifying guiding principles and challenges to asset building in schools.

By promoting open dialogue and the participation of influential leaders, these smaller forums proved to be sources of innovation that supported ACY in the expansion of its work with communities. The forums also provided opportunities for asset builders to renew their commitment to an asset-building approach and provide input regarding policy issues and ACY's work in specific sectors.

PROMOTING INNOVATION IN THE APPLICATION OF THE ASSET FRAMEWORK

The award of innovation grants through the community grants program and the customization of trainings for specific audiences interested in applying the framework in diverse settings or populations were two important ways that ACY promoted innovation. A third, significant way that ACY promoted innovation was through the refinement and professional packaging of lessons learned in the field. Resource development served at least three important functions for ACY and asset builders:

- Products created another medium through which ACY could spread asset-building principles and deepen its work within specific communities and sectors

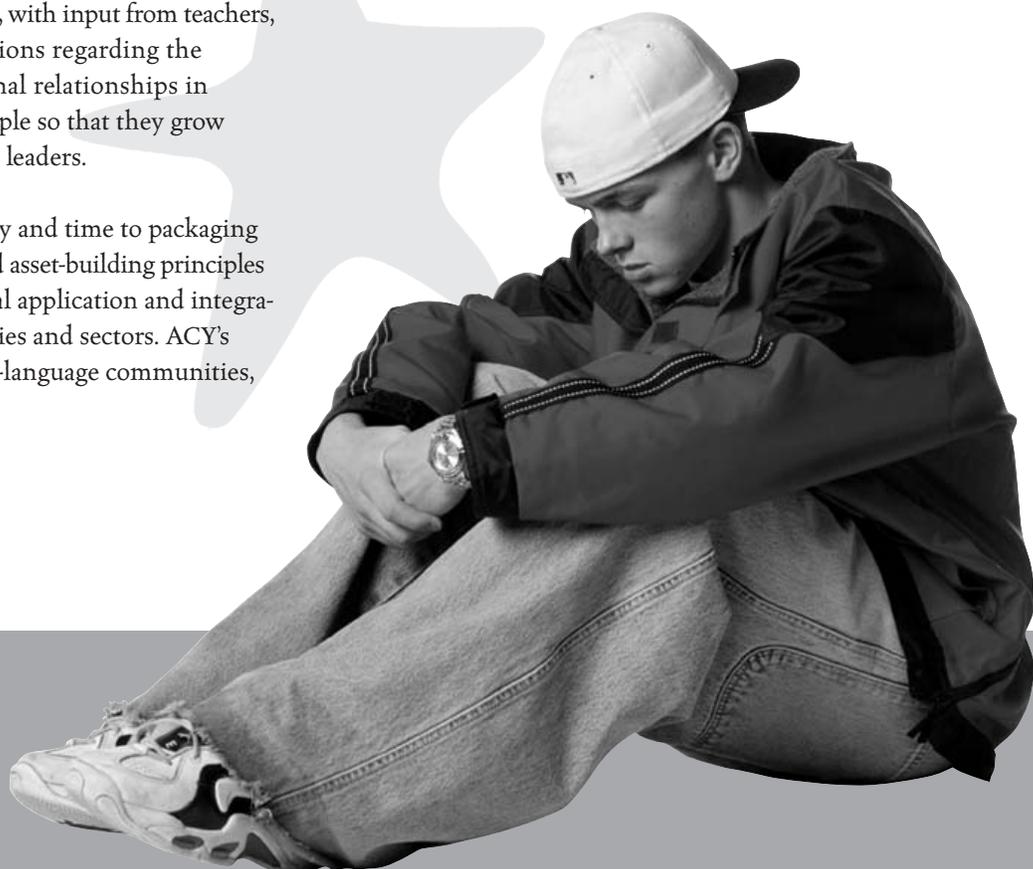
- Products provided community groups with the tools and materials necessary to sustain transformation and empower new asset builders.
- ACY's role in resource development facilitated its own organizational sustainability and, thereby, the leadership of asset building in Colorado.

Beginning in 2000, ACY provided individuals inspired by the asset-building approach with an array of tools and resources to support local asset building. The video *Expect Great Things* and the accompanying discussion guide is an example of ACY's product development process and the ways products were packaged for specific audiences. *Expect Great Things* was developed in partnership with the Veterans of Hope Project, an organization affiliated with the Iliff school of Theology on the University of Denver campus that records the oral histories of some of the world's most important civil rights leaders. The video featured interviews with ethnically diverse leaders who played instrumental roles in movements for freedom and equality. Interviews focused on the important and empowering relationships these leaders had while growing up. The video and discussion guide were designed, with input from teachers, to promote classroom discussions regarding the importance of intergenerational relationships in shaping the lives of young people so that they grow up to be principled, influential leaders.

ACY devoted significant energy and time to packaging the 40 developmental assets and asset-building principles in ways that facilitated practical application and integration among diverse communities and sectors. ACY's work with Latino and Spanish-language communities,

in particular, illustrates how it was innovative in the packaging of useful resources for specific audiences and the effective translation and cultural adaptation of the asset framework. Early in the initiative, ACY provided Spanish translations of the developmental assets and accompanying materials. ACY also perceived a need for culturally appropriate formats for the presentation of asset-building principles and the engagement of communities of color in application of the framework. One example of an innovative resource that ACY made available to Latino and Spanish-language communities is *La Lotería*, an adaptation of a popularized form of Mexican bingo that teaches participants about the asset framework.

Experiences working within diverse communities and organizations helped build ACY's expertise and credibility in the development of resources and tools to support asset building. ACY resources abstracted guiding principles and lessons learned about working in specific sectors or with communities of color from customized trainings. In addition, ACY collected and disseminated



asset stories from grantees and other local asset-building efforts to provide meaningful illustrations of the asset framework in action. Conventions and work groups also aided ACY in keeping in touch with what works and the needs of communities. Relationships between ACY and asset builders in the state helped establish a feedback loop between work in communities and resource development. Thus, resource development was not only an important contribution to asset building in Colorado, but also a source of the organization's own growth and sustainability. Resource development generated a new base of revenue for the organization, which enabled new efforts to carry out its mission.

STRATEGIC TARGETING OF PUBLIC AND NONPROFIT SECTORS

After its transition to an independent 501(c)3, ACY began to think intentionally about the value that it might add to the education sector. An influential sector working with youth, families, communities and policy-makers, the education sector is the domain in which

“Going deep,” as an ACY staff member termed the process, with the education sector means teaching the asset framework to leaders and supporting innovative ways to foster sustainability of change within schools.

youth spend the majority of their time from early childhood through their adolescent years. Similar to the way it focused on the integration of assets in Spanish-language communities, ACY sought to provide new ideas and asset-building resources to educators to address issues facing schools and youth. ACY's work in this field serves as a model of how it might continue to target other sectors and bring asset-building principles to organizations that work with youth.

“Going deep,” as an ACY staff member termed the process, with the education sector means teaching the asset framework to leaders and supporting innovative ways to foster sustainability of change within schools. ACY's work with individual schools began with the awarding of community grants and trainings. Its partnership with Denison Montessori School, like the work with Phillips Preparatory School, provided an important foundation for furthering its work within the education sector. ACY gained considerable experience working within Denison's school setting and developing training tools tailored to the different occupations of school staff, including administrators, teachers, teacher's aides, cooking and janitorial staff and bus drivers. During this partnership, ACY addressed issues concerning parental involvement, including helping administrators and parents identify the assets that parents potentially bring to the school setting and the alienation that many parents experience in trying to support their children's education.

The development of a training and companion publication in 2001, *The Power of Parents: Parent Engagement in Schools and the Developmental Assets*, was a direct result of this work. This publication and accompanying training were developed to strengthen relationships between parents, school staff and students through the principles and framework of assets. The premise of the publication and training was that: “Parents have the power and influence to positively impact their child's achievement in school. They also have the power to positively influence schools so that other children can also benefit from improved educational environments. The power of parents emerges through meaningful participation and the development of relationships in schools.”¹

Applying asset-building principles, *The Power of Parents* publication and training were designed to move school personnel and parents beyond the concept of parent

involvement to parent engagement. *The Power of Parents* provided practical strategies for building and sustaining parent engagement, including ideas for improving a school's climate that could lead to the engagement of individual parents. Moreover, the publication and training show the connection between parent engagement and the development of asset-building schools.

Other examples of how ACY continued to target the education sector through training, leadership forums and resource development include:

- *The Educators' Forum for Asset Champions* – This publication was based on the Educators' Forum held in Denver with education leaders, students and family advocates. In a question-and-answer format, the report shares principles and effective strategies for fostering student involvement.
- *Expect Success Strategies for Parent Engagement* – In 2001, ACY began the Expect Success Project: Strategies for Parent Engagement and Improving School Climate. This project was a collaboration between ACY, Denver Public Schools and the University of Denver to enhance parent engagement and academic achievement in five Denver schools that received low scores on standardized tests. The project was being evaluated for the purposes of advancing both asset building and education research. ACY used this opportunity to expand its capacity to participate in evaluation research, refine its strategies based on findings and make key contributions to education research on academic achievement and school climate.
- *Conversations for Kids Forum on the Expect Success Project* – To illustrate the connection between positive youth development and academic achievement, in June 2002, Assets for Colorado Youth convened a forum of education leaders at the district and state levels to hear about the Expect Success Project, designed to promote parent engagement in schools with low scores on Colorado's student assessment tests.

BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR ASSETS

Beyond funding from The Colorado Trust and ACY's affiliation with Search Institute, several factors were critical to ACY's emergence as a leading force in Colorado's asset movement, such as ACY's:

- Visibility through presentations and media as a voice for asset building in the state
- Galvanization of asset builders
- Role in the development, packaging and dissemination of innovations from the field
- Focused work in targeted sectors and communities of color.

OMNI's interviews with grantees also suggested another important factor in ACY's leadership capacity. This was the shared perception among asset builders and newcomers to the framework that ACY was a credible messenger. Interview data indicated that ACY's credibility was rooted in three different sources:

1. Its fusion of the personal and professional in defining its leadership role and in communicating about the asset framework
2. Its ability to bridge community and research
3. Its work with communities of color, especially Latino and Spanish-language communities.

Each of these three elements were influential in building ACY's reputation for working with Colorado's public and nonprofit sectors.

“Assets influence my work; it's something I believe in; it's part of my life. Everything I say is asset building and strength-based, and moves for creating an environment in which young people can thrive.”

– An ACY staff member

LINKING THE PERSONAL AND THE PROFESSIONAL

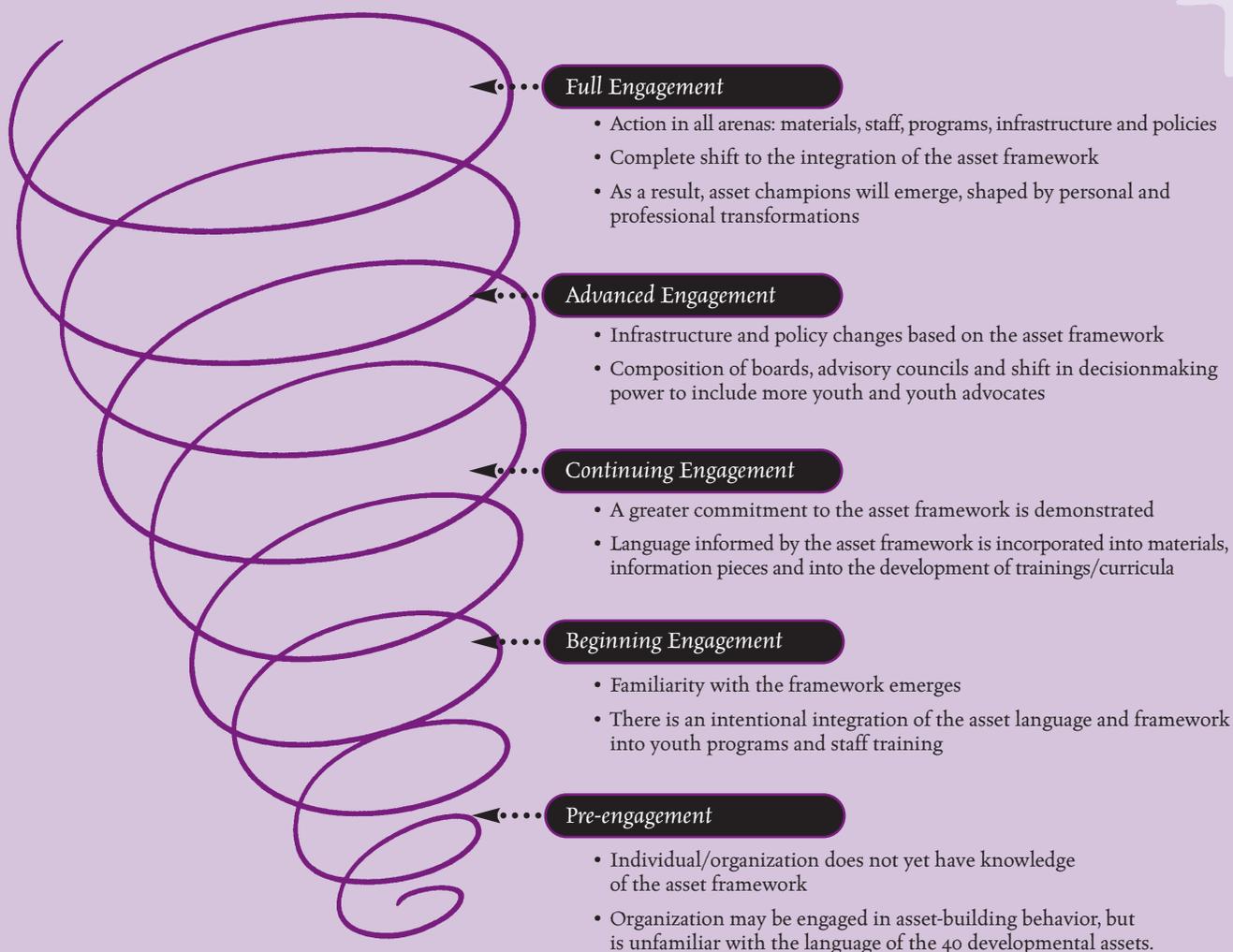
The very nature of asset building, it appears, causes individuals to think differently about personal and professional spheres of life. In the case of ACY, grantees observed that its staff was both personally and professionally motivated to share the asset framework. Personal applications by staff of the asset framework provided stories and inspiration that could be shared with the community. It also helped build credibility because ACY staff members were seen as seasoned asset builders. Moreover, the fusion of the personal and professional spheres was viewed as a positive indicator of the organization's integrity. Both ACY staff and organizations working with ACY identified the personal experience as asset builders as a significant factor that

informed ACY's guiding principles, or what ACY staff referred to as "ways of being" or "ways of showing up in the world."

CONNECTING COMMUNITY AND RESEARCH

When ACY transitioned from a state initiative of the Search Institute to an independent agency, one of the chief concerns that grantees shared was the loss of their special affiliation with Search Institute and its recognition as a leader in the field of positive youth development. Grantees perceived many benefits from their relationship to Search Institute, including the research base it provided to funders and communities for the asset-building approach to working with youth. ACY responded to their concerns and its own interest in contributing to the field through a number of efforts.

FIGURE 2: THE SPIRAL OF ASSET INTEGRATION



Source: Assets for Colorado Youth, Spirit of Culture, 2000

By early 2001, ACY stated that “identifying and sharing what works in the field of youth development” was a core competency it would develop. The explicit acknowledgment of the need to bridge community and research was an important step in addressing grantee concerns. ACY’s earlier work on examining asset #34, cultural competence, to show the importance of racial identity in adolescence was one important example of ACY’s efforts to bridge research and community. The publication, *The Spirit of Culture*, was a result of how ACY blended research with its own lessons about how to apply cultural competency within communities to facilitate strength-based youth development.² ACY’s development of the asset integration spiral to describe the process organizations undergo in integrating the asset framework also suggested the seriousness with which ACY assumed this charge. Figure 2 displays the spiral, the stages of asset integration and the indicators that ACY found to be associated with progression up the spiral.

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Another important factor in the perception of ACY as a credible messenger was its engagement of or involvement with diverse communities. Central to ACY’s approach to working with communities of color was the principle, one staff member described, of “honoring diversity and expecting great things from everyone.” ACY’s work with Latino and Spanish-language communities was particularly noted by grantees and other organizations involved in asset building. This was because ACY helped bring the engagement of Spanish-language communities into the consciousness of asset builders in the state and throughout the nation. Moreover, grantees identified the personal history of ACY’s executive director, Maria Guajardo Lucero, a daughter of Mexican immigrants, to be a major factor in both the advancements that were made in working with Latino and Spanish-language communities and ACY’s credibility within these communities. Positive perceptions of ACY and its work within these communities were significant factors in community members’ engagement with the asset message. One asset builder observed, “I always believe that the messenger’s got to be whoever your targets are [the groups you are targeting with the asset message]; those people have to see their people. If not, they’ll say you aren’t telling me nothing new... They’re not gonna hear anything else, because you don’t know how to approach it with them.”

Chapter 3

THE DYNAMICS OF ASSET INTEGRATION, INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION

ASSET INTEGRATION IMPLIES THAT ORGANIZATIONS EMBRACED THE STRENGTH-BASED PHILOSOPHY OF THE ASSET FRAMEWORK AND ACTIVELY USED THE FRAMEWORK TO GUIDE THEIR PROGRAMMING, THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND, WHEN THE FRAMEWORK WAS INTEGRATED AT A DEEP LEVEL, THEIR ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION AND VISION. AMONG THOSE GRANTEES THAT INTEGRATED ASSETS MOST EXTENSIVELY, OMNI FOUND THAT THE ASSET APPROACH HELPED ESTABLISH A TONE AND ORIENTATION THAT SHAPED ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND PRACTICES. IN THESE ORGANIZATIONS, STAFF IDENTIFIED TRANSFORMATIONS, OR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES, IN STAFF MORALE, YOUTH ENGAGEMENT, ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND THE EXPANSION OF NETWORKS WITH OTHER AGENCIES ON BEHALF OF YOUTH.



CASE STUDY APPROACH

To learn about the process of asset integration and transformation, the evaluation included a case study approach. This involved conducting in-depth and focused research with a subset of grantees to tell a richer, fuller story of the application of the framework in different organizational settings. Because asset integration and resulting transformations are highly contingent on context (i.e., the diverse array of factors in the setting or environment), the case study approach used qualitative methods to capture the complexity of asset building in different communities and organizations, and with different groups and populations. These methods included:

- Site visits (participant observation)
- Extensive grantee interviews
- Detailed document summary reviews (primarily of progress reports)
- Focus groups with youth.

Direct observation, in particular, allowed OMNI to explore multiple dimensions of the asset integration-transformation process through first-hand experience.

For example, site visits allowed OMNI to observe youth involvement in asset-building activities. In addition, the evaluation team also learned about the unique meanings that organizations attributed to the asset framework, as well as how organizations used the framework in novel ways. Site visits provided OMNI with important opportunities to gather rich contextual information that facilitated a fuller understanding of the level of asset integration that occurred among grantees, as well as some of the factors that contributed to or impeded this process.

To facilitate data collection, the evaluation team developed an extensive site visit tool kit. The tool kit included the following tools/instruments:

1. *Site visit checklist*: The checklist was designed to guide the collection of similar types of information across sites and across visits to the same site. This tool also was developed to facilitate quick and easy note taking during the event that evaluation team members were observing. Following the site visit, these notes were incorporated into field notes written more formally using the site visit summary form.

2. *Questions to explore with main contact:* These questions were developed to elicit important contextual information about the events that were observed by the evaluators. When preparing for a site visit, members of the evaluation team requested time to visit with the main contact(s) at each site before or after the event that served as the focus of the site visit. This provided an opportunity for OMNI to explore the history and purpose of the event, and its links to other asset-building efforts.
3. *Site visit discussion guide:* The discussion guide was used as a debriefing instrument following a visit to facilitate the mutual exchange of information about what was observed by evaluation team members. This helped solidify observations and provided a forum for exploring impressions and differences in interpretation. Talking through areas where observers experienced or interpreted something differently proved helpful in gaining insights into asset building. Ideally, debriefing conversations were formally recorded, allowing the evaluation team to revisit issues.
4. *Site visit summary form:* This form was used to record observations and served as the formal documentation of each site visit. Summary forms synthesized field notes and reflections. Questions within the summary form also probed emerging hypotheses, new insights and areas that evaluators hoped to explore during subsequent contacts with grantee sites.

Approximately 50% of grantees had already concluded funded participation in the initiative at the time OMNI began its evaluation efforts. Case study sites were selected from those grantees still receiving funding. Sites were

selected to maximize variation among case studies. Of the 10 sites selected, at least two grantees were selected from each of the grantmaking strategies, with the exception of the associational partnerships (i.e., grants designed to engage the education sector). Only one associational partnership was sampled due to the small number of awards in this category; however, other grantmaking strategies provided insights into the asset integration-transformation process in schools.

The limited evaluation period restricted the number of site visits OMNI was able to make to individual case study sites. To maximize data collection during site visits, field visits were scheduled around asset-building events so that the evaluation team could observe grantees in action. In addition, field visits were coupled with other evaluation activities when possible, such as on-site interviews and youth focus groups. Table 3 provides an overview of the site visits conducted with case study sites from May 2001 to January 2002.



TABLE 3

EVENTS OBSERVED AT CASE STUDY SITES
<p>ASIAN PACIFIC DEVELOPMENT CENTER <i>(community of color contract & innovation in asset building)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vietnamese parent support group meeting (interpretation was provided)
<p>CITY OF LONGMONT <i>(community mobilization)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community youth feedback forum to explore findings from Search Institute's <i>Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors</i> survey • Asset-building class for sixth graders • Meeting with four student leaders on the Youth Speakers' Bureau
<p>COLORADO STATEWIDE PARENT COALITION <i>(statewide partnership)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent training sponsored by Lake County Schools • Meeting with youth trainers
<p>CROSS COMMUNITY COALITION <i>(community of color contract & innovation in asset building)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EarthForce youth leadership meeting
<p>DENISON MONTESSORI SCHOOL <i>(associational partner)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asset Champion Club meeting with 20 fourth and fifth grade students • Community/School Assistance Team meeting of school faculty, staff and parents
<p>FULL CIRCLE INTERGENERATIONAL PROJECT <i>(statewide partnership)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colorado Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division conference presentation by youth
<p>GIRL SCOUTS WAGON WHEEL COUNCIL <i>(statewide partnership)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cadette-led asset training during the Cadette Senior Summit Leadership Weekend • Interview with two cadettes (who had conducted the asset-based training highlighted above) and their adult leader
<p>TEACHING PREVENTION, PROMOTING INVOLVEMENT (MONTROSE/OLATHE) <i>(community mobilization)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Issues Consortium • A meeting with members of the Youth Issues Consortium and Youth Central with seven youth between the ages of 15 and 18 years participating
<p>SENIORS, INC.! <i>(innovation in asset building grantee)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asset Builders' Club at Trinidad High School • Public service broadcast on assets in both English and Spanish at local radio station
<p>SOJOURNER SCHOOL <i>(innovation in asset building grantee)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immersion class (four classes attended) • A meeting with seven students enrolled in immersion classes

In addition to site visits and document reviews, other sources of rich information on case study sites were the interviews that the evaluation team conducted with grantees as they completed funding. A significant portion of the exit interview was dedicated to exploring the degree to which grantee organizations had integrated the asset framework during their involvement in the initiative and what this integration looked like in the context of organizations or communities. A number of questions were shaped by ACY's conceptualization of asset integration. Specifically, the following indicators of asset integration were explored with grantees:

- How staff incorporated the asset approach into their work at the organization
- The establishment of new or modification of existing programs
- The incorporation of the asset message into staff trainings and orientations
- The integration of the asset message into materials and other resources used and developed
- The incorporation of the asset framework into policies and procedures, such as requiring that all new staff receive training in the assets or that there be a youth representative on decisionmaking councils or boards
- Youth involvement in the development of asset-building efforts at the organization
- The fit of the asset framework with the community/population served by the organization.

Probing permitted evaluation team members to explore both the degree to which asset integration occurred and specific examples of what this integration looked like in diverse grantee organizations.

FACILITATORS OF ASSET INTEGRATION & TRANSFORMATION

The factors that facilitated asset integration at grantee organizations included:

- The “natural fit” of the asset framework with youth-serving organizations using a strength-based approach

- The empirical research that grantees could leverage to document the link between their work and positive outcomes for youth
- Innovative applications of the asset framework.

For the organizations with which assets resonated most strongly, transformation promoted organizational effectiveness in the following ways:

- Encouraged staff to be more intentional in their work with youth and in the community
- Established a common, unifying vision and mission for the organization
- Enhanced organizations' ability to leverage funding and in-kind support
- Engaged youth more effectively.

ASSETS AS A NATURAL FIT WITH YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

One of the most persistent themes that members of the evaluation team heard during exit interviews was that the asset framework is a “natural fit.” The asset framework tended to resonate most strongly with

“... So, the asset model seemed to be a natural and very easy fit with the programming we were already doing.”

– An ACY grantee

youth-serving organizations that already used a strength-based approach, as well as staff members who were strong advocates for youth. For these grantees, the 40 developmental assets made their guiding philosophy explicit and provided a structure for expanding and deepening their work with youth. As one grantee described, “We had been working all along doing youth development and leadership and that kind of thing. And we were looking for a way to make it stronger... Any program that we were giving the kids, we wanted to make sure there was some value in it – [that] the kids were definitely getting something from it... So, the asset model seemed to be a natural and very easy fit with the programming we were already doing.”

For many of the organizations that expressed this sense of natural fit, asset integration was less about changing existing programs and more about bringing assets to the forefront of the work already being conducted. Asset integration for these grantees was a purposeful step taken to enhance organizational effectiveness. In organizations that integrated assets into their infrastructure and policies, significant transformations could be achieved in clarifying and renewing the mission.

A New Framework for Advancing the Mission of Organizations

In many ways, the grantee organizations that found the asset framework a natural fit seemed to have an affinity for the asset-building approach. Exposure to the asset framework, however, gave these organizations a new language, structure, research and resources that supported and accelerated their work. As one grantee explained, “I really feel like we knew the asset language before it was even spoken. But to have it there, cut out for us, it just saves so much time and energy. It really helped us say, ‘Oh! This is it. This is the foundation. This is exactly what all of us were thinking in our heads, but had not put into words yet!’”

This grantee also described the increased efficiency that resulted from integrating the asset framework into his/her organization: “I really feel like it just gave us a foundation and a framework for building... whereas

before we were spinning our wheels, trying to develop things from scratch.” By integrating the assets framework as a foundation for their work, staff could devote resources to build upon this foundation rather than create a new organizing philosophy themselves.

The asset framework, as well as the language and material resources that accompanied the 40 developmental assets, enhanced the ability of these organizations to articulate and set forth a common, unifying vision and mission that more explicitly guided staff in their work and interactions with youth. As one grantee shared, “For me, it helped conceptualize what we were doing. So, it has been helpful for me to explain why [our organization] does what it does. And it’s using the asset model, being able to use that language, and talk about the different assets and connect our programming with building those assets... So, it’s just helped conceptualize what we do... That’s what’s helped the mission.”

Another grantee explained how integration of the asset framework clarified and advanced the mission of the organization in this way: “It helped me understand better what we’re doing here... [assets] was a great way to... explain [to other staff members], ‘These are the skills we’re trying to build in young people.’” The asset framework and philosophy helped staff understand the deeper meaning and contribution of their work and align their individual efforts with the organizational mission. Organizations that have established and articulated a more explicit mission and vision are in a better position to hold staff accountable for their work. Not surprisingly, therefore, many of these organizations incorporated assets as a topic of regularly scheduled staff meetings and as a component of staff evaluations. One grantee described how sharing a common vision about the purpose and impact of one’s work promotes organizational effectiveness. He/she said, “I think [assets] has given us a framework that we all share. And I think any time groups of people that are working together have shared values, it strengthens your organization. And I’d say that [building assets is] one of our shared values that we’ve identified as a group.”

Empirical Support for Grantees' Work with Youth

One of the more powerful ways that the asset framework strengthened and enhanced the efforts of grantee organizations was by providing a research base that supported their work. The research that gave rise to the asset framework and philosophy found that young people who reported having more assets in their lives also tended to have a lower incidence of risk factors. As suggested above, many organizations were already dedicated to nurturing at least some of the assets identified through this research, such as self-esteem, cultural competency and academic achievement. The research associated with the 40 developmental assets, therefore, provided important empirical support for the positive outcomes and impacts that grantees could hope to achieve in the lives of young people through their programs. When organizations decided to actively incorporate the asset framework, grantee organizations could apply this empirical research to support their work. As one grantee said, "And so when we found out that there was this research that had been done that strongly supported the work we were doing, and it showed the benefits and how it was keeping youth away from certain risk factors, it was a very natural fit. And it was exciting for us, because it saved us a lot of work in terms of research."

The research base that gave rise to the 40 developmental assets validated and legitimized the work of these asset-building organizations in ways that gave them a stronger voice to promote their programs and services. Several grantees attributed their success in leveraging in-kind and financial support to the enhanced credibility that came with the research base of the assets. One grantee, for example, shared, "Every grant application that I write has something about assets in it. Right now... we're funded by 12 different grants. Every single one of them, somewhere, woven into that grant, either in a big way or a small way, there's the asset philosophy in the grant."

The framework of the 40 developmental assets helped organizations better convey their work to others. In the words of one non-grantee the evaluation team spoke with, the asset framework and philosophy "advanced our opportunities a lot quicker."

Enhancement of Organizational Practices and Work with Youth

For the organizations and staff members that experienced the asset framework as a natural fit, a strength-based approach often already existed, but was less developed or had not been applied strategically to guide their work. For example, grantees did not always have available to them a larger, more comprehensive framework that outlined the ways in which their efforts needed to be complemented and reinforced by other major sectors of the community. For many, the framework provided a broader frame of reference that allowed staff members to understand the significance of their organization's efforts within this larger context and the need to engage with other segments of the community as partners in asset building.

Within grantee organizations, the 40 developmental assets also provided a structure and organizing framework that helped staff examine more critically the value of their programs and services for young people. The asset framework supported the work of many asset-building organizations by providing a logic model in which to

"What assets has done is allow kids to have a voice, a larger voice, and trust that they know what they need and trust that they know how they feel. And also to encourage them to speak up, speak out."

– A grantee of the initiative



situate specific programs and their associated benefits. This, in turn, facilitated a thoughtful assessment of the strengths, as well as the gaps, in programming as these related to the specific assets that organizations hoped to nurture in young people. During an exit interview, one grantee described his/her organization's assessment in this way, "[We] worked with our providers and some of the youth staff [to] put together a checklist... to see, 'Are we giving kids more than just giving them activity? What are they getting from each activity?' And at... some point in our program, we want the providers to be able to look at this checklist and say, 'Karate. This child's learning discipline and self-control. And she's getting self-esteem.' Those kinds of things."

Two Grantees Highlight Teachable Moments

PROVIDERS LEARN HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TEACHABLE MOMENTS.

"I think the providers see, really see, what we've given them. When they go back and do their programs, I think they now realize they have more [of] what I would [call] 'teachable moments.' When kids do have conflict or they're struggling in the class, with the instructor, with other students or with a particular activity, now they maybe have a map to say, 'Okay. Let's work through this.' And help the kids solve some of that."

TEACHABLE MOMENTS CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO EMPOWER YOUNG PEOPLE.

"We would say, 'Look at you. You're a youth, and you help your community by going and working in the community garden once a week. Or [by] going and spending time with your grandma.' It's things like that they didn't realize they were doing that needed to be pointed out to them. So, it's just a matter of, I think, them realizing and really looking in the mirror and saying, 'I did do those things.' ...And someone just having to point it out to them and say, 'Look. This is an asset. This is what you're doing. You're growing and developing in this way.' And so I think that's the main thing that really helped them. Because, then, they were conscious of it."

As a result of the deeper understanding and enhanced consciousness created by the asset framework, as well as the increased accountability that stemmed from using the framework as a tool for evaluation and assessment, the staff of asset-building organizations often became more intentional in their work with young people. The staff worked more deliberately, purposefully and consciously to build assets and structure activities and interactions in ways that foster the development of assets. One grantee described how he/she works to build assets in children while teaching them to play a new sport, "Tennis might be the activity, but the goal of the [activity] is to develop the character of these kids. To develop their discipline, develop their reliability, to develop their self-esteem, their integrity. Tennis is the means, but the end is really this other objective... What they get out of a tennis class in terms of skills is nice, but we also want them to get these other things."

Intentional, deliberate actions that resulted from the consciousness created by the asset framework and asset-building approach often made staff more effective in their work with youth. This is perhaps best demonstrated through grantee accounts of recognizing and taking advantage of teachable moments.

Assets as the Foundation of an Organization

When the asset framework became the foundation of an organization, driving and guiding its work, this level of integration — the deepest possible — fundamentally changed the nature of the organization's work. Organizations that used the asset framework as a core philosophy were unlikely to view assets as just another program. Rather, they used the framework and philosophy to inform all programming. As one grantee explained, "In our department, every single thing that crosses my desk, from all the programs that are here, I'll [ask], 'How are we addressing the asset framework in what we're doing?' And so you'll see assets in [all our programs]." Beyond the development and management of programs, the asset framework also was used in these organizations as a basis for staff trainings and new staff orientations, and was incorporated into the literature and resources produced by these organizations. Integration of the assets also impacted grantwriting and the development of an organization's policies and procedures

When the asset framework served as the foundation of an organization's efforts, influencing the products and work being carried out at each of these levels, the asset philosophy permeated the organization and institutionalization of the framework was likely to occur. Institutionalization of the framework facilitated sustainability of asset building because it served as a buffer against staff turnover and funding streams that shift their program priorities. When the framework became institutionalized, it had staying power. As one grantee explained, "It's in our literature. It's in our curriculum for our trainings. It's part of the foundation. So whoever steps into the position, I mean, the way that you run the program, the approach, it's just already there. It's not something that somebody would come in and have to develop... It's part of our outreach campaign. It's part of our classes. The neighborhood is aware of it. They have an expectation. So does the school. The organization has an expectation about the importance of youth development and how that's achieved."

Another aspect of deep integration that sustained asset-building efforts was public awareness of the asset framework. When an organization had developed a culture of asset building and the assets had name recognition among clients and staff and in the community, it created an expectation and standard, and multiple layers of accountability that extended beyond the organization.

When the asset philosophy seeped into multiple levels of an organization, part of the richness that emerged was that different audiences were engaged (e.g., staff, clients and funders). For example, in school-based settings, parents were engaged as partners with teachers and administrators in promoting and nurturing the development of assets in their young students. In youth-serving organizations, young people shared responsibility with adult directors and administrators for the development and implementation of programs and services. Youth had opportunities to sit on decisionmaking councils, and boards and staff worked closely with young people to foster the development of skills and knowledge that would increase their success and effectiveness in these roles. The voice of youth informed planning efforts and their perspectives were heard through evaluation and feedback sessions following programs and events. One grantee stated, "Youth are at the table with us. We've been strategic about listening to the voice of youth through the survey responses used to guide the development of programs in the community."

One of the most salient pieces of evidence that an organization had embraced the asset framework was the active involvement and engagement of youth. While engaging youth as partners provided important opportunities to develop assets in young people, youth engagement also promoted organizational effectiveness. For example, programs that were designed with input from young people often were more effective at piquing the interest and maintaining the involvement of youth participants. Soliciting the input of young people, both in the planning stage and as a facet of program evaluation, also often expedited the process of program development and refinement because participants were involved. Often young people were the best advocates for youth-focused programs and services and generated public



support more effectively than adults speaking on their behalf. A grantee said, “[Youth] were incredible in front of the school board – so enthusiastic, [and they] spoke from their hearts... Very articulate and eloquent. [They really] put it over the top.” Seeing youth thriving in such roles was a powerful experience for adults. One grantee indicated that, by having youth more involved, adults’ respect for youth was broadened.

Organizational cultures steeped in asset building are often shaped by and for young people who are participants of programs and who are important stakeholders that benefit from organizations’ success. Young people, not unlike adults, were more engaged and brought a greater energy and enthusiasm to their roles within an organization or community when they were provided with meaningful opportunities to contribute and serve as resources. The presence of youth and their involvement in multiple roles at different levels within an organization is perhaps the best evidence that deep and lasting integration of assets has occurred.

“If I look back at the work accomplished by the council over the last two years, a lot of the major achievements are youth driven and youth led. And, you know, whether it’s the science fair, or the publishing of a newsletter, these are major accomplishments that were led by youth.”
– A grantee of the initiative

INNOVATION – A KEY FACILITATOR OF ASSET INTEGRATION

Asset integration occurred fluidly and with relative ease among grantee organizations that found the asset framework to be a natural fit given the work they were already doing. The fit of assets was further enhanced through original adaptations of the framework that allowed assets to become a greater part of organizational efforts and individuals’ consciousness (both staff and clients). Many grantees relied on innovation – specifically, cultural innovation – to involve diverse constituents with whom they worked. Innovation, therefore, served as a mechanism for the assets to extend beyond organizations to impact and transform individuals in larger social and cultural contexts.

Youth Engagement

The evaluation revealed that forums for youth involvement were a major area of innovation. The 40 developmental assets were commonly associated with the notion of youth as resources – an idea that reminded adults and youth alike of the gifts and promise that young people have. This idea inspired many organizations to share power with young people to varying degrees. In some organizations, youth were given opportunities to provide feedback about programs or provided a forum to advocate publicly for the establishment of youth-oriented services or resources in a community (such as a skateboard park or recreational center). Youth in other communities or organizations sat on decisionmaking councils and boards with elders and worked with adult staff to deliver programs to their peers. A few young people served in a grantmaking capacity by soliciting proposals from their peers and selecting recipients for funding of projects that directly benefited youth in the community. Other young people traveled around the state sharing the asset message with others; these youth took center stage while adults served in more supportive roles and capacities.

Cultural Innovation

Another important area of innovation uncovered by the evaluation was cultural innovation. Cultural innovation involved the translation of the list of 40 developmental assets into other languages and cultural contexts. The Asian Pacific Development Center, for example, translated

written asset materials into both Vietnamese and Cambodian. Community leaders representing the Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian and Hmong ethnic groups facilitated parenting classes that incorporated assets in the participants' native languages. Focusing on asset building with parents reinforced and honored parental authority, which is a highly esteemed cultural value in many Asian ethnic communities.

Cultural adaptation of the asset framework entailed not only a translation of the words, but also tailoring the 40 developmental assets to the cultural milieu of diverse groups. A representative of Eagle Lodge, for example, explained: "We changed some of the assets to make them more culturally appropriate. Where, in the assets, [you have] 'connection to your neighborhood' or other different ways to describe who you are in your world, we made the assets address who Indian youth [are] in their world."

The Cheltenham Family Resource Center, based in an elementary school that serves primarily Spanish-language families in Denver, provided another poignant example of cultural innovation. The goal of the Cheltenham Family Resource Center was to make the asset framework a way of life. To accomplish this goal, parents began meeting once a week. During each meeting, they focused on a single asset and explored creative ways to build or nurture this asset in their children. The idea soon emerged to develop a presentation that would incorporate culture and language to help members of Spanish-language communities feel connected to the asset framework and philosophy. These parents wanted to create a presentation that would engage other parents by conveying asset-building messages through lessons that had been passed on to them through their own parents and grandparents. To portray categories of support, empowerment, boundaries, expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity, these parents embroidered *huipiles*, authentic Mexican tunics that are worn by women in south and central Mexico, which they wore and displayed during their presentations. Through narration, dance and *dichos* (traditional Mexican sayings or proverbs that teach a moral lesson) mothers

and daughters began spreading the asset message to other parents and families. The group, *Flores Indigenas*, or Indigenous Flowers, emerged as powerful asset builders. They were asked to perform in a variety of settings to engage diverse audiences in making the asset approach a way of life.

One participant affiliated with the Cheltenham Family Resource Center explained the importance of such cultural innovation in this way, "It is extremely important to connect the asset philosophy to culture. Incorporating... visuals, song, dance [and] *dichos* helps participants understand and remember the message." He/she continued, "[T]he dance, the *dichos* and the words used in their presentation help people connect with the assets in a way that is meaningful to their lives. Incorporating culture helps them translate the assets into their own way of thinking."

Cultural innovation serves as a key mechanism for rooting the asset message within the context of one's cultural heritage. The asset builder quoted above spoke poignantly

Cultural innovation serves as a key mechanism for rooting the asset message within the context of one's cultural heritage.

about the importance of reaching communities of color with this positive, affirming message, “In most initiatives, people don’t know how to really reach out to the communities of color families. And [these families] kind of get left out. In my experience, [I] have seen that our kids of color are starving for positivity and for encouragement, and for people to believe in them... They need it so badly, because so much of their lives... they’ve been labeled, they’ve been told they can’t make it... And I think that assets is certainly one vehicle we can use to start turning that around. I think that unless we make it very intentional and very strategic, we’re not going to get that message out to them.”

Cultural innovation facilitated integration of the asset framework and philosophy by fostering the application of the framework in diverse community contexts and organizational settings and it seemed to be directly related to empowerment. Grantees reported that active participation in the process of cultural innovation promoted a sense of ownership of the framework within diverse communities. Empowerment was one of the major, yet largely unanticipated, transformations that resulted from this kind of engagement with the framework.

An examination of the fundamental principles of empowerment philosophy facilitates an understanding of how the assets inspired this powerful transformation within the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative. There are a number of empowerment models. Some of the common elements that cut across these models and that serve as some of the basic tenets of empowerment philosophy include the following:

- Doing *with*, not *to* or *for*
- Being inclusive, not exclusive: involving people in determining and defining the problem and developing and implementing the solution
- Knowing that people support what they help create
- Recognizing and celebrating diversity
- Creating a critical consciousness (e.g., consciousness about the root causes of a problem and the strengths and resources available for coping with or addressing identified needs)
- Promoting respect and dignity.

As these basic principles suggest, empowerment is about sharing power and, therefore, bringing parity to the power imbalance that often exists between youth and adults, and disenfranchised communities and more dominant groups.

The integration of the asset framework in organizations and the internalization of the philosophy by individuals (both of which cultural innovation facilitated), led to or contributed to the activation of many of these principles of empowerment. What asset integration provided, therefore, was the creation of a social space for partnerships to develop and dialogue to occur, between groups where few of these social linkages previously existed.

BARRIERS TO ASSET INTEGRATION

As previously noted, a richness occurs when the asset framework informs organizational mission and vision and, therefore, serves as the foundation for an organization. Asset integration at multiple levels within an organization ensures that staff are speaking the same language and working toward the same goals. When the assets permeate an organization, the application and implementation of the asset framework in programming becomes an expectation, and the resources and materials for building assets become institutionalized. These aspects of asset integration help to weather staff turnover or changes in funding. Not every grantee, however, was able to integrate the asset framework at multiple levels within their organization. There were several factors that thwarted the integration of assets into the structure and culture of organizations. The main barriers to deeper asset integration, which were identified during the evaluation, included:

- The perception that the asset framework was a program
- Lack of staff responsiveness to the asset framework
- Insufficient support for applying the framework
- The absence or loss of asset champions
- The insufficient fit between the 40 developmental assets and some social issues and populations.

These barriers are explored in more detail in the following paragraphs.

PERCEPTION THAT THE ASSET FRAMEWORK IS A PROGRAM

People within some organizations understood the asset framework to be supportive of what they were already doing or wanted to do, but were ultimately unable to integrate the assets at multiple levels within their organizations. Rather than recognize the assets as an organizing framework or philosophy that could guide their work, the assets were viewed as another program within these organizations.

Organizations that applied the 40 developmental assets as a program were not necessarily seeking an organizing frame of reference or philosophy; rather, they were typically looking for a way to support an existing structure and set of goals and objectives. Assets, in many ways, resonated with what such organizations already had in place and served as a mechanism for obtaining funding support for their work. Once funding was obtained, efforts to build the 40 developmental assets tended to remain at the program level and did not come to the forefront of the organization's work.

When asset integration did not progress beyond the program level (i.e., when the framework and philosophy did not become part of the fabric of the organization or the consciousness of its staff), assets had to compete with other programs, particularly as funding streams changed. Viewing assets as a program created an expectation among staff that this program, like so many others, had a life cycle that paralleled or was determined by the duration of the funding period. Staff who saw many programs come and go as funding waxed and waned were prepared to see the asset framework go. This fostered a lack of buy-in and investment among staff who saw themselves as implementers of another program rather than as key change agents.

Because the asset framework and philosophy was never explicitly institutionalized in these organizations, commitment to applying the framework was also contingent upon and vulnerable to staff turnover and organizational instability. Furthermore, in organizations that implemented the assets as a program, there was a lack of vision for what was possible to achieve by applying the framework within and throughout all programming. These grantees were often not aware of the deeper messages and opportunities (of engagement,

empowerment, innovation and strength) that other organizations, which integrated the asset framework more deeply, tended to perceive.

LACK OF STAFF RESPONSIVENESS TO THE FRAMEWORK

While many staff readily internalized the asset philosophy, grantees described others in their organizations who were less receptive or responsive to the framework. Importantly, both the organizational environment surrounding asset integration and staff readiness seemed to work together to influence the degree of asset integration, positively or negatively reinforcing one another.

When the organizational environment communicated to staff (in explicit and implicit ways) that the assets were another program, these staff tended to be less responsive to the framework. In agencies where asset building was not explicitly promoted organization-wide, and the connections between the programs and the asset framework were not made concrete, staff tended to use the framework more passively. Rather than internalizing the asset philosophy, these staff tended to place them on a shelf when an asset-related activity was completed. According to one grantee the evaluation team spoke with, "There [were] some staff that hadn't... really internalized it yet, enough to make it part of everything they did. They were certainly doing asset-building activities. They just weren't quite as intentional about using the language, and about building activities around the asset framework." Rather than emerge as a philosophy that impacted all programming in these organizations, the assets competed with other programs for staff and client time and organizational resources. Thus, the assets became something else to add to an already full plate for many staff.

Staff resistance or lack of responsiveness to the framework also had a negative impact, preventing the assets from progressing beyond the program level. Grantees identified a number of reasons for this resistance. A few grantees explained that members of their staff were resistant to something new or having to learn how to do their work in a different way. This seemed to be a particularly salient issue with the veterans of their staff who had been at the organization or doing work in a particular field the longest. Other grantees indicated that staff's affinity for the assets or responsiveness to

the framework had more to do with their position or responsibilities in an organization. More specifically, when asked if there were staff members who were more committed to the asset framework and philosophy than others, grantees frequently stated that those providing direct services to youth were likely to adopt the framework and philosophy more readily than others. When the assets reached and transformed staff who were more removed from the frontlines of an organization's operations, this was an indicator that a deeper level of asset integration had occurred within an organization. Achieving this level of engagement with all staff, regardless of level or responsibilities within the organization, was challenging because it required organizational endorsement of the framework and intentionality in integrating the framework as part of the structure and culture of the organization.

Finally, one or two grantees noted that, due to the positive orientation of the assets, this made it tempting for staff to argue that asset building was something that they already did. These staff could then use this as a basis or

... when asked if there were staff members who were more committed to the asset framework and philosophy than others, grantees frequently stated that those providing direct services to youth were likely to adopt the framework and philosophy more readily than others.

rationale for not explicitly or intentionally integrating the 40 developmental assets into their work. According to one grantee, "One of the barriers to taking on assets is, [in] any group that's already doing positive, great things, a lot of people say, 'We're already doing them.' That it's no different than anything we're already doing. [This is] also a common barrier of programs. 'We're already doing great programs. Why do we need assets?'"

INSUFFICIENT SUPPORT FOR APPLYING THE ASSET FRAMEWORK

A key lesson learned during the initiative is that staff members require adequate support in order to apply the asset framework and philosophy effectively in their work. This support entails time, training and reinforcement through the sharing of ideas and successes, as well as challenges, among colleagues. A few grantees emphasized that awareness and acceptance of the asset framework and philosophy did not automatically or necessarily translate into knowledge of how to apply the framework. This application piece was a key barrier to engagement, integration and transformation for many staff. As one grantee said, "There have been people who have struggled with how to do it, at many different levels. And there [are] some who are putting it to work [for] the first time. [For others], until they practice putting it into practice, and they share stories, that's when they start developing it further, deeper. It becomes easier for them. It becomes like breathing."

One observation made during the course of the evaluation was that if staff received a didactic presentation of the asset framework that was how they tended to use or apply assets in working with clients or focus populations. This stifled transformation because the assets remained a flat, immutable framework that did not invite engagement. If, on the other hand, the assets were presented to staff in an interactive fashion, they tended to apply the assets in an interactive and more engaging way. These staff demonstrated an enhanced ability to bring the asset model to life for others and to facilitate others' dynamic engagement with the asset framework and philosophy. This tended to be more intrinsically rewarding for staff, reinforcing their desire to integrate the assets into their work. For some staff, however, lack of needed support for translating the framework and making it more engaging often created a barrier to integration at both the staff and organizational levels. One grantee

explained how opportunities are lost when the assets are presented in a more rigid and didactic fashion or when individuals are not introduced to the assets in an experiential way: “The teaching of actual assets, and the building of a curriculum on assets, really tends to not be as helpful in building assets as doing concrete things that build a number of assets at the same time. And then, you talk about, ‘Well, incidentally, this builds these assets.’ And it makes sense to people. There’s a ‘click’... The kind of abstract lecture on assets is much less helpful to the movement than initiatives and projects [that] are concrete. Kids are concrete thinkers. In fact, many adults are, too. And that is just a much more fertile way to teach the message and spread it.”

Another important source of support for asset integration was the provision of sufficient time for this work. While time often served as an important investment in terms of enhancing organizational and programmatic effectiveness, it was often hard to make a case for the investment of resources (particularly staff time, which is at a premium in most organizations) in organizations that did not have a vision for what was possible to achieve or accomplish through asset integration. One grantee spoke about the need for more time to integrate the assets at a deeper level in the organization and to honor the innovation that the framework had inspired: “Sometimes our time and commitments to other things just don’t allow for that concentration on building those things... It’s just that sometimes we just don’t have the time that we would like to really dedicate and invest in this. I mean, just in working with the asset model, I have so many other ideas that I’ve wanted to implement that I haven’t been able to because of time...”

During exit interviews, those staff persons who were most passionate about assets also were most likely to identify insufficient time as a barrier to asset integration. Whether due to a greater conscientiousness on the part of these asset builders, a realization of what it takes to do asset building well or structural issues such as an insufficient operating budget to pay for adequate staffing, these grantees noted that insufficient time

was a significant dilemma that they faced with respect to asset building. As one grantee explained, “We just didn’t have enough time. We were [working] 20 hours a week. And, after the first two classes were recruited, it just became really difficult to maintain that level of connection with the kids and the board and to start raising money. And so, I mean, even if it was a mental barrier, there was just this feeling of never being able to do completely what we needed to do...” Obviously, the intensity of asset integration can be a double-edged sword, with the experience at once energizing and inspiring, and also overwhelming.

THE ABSENCE OR LOSS OF ASSET CHAMPIONS

For many organizations and staff members, the adoption and integration of the asset framework required a philosophical shift away from a deficit-based orientation toward a strength-based approach. For others, the asset model represented a new way to conceptualize, organize or frame their work and the associated impacts. In either case, integrating the asset framework into organizations’





work required behavior changes and shifts in thinking for individuals, as well as some degree of structural change for organizations. Asset integration required an investment of individual and organizational resources; this investment was not possible without true commitment to the asset framework among staff, particularly those who held decisionmaking authority and influence within organizations.

Asset champions, both inside and outside of organizations, served important roles in terms of fostering this commitment at high levels in organizations. One grantee described the importance of an asset champion's vision and influence with respect to fostering asset integration in this way: "If they see it as a part of every aspect of their own personal lives and see the value of having it everywhere in [their organization], that's how it is. If they see it just as part of youth stuff, then that's how it is... At some locations, the youth director is the most vivacious person in the whole place, and everybody gets excited about what that person's doing. It's not relegated to youth stuff. So, it all depends on the personal affect of that person, their influence – their spheres of influence."

A few of the major roles of asset champions, with respect to the integration and transformation process in organizational settings, included:

- Encouraging, inspiring and coaching others in order to facilitate engagement with the asset framework
- Keeping the assets at the forefront of people's minds and the work being conducted
- Moving the agenda of asset building forward within the organization and among colleagues.

Without someone to champion asset integration or to provide a vision for the innovative and creative ways that the assets could enhance and guide the work of an organization, the asset framework rarely moved beyond the programmatic level. This was especially true if there was no one with sufficient influence and authority championing assets. While the absence of a passionate advocate for the asset model did not always prevent integration from occurring, the absence of an advocate did stifle the depth of asset integration and/or the pace at which this process took place. One grantee observed

The Dynamic Process of Asset Integration and Transformation

TENSIONS THAT EMERGED:

- Asset building is at once energizing and empowering, and intense and tiring.
- In organizations already using a strength-based approach, staff may be more receptive to the asset framework and philosophy because the approach feels consistent with what they are already doing. However, other staff may feel resistant to the framework, because they think they are already doing this.
- Asset-building work is intensive, potentially requiring more resources of individuals and organizations. However, this investment can have tremendous rewards.
- While diverse groups may find the strength-based focus empowering, for other groups, the 40 developmental assets may contradict their life experience, furthering their sense of social isolation.
- Although many experienced the assets as very practical and directly applicable, for others, the ways in which to apply the assets and put the framework into action were less obvious. Commitment and awareness are not the same as knowing how to apply the framework.
- Staff turnover tends to lead to inconsistency and disunity in vision, which impedes asset integration. Yet, deep integration of assets (as a foundation or organizing frame of reference) may buffer the effects of staff turnover, as support and accountability structures, as well as an expectation about asset building, are already in place or have already been created.

how having an asset champion at a high level of leadership within the organization expedited the process of asset integration. He/she stated, “I’d say some of the facilities took it on quicker out of having their director be enrolled. And [so it] covered everybody... The director made sure that it happened.”

A number of grantees lost an asset champion during the course of the initiative. In some cases, youth asset champions, who had been powerful advocates for asset integration, left the community in order to go to college after graduating from high school. In these cases, organizations had to re-establish a group of engaged youth asset builders and often lost their momentum for asset integration as a result. In other cases, organizations lost adult asset champions due to staff turnover. The individuals who assumed these positions had to internalize a new framework and philosophy and assume, and work to implement another person’s vision if they were going to continue to promote an organization’s integration of the asset approach. This also often led to a loss of momentum and passion, as the new staff person frequently experienced the integration of the asset framework as more of a directive than an organic aspect of their work. Because the new staff person had to build relationships with other staff in the organization, this person’s influence also was compromised, which made them relatively less effective at championing asset integration until respect and legitimacy could be established.

INADEQUATE FIT OF THE 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

Some organizations struggled to use or apply the 40 developmental assets even though the staff was dedicated to building assets and devoted significant efforts to adapting the model to create a better fit for their organization or the unique population they were serving. This lack of fit was, at least in part, a reflection of the nascence of the model and the lack of asset-based resources available for and specifically tailored to some populations or communities. Perhaps the most poignant example from the evaluation was the inadequate fit between the 40 developmental assets and the life circumstances of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) youth.

The 40 developmental assets outline what research suggests are the major support systems that foster the positive development of children. However, for GLBT youth,

many, if not all, of these support systems have broken down due to the social rejection of these young people based on their sexual orientation. As one grantee explained, “When you look at the assets in regard to family, to religion, to school, a lot of those do not apply to gay and lesbian youth. Because their schools are not safe, and the churches are not safe. And [for] a lot of them, their families are not safe. So, trying to get them connected to those three areas, a lot of times, is a moot point because they’re not accepted.”

Although a tremendous impetus during the course of the initiative in Colorado was placed on culturally adapting the asset model and encouraging innovation as a key mechanism for informing its refinement, much of this work maintained and reinforced the support systems highlighted in the original framework. The experience of trying to apply the 40 developmental assets to support the development of young people for whom these support systems (e.g., family/home, church and school) were not available suggests that much work remains to be done in

The 40 developmental assets outline what research suggests are the major support systems that foster the positive development of children.

terms of understanding and identifying the components of a safe and adequate support system to nurture the development of a positive sense of self in the world among highly marginalized youth. This work would have wide application and relevance, as there are many young people for whom these traditional support systems have broken down. One outcome of this work may be a redefined role for some youth-serving organizations. Currently, these organizations, despite small operating budgets and small numbers of staff, play a vital role in raising many of society's children – an observation that, if valid, makes the work of youth-serving organizations within the course of this initiative far more salient.

RE-THINKING THE DYNAMICS OF ASSET INTEGRATION, INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Two scenarios help to promote greater understanding of the key facilitators of and barriers to asset integration and transformation. These scenarios highlight active and passive approaches to integration. The hallmark

of active integration is intentionality – the purposeful and conscientious application of the assets in all programs and at every level within the organization. Over time, active asset integration leads to the emergence of the asset framework and philosophy as a foundation or organizing frame of reference, driving and guiding the organization's vision and mission. In organizations that have reached this deepest level of integration, assets becomes institutionalized and, as a result, are more likely to be sustained.

In contrast, viewing assets as a program is the hallmark of passive asset integration. In organizations that experience assets as a program, the philosophical approach of the assets framework is not leveraged. This may impede staff acceptance of the framework, as well as the integration of assets into other programs and the organizational infrastructure. For these reasons, in organizations that take a passive approach to integration, assets are less likely to be sustained.

TABLE 4

TWO TYPOLOGIES OF ASSET INTEGRATION	
PASSIVE APPROACH	ACTIVE APPROACH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The asset framework is a program that will help staff reach goals and objectives with clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The asset framework is a core philosophy that permeates all programs, all interactions, all systems and, therefore, serves as the basis for organizational culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The framework is not viewed as a new resource for meeting the needs of youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactive and reflective about the degree to which the organization is meeting the needs of youth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involve youth only as clients and consumers of services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently, and on an ongoing basis, seek the voices (experiences and perspectives) of youth to inform program planning and development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The asset framework is viewed as a source of funding to support work for youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assets serves as a mechanism for strengthening organizational infrastructure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asset are viewed as one program among many 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assets are at the forefront of all programs

Table 4 further operationalizes and contrasts passive and active approaches to asset integration. Importantly, due to the dynamic and complex nature of asset integration, the vast majority of ACY grantees fell somewhere between these two extreme ends of the asset integration continuum.

The *Spiral of Asset Integration* model (page 17) suggests that asset integration occurs through a step-wise progression from raising awareness and increasing knowledge, to incorporating asset messages and language into materials and resources, to involving youth in roles and, finally, to integrating assets into policies and procedures. The culmination of asset integration, as postulated by this model, is the emergence of asset champions. During the course of the evaluation, OMNI came to understand and observe that asset integration does not necessarily occur in a given order, with one type or aspect of asset integration giving rise or leading to another in a causal fashion. In fact, the starting point for asset integration seemed contingent, at least in part, upon the scope of a grantee's efforts (e.g., organization, community or statewide). With respect to statewide partnership grantees (i.e., those whose efforts were statewide in scope), for example, the evaluation team found that these grantees frequently initiated the infusion process within a statewide organization by first integrating assets at the policy level. This seemed to facilitate the ability of key staff who were championing asset integration to reach individuals within a statewide network efficiently and influentially. Integrating assets at the policy level further enabled them to engage large numbers of staff with whom they had no or little direct contact.

Regardless of the grantmaking strategy, OMNI found that the starting point of asset integration often occurred at the top of the spiral (e.g., with asset champions) rather than at the bottom (e.g., with awareness and engagement of individuals). These key ingredients of asset integration, which appear most distant from one another on the spiral, actually interact in a synergistic fashion: asset champions play a key role in the engagement of others, with new asset champions emerging through the engagement (i.e., consciousness-raising) process. This dynamic interaction creates an environment in which for asset integration and transformation are more likely to occur. A way to capture these aspects of asset integration is represented in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3: MODEL OF THE DYNAMIC PROCESS OF ASSET INTEGRATION AND TRANSFORMATION



Chapter 4

THE SPREAD AND REACH OF THE ASSET FRAMEWORK

MANY PEOPLE HAVE REFERRED TO THE CONTAGIOUS EXCITEMENT ASSOCIATED WITH THE ASSET FRAMEWORK AS A MOVEMENT, REFLECTING THE GROWING AWARENESS AND ACTIVITY SURROUNDING THE ASSETS IN ORGANIZATIONS AND DIVERSE SECTORS THROUGHOUT COLORADO. THROUGH THE EVALUATION OF THE ASSETS FOR COLORADO YOUTH INITIATIVE, OMNI IDENTIFIED SIX MAJOR CATALYZING FORCES THAT FACILITATED THE SPREAD OF ASSETS IN THE STATE:



1. Assets for Colorado Youth's leadership in innovation and engagement of diverse sectors and communities (explored in Chapter 2)
2. Organizational and cultural innovations in applying the asset framework (explored in Chapter 3)
3. Asset champions who serve as local messengers, engage communities in asset building and advocate for youth
4. Networking between individuals and organizations on behalf of youth
5. Funding to support training, convening of asset builders and the development of asset related products
6. Youth engagement in asset-building organizations (explored in Chapter 5).

Each of these catalyzing forces contributed to the spread of the asset framework in Colorado. The roles of asset champions, networking and funding in this movement are detailed in the following pages.

THE CATALYZING INFLUENCE OF ASSET CHAMPIONS

People who champion social movements are typically active and influential in transforming public awareness and acceptance about social change. Asset champions are impassioned advocates for asset building. In Colorado, asset champions played an instrumental role in challenging negative stereotypes of youth and moving the agenda of positive youth development forward. Asset champions explain they have accomplished this by “spreading the word about developmental assets” and “taking the asset message to others.”

To learn more about asset champions' contributions and roles in organizations, communities and in the asset movement, OMNI selected nine asset champions to interview. The evaluation team relied on multiple sources of information to identify asset champions, including, but not limited to:

- Grantee progress reports
- Observation (e.g., site visits, attendance at ACY- and grantee-sponsored events)

- Interviews with grantees and non-grantees (a term the evaluation team used for agencies that were involved in asset building, but not supported through initiative funding)
- The *Web of Support for Asset-Building* survey.

In addition, OMNI's study of asset champions also examined other data sources, including exit interviews with grantee staff and site visits.

The asset champions interviewed by the evaluation team met each of the following five criteria, based on what OMNI learned from these data sources.

The asset champion(s):

1. Spread the asset model and philosophy intentionally through both formal and informal means
2. Were identified by more than one person or organization as the source of their asset-related inspiration
3. Served as the hub – or point of connection – for networks or partnership
4. Served as a resource to others: asset champions supported and encouraged others to move from awareness of the assets to their application in work and personal lives
5. Demonstrated a sustained commitment to and passion for the asset framework; grantees say they “stuck with it over time.”

Three distinct types of asset champions emerged from these interviews. The following characteristics served to distinguish the different types of asset champions:

1. Unique histories with the asset framework
2. Formal participation in the initiative
3. The fidelity with which they applied the asset framework.

These characteristics had implications for the unique roles that each of the three types of asset champion served with respect to the spread of assets in Colorado, including:

- Early asset champions who helped to set the stage
- Asset champions who emerged as powerful advocates for youth
- Asset champions who emerged as a result of the initiative.

EARLY ASSET CHAMPIONS WHO HELPED TO SET THE STAGE

Through interviews, the evaluation team learned that a number of asset champions were engaged with the 40 developmental assets prior to their participation in the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative. Before an organized statewide initiative was in place, these individuals eagerly embraced the asset framework and philosophy. They understood the potential of the 40 developmental assets to serve as a powerful call to action and a unifying vision for their community, school or organization. This understanding of what was needed and what could be accomplished characterized early asset champions who exhibited social consciousness and knowledge of their communities. As one asset champion who spearheaded asset-related efforts prior to the establishment of the initiative said, “I think that’s one piece that [has] been very influential: I believed in this community and knew the community and wanted to work for the community.”

“It’s the ability to do something without looking for anything in return but recognizing that... no matter who you are, you can push something forward. You can create the momentum.”

– An asset champion

Individuals who were ready to emerge as asset champions in Colorado tended to be deeply committed and connected to a community, whether a geographically bounded community or a community of identity. Without funding support or the expectation of external rewards, these asset champions made efforts to address social concerns in their personal and professional lives. Moreover, they tended to demonstrate an enduring history of community service, resulting in established trust, respect and far-reaching networks. These networks provided a structure and mechanism for asset champions to spread the word about the assets and take the asset message to others. The social reach and influence of these established community leaders, therefore, enhanced their ability to mobilize others effectively and to serve as a catalyzing force for the movement. While these asset champions tended to genuinely enjoy meeting people and developing new relationships, they were also aware of the effectiveness of mobilizing and activating established relationships in order to achieve shared goals.

In addition to recognizing the power of connecting with other people, these asset champions, even before their exposure to the 40 developmental assets, understood and believed in the inherent potential of the individual. They felt confident that they, and others, could make a difference and committed themselves to making that difference. This self-efficacy reinforced and sustained their commitment and activism at home, at work and in the community. Because they believed in the promise of individuals, these asset champions seemed driven to empower others, whether youth, parents, teachers or colleagues. They invested personally in the success of others on a daily basis.

These were the asset champions whose engagement with the 40 developmental assets preceded the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative and the involvement of a broad base of inspired leaders and role models. This small number of early leaders helped to set the stage for growth of the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative and assisted in shaping the development of the initiative.

ASSET CHAMPIONS DEVOTED TO ENGAGING AND EMPOWERING YOUTH

Through the evaluation of the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative, another type of asset champion was identified. In contrast to the veteran asset champions, these individuals tended to:

- Place an emphasis on promoting youth voices, rather than serving as the vocal advocates for asset building themselves
- Participate formally in the initiative
- Apply the 40 developmental assets with less fidelity.

Asset champions who were devoted to engaging and empowering youth carried the spirit of the asset approach forward by creating opportunities for young people to have meaningful roles in community life. These asset champions served as examples for other adults in terms of how to nurture the potential of and build relationships with youth. Through their example, other adults came to understand that young people have viable and valuable roles to play in community life.

The asset champions profiled here tended to apply the asset framework more broadly, and they did not usually identify specific assets that they were building or nurturing in youth through their work. While they did not typically speak in terms of specific assets, these asset champions recognized and used teachable moments with young people. For example, they might coach young people in public speaking so that youth could more effectively express the asset message over a local radio station or during a presentation at a state or national conference. Rather than promote asset building by intentionally spreading the word about the assets, these asset champions tended to place young people in positions to be the voice and inspiration for the movement. They advanced the asset movement, therefore, by advocating for young people to assume visible roles in the community and by supporting their success in these roles.

By working so closely with young people, these asset champions were exposed to the tremendous potential of youth and often talked about being amazed by their contributions to asset-building projects. As one asset champion said, “It just puts me in awe sometimes, how amazing they are when they speak. When they use their voices, it’s just like, ‘Whoa!’ It blows my mind. It blows my mind on a regular basis.” The asset champions frequently commented that young people consistently exceeded their expectations. The wonderment that they expressed when describing their experiences with youth reinforced the importance of continuing to serve as advocates for them. Their experiences with young people, therefore, sustained and fueled their commitment to the asset-building movement.

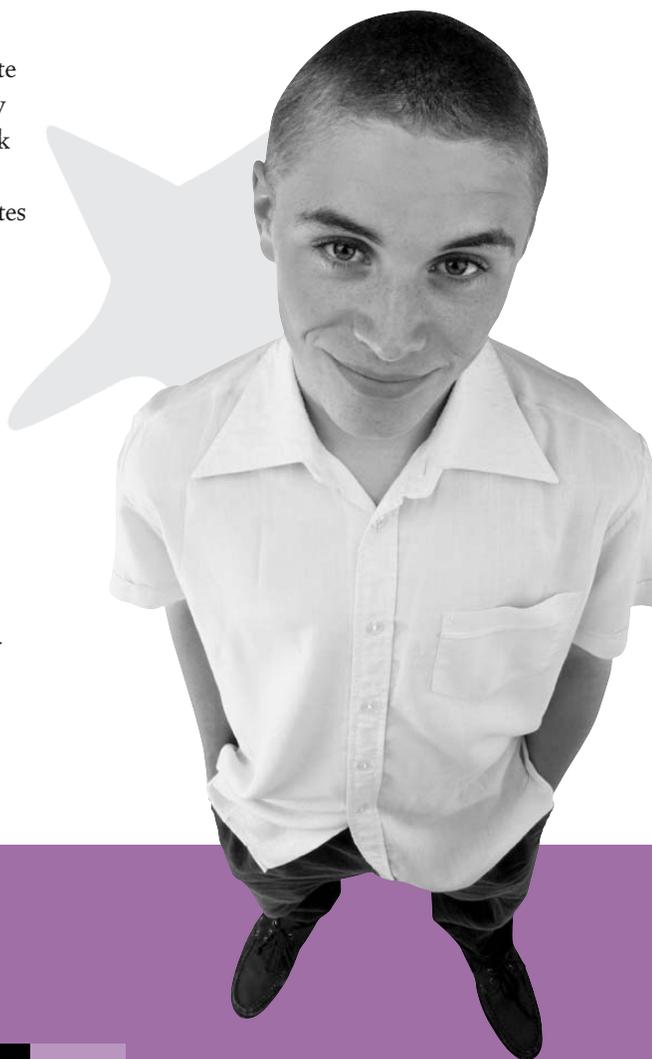
While the veteran asset champions profiled in the previous section tended to become deeply steeped in the 40 developmental assets and the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative, the asset champions profiled here were sometimes non-grantees whom OMNI came to know primarily through ACY’s work to engage others not funded by the initiative. Although these asset champions sometimes did not formally participate in the initiative, they did embrace the asset philosophy and leverage the asset framework to support their work with youth through a strength-based approach. These asset champions were passionate champions and advocates for young people, something that the asset framework validated and reinforced.

ASSET CHAMPIONS THAT EMERGED AS A RESULT OF THE INITIATIVE

Although the two types of asset champions presented above differ in terms of their formal participation in the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative and the formality, specificity or explicitness with which they applied the 40 developmental assets, both demonstrated long records of using a strength-based approach to youth development prior to their exposure to the 40 developmental assets. For others, however, the exposure to the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative and their role in

it served as a major transformative experience and the beginning of their engagement with and commitment to asset building. For those whose participation in the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative was a transforming experience, exposure to the asset framework awakened these individuals to new possibilities in their work. While the 40 developmental assets resonated with the personal philosophy of veteran asset champions and validated the importance of their work in the community, for newer asset champions the asset framework and philosophy created a new and deeper awareness of what could be accomplished when youth became partners and collaborators.

Not all grantees became asset champions, as defined by the criteria established through the evaluation. For a select few participating in the initiative, the asset framework was something to take home with them rather than something to leave at the office. During the two-year timeframe of the evaluation, toward the close of the initiative’s funding, the evaluation team



had the opportunity to observe two grantees undergo the type of personal transformation described above. Seeing and becoming more conscious of the ways in which the assets can make a difference in others' lives served as a key catalyzing force in these grantees' personal transformation and evolution as asset champions. Inspired by what they experienced during the course of the initiative, these budding asset champions found new vision and their work gained a deeper meaning. In the presence of positive role models, veteran asset champions and inspiring innovations, these newer asset champions emerged as a result of the initiative.

During their participation in the initiative, these newer asset champions became powerful motivators and role models in their own right. As they concluded their grant funding, however, the evaluation team found some evidence to suggest that asset champions who emerged more recently might be more vulnerable to changes in funding streams and pressures to use traditional and more widely-accepted approaches in their work. Although these asset champions demonstrated sustained

commitment to and passion for the assets during the period of initiative funding, at the conclusion of the grant, these asset champions tended to question whether they would be able to maintain this level of intensity for championing assets. Findings from this evaluation do suggest, however, that newer asset champions may benefit the most from ongoing support in the form of role models, resources and continued connection to Assets for Colorado Youth. The ability of the veterans of asset building in Colorado to maintain and nurture the engagement of newer asset champions will be key to ensuring that the asset movement continues to grow and gain momentum.

UNIQUE ROLES OF ASSET CHAMPIONS IN THE EMERGING MOVEMENT

Among the three major types of asset champions, the evaluation team found differences in terms of the duration of engagement, the explicitness and specificity with which champions referred to or used the framework, as well as differences in the ways each type of asset champion contributed to the asset movement in Colorado. While the most engaged and enduring asset champions served as sparks to ignite the movement and nurtured new asset champions, newly emergent asset champions helped generate a critical mass of impassioned advocates who continued to propel the movement forward. These efforts were reinforced and complemented by asset champions who were not formal grantees of the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative, but who helped spread the asset message through their example of engaging youth as partners and promoting youth as assets to the community.

Although three distinct profiles of asset champions have been presented, in actuality, there is a great deal of overlap in their roles and contributions. Asset champions demonstrated different histories and experiences with respect to the asset movement and the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative. Even some of the veterans of the movement demonstrated different degrees of fidelity with respect to how they applied and talked about the 40 developmental assets, as well as the degree to which they relied on or desired support in their work with assets. While the three profiles of asset champions helped the evaluation team discuss and conceptualize

“I think [exposure to assets] has given me clear direction that my work will always be with and around and for youth.”

– An asset champion

the distinctive ways that asset champions have served as catalysts for the movement in Colorado, it is important to acknowledge this variability.

The social change process in Colorado began unfolding, at least in part, due to the efforts of asset champions to engage individuals in asset building, sometimes one person at a time. Asset champions dedicate themselves to engaging individuals because they understand that engagement with the asset framework often must first occur at a personal level. Engagement, therefore, serves as a key strategy for ensuring that the asset movement continues to grow and expand; and it is with respect to engagement that asset champions have, perhaps, the most to teach.

ASSET CHAMPIONS ENGAGE INDIVIDUALS

Asset champions demonstrated an ability to facilitate a process in which others connected through experiences to the asset framework. With a blend of passion, positive energy and charisma, as well as a sense of how to mobilize and engage others, these “people magnets” convened individuals with little previous knowledge of or exposure to the developmental assets. Asset champions employed a number of strategies to facilitate this process of connecting individuals to the asset message. For example, an asset champion might ask a group of community leaders to articulate a vision for an environment that fosters positive youth development. Individual assets might emerge from the list of aspects that comprise or characterize such an environment or from the conversations that followed the brainstorming. Other asset champions conveyed the power of assets and asset building through interactive forums, during which individuals were invited to share life experiences and stories or to think back to their own childhood and remember what had made a difference in their own lives as young people. After a time of sharing, asset champions might present the 40 developmental assets, making explicit the connections between the asset framework and what people were communicating.

The interactive and experiential presentation of the 40 developmental assets gave people an organizing framework for understanding their experiences, motivations and aspirations (e.g., as a parent or a community member). According to one asset champion, “I think a lot of people have it in them. They just don’t know it.

So that’s what this piece is about – affirming what you already have [or know or feel]. It’s just that you couldn’t put your hands on it [before]. So, it provides more support around language and ideas and feelings... It affirms what I’m about.”

When asked how they knew when someone had really connected to the assets, asset champions often described physical transformations or changes in language as the outward manifestations of an internal process of realization and empowerment. They described signs such as facial expressions, a different energy being radiated and the quest for more (e.g., information-seeking behavior). According to one asset champion, “When they stop using language that’s defeatist and use language of hope, then you know it’s happening.” Another asset champion stated, “They verbalize it. They show it in body language, including tears and laughter... They tell a story about what they used to do and what they will do.” At the conclusion of presentations and experiential forums, many asset champions called for such a verbal commitment: “What will you do as a result of this information?”

“[Assets] gave me a way to share... what I knew in my heart. This gave me a language that let me talk to other people about that and, probably, [provided] more substance to what I was feeling and trying to do.”

– An asset champion

An asset champion explained, “That is an indicator for me that they’ve gotten it when they say what it is they will do differently.” Or, as another asset champion stated, “You know they get it when they commit to doing it.”

This heightened consciousness and personal transformation often led to what the evaluation team called “ah-ha moments” – moments of realization during which individuals understood their own power and efficacy to help children succeed in school, to make children in their neighborhood feel wanted and valued and to build a more cohesive community that would provide an enhanced safety net for all children.

Asset champions reported that those who had experienced a true “ah-ha” moment were more likely to take initiative and move from new insight and awareness to action. These were the individuals who were primed to become the newest asset champions. One asset champion explained, “I think the people who really grab it become the best ambassadors for assets.” In order to motivate and enhance commitment to action, asset champions often helped people recognize the size or breadth of their circle of influence. For example, they might talk to parents about the opportunities they had to become a source of support and a significant adult role model to their children’s friends. They might help adults realize that simply acknowledging a young person by remembering his or her name or recognizing something the youth has done well can make a positive difference in a child’s life and be the beginning of forming a relationship with a young person in their community. These examples, which often emerged from the personal stories and testimonies of participants, served as a way to help others realize that they can make an impact.

In seeing the transformation of others that occurred as a result of their shared stories and engagement of the asset framework, asset champions themselves had a renewed commitment to championing change.

ASSET CHAMPIONS’ ROLE AS A MESSENGER

There is perhaps no better way to capture the unique contributions of asset champions and the ways in which they served as key catalysts for the movement than the metaphor of the messenger. The evaluation team often heard asset champions describe purposeful strategies for exposing the maximum number of people to the asset framework. Many asset champions, for example,

An Asset Champion’s Story **THE DIFFERENCE ASSETS CAN MAKE**

We once did a parent program. It was with low income... people who had heard for years how awful their neighborhood is. And so they were coming in kind of eyes down... but they are there for their kid, you know. And when they left, they were talking and excited and just had some hope. And then one of the collaborators that I worked with became an asset champion after seeing that and talked about how that made the difference.

Parents often feel real beat up and tired. You know, “I have to do something else,” and “my kids [are] at risk, and I’m worried about them, but there’s nothing I can do because we live in this place, and I can’t afford to move.” And so assets gave them some hope that there are still things you can do, even if you can’t change where you live. There are things you can do to strengthen the assets that the kids do have.

In terms of one of the parents, what I saw was they gave rides to other kids that didn’t have rides. They made some special arrangements and kind of looked out for some of the other kids and really helped nurture some of the other kids, not necessarily just their own. They just showed a lot of energy for the youth and listening to the youth and promoting youth as positive, instead of, you know, “Oh, I’ve got these teenagers again.”

consciously and deliberately worked to nurture new asset champions in order to reach more people more quickly with the asset message through these new champions. Other strategies included taking vans rather than airplanes to conferences in order to stretch limited dollars so that more people could attend events related to the assets. Many asset champions saw their charge as this intentional process of engaging others to take on this mission of empowering and engaging others and advancing the asset movement.



However, being a messenger involved much more than taking the message to others, although asset champions actively and consistently sought such opportunities and intentionally developed strategies to this end. Being an effective messenger required deliberate actions, commitment to sharing the asset message and convening diverse groups for this purpose. It was not enough for asset champions to carry the assets forward as a pre-packaged message to be delivered the same way to every group. The messenger role required asset champions to be effective and innovative translators of the asset framework and philosophy. Asset champions helped people connect with the developmental assets by adapting them to the unique circumstances, life experiences and social and cultural frames of reference of diverse groups. They presented the assets in ways that made the framework relevant and meaningful to people's daily lives. One asset champion explained the importance of this approach in this way: "The message of assets [has to align] with what is going on right now in communities. I think that [the asset message] has to be tailored depending on the community and the neighborhood. I think that's one of the key factors is that it can't just be a list... It has to be adjusted, tailored and presented in a way that is relevant for this time, for the community, for the people that it's presented to."

Some strategies that asset champions used to adapt and translate the asset framework and philosophy included integrating the words, experiences and cultural milieu of the audience to convey the power, meaning and value of the assets. In addition to affirming and validating people in this way, asset champions were skilled at facilitating a process in which people explored how to enhance their work and interactions with youth. The assets became the tools to help others understand the value of their work in terms of programmatic goals and objectives and their broader significance in the life of a child, parent or family. Asset champions effectively conveyed to diverse audiences that: "The asset framework, in a lot of ways, is all about celebrating what you have and trying to make it more than what it is... They're about increasing your opportunities." This last comment, in particular, captures the essence of teachable moments – those moments when an opportunity is intentionally created or presents itself for teaching or articulating a life lesson that has a broader significance and impact than the situation at hand may suggest. Situating such opportunities in the real life context of people's lives

helps individuals understand the numerous opportunities that exist for this type of learning and teaching, which is fundamental to asset building.

During the evaluation, OMNI learned that an important aspect of connecting to the asset message involves connecting to and identifying with the person serving as the messenger. Asset champions were often members of the communities and groups to which they presented the 40 developmental assets. For example, asset champions may have been long-term residents of the same geographic community or shared the same ethnicity or cultural heritage as members of their audience. Asset champions were often peers – fellow parents experiencing similar challenges in raising children, or fellow teenagers coping with the same difficulties in school or at home. Because asset champions had first-hand experience with and knowledge of the context of people's lives, they also had a context for how to translate and convey the 40 developmental assets in ways that were meaningful and helped people apply the asset framework to their life circumstances. The intimate knowledge and familiarity that resulted from this shared experience and understanding



**"[The 40 developmental assets] can't just be a list... It has to be adjusted, tailored and presented in a way that is relevant for this time, for the community and for the people that it's presented to."
– An asset champion**

made it possible for asset champions to raise salient issues while also making explicit the inherent strengths of the particular group that could be leveraged to address these issues. Asset champions' history with a community and membership in a group and their example of success in overcoming the same challenges experienced by others legitimized their role as change agents. The respect and trust attributed to these leaders made people willing to listen and respond to their message of strength and hope, as well as their call to action.

Connecting with the asset message through an asset messenger also entailed relationship building. As one asset champion reflected, "It's really based on who you know that you can connect with initially and who connects with you in the interest of building assets... Relationships are key." There are a number of factors that contributed to asset champions' skill at building relationships and attracting others. While activism and a history within a community enhanced the social reach of asset champions, it was the extroverted and charismatic personalities that many asset champions exhibited, the positive energy and enthusiasm they exuded, as well as the fact

that they helped people understand their own strengths and resources, which contributed to the magnetic quality that drew others to them who were not previously a part of their social network.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND NETWORKING ON BEHALF OF YOUTH

In fall 2001, the evaluation team administered the *Web of Support for Asset Building* survey in order to learn as much as possible about the spread of the asset framework among different sectors, organizations, groups and individuals in Colorado. The survey was administered near the conclusion of the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative in order to assess the reach of the asset movement a full five-and-a-half years after The Colorado Trust launched the statewide initiative and sponsored the establishment of the Assets for Colorado Youth office. To obtain as accurate an assessment as possible about the reach of the movement in Colorado, OMNI wanted to survey those it had reason to believe were engaged in asset building in the state. Therefore, the survey asked respondents to identify the organizations, groups or individuals that made up their "web of support," or their asset building networks. OMNI requested that survey respondents restrict the identification of partners and sources of support to those that also use the 40 developmental assets.

After compiling lists of grantees and non-grantees, including attendees of state and national asset conferences, ACY partners and others who had attended ACY presentations, trainings and forums, OMNI sent surveys to an estimated 230 entities in the state. Seventy-five surveys were completed (for an overall response rate of 33%). These surveys identified a total of 616 entities (mostly organizations) that reportedly used the 40 developmental assets in their work or in support of the asset-related efforts of other organizations in the state. For example, a local foundation may not have been directly involved in building assets but supported an organization by providing grant funding for this purpose. Only 60 (or about 10%) of the entities identified were grantees of the initiative – a finding that indicates that the assets have spread well beyond those formally involved in and receiving funding from the initiative.

**"... Assets, in a lot of ways,
[are] all about celebrating
what you have and trying
to make it more than what
it is... It's about increasing
your opportunities."
– An asset champion**

Overall, a total of 60 survey respondents reported having at least one established partnership with an entity that also used or actively supported the use of the 40 developmental assets. The number of asset-building partners that survey respondents reported ranged from one to 25, with the largest percentage of survey respondents (38%) identifying between one to five partners. Approximately 22% of survey respondents identified between 16 and 25 such partners. Table 5 highlights the number of partnerships established between entities using or supporting the use of the 40 developmental assets.

Altogether, survey respondents identified a total of 446 different partners. Because more than one survey respondent could list the same entity as a source of support for their asset-related efforts, these 446 partner organizations were involved in a total of 582 documented relationships with one another. Assets for Colorado Youth topped the list as the organization most frequently identified as a source of support for asset building by organizations across the state – a finding that documents ACY’s role as a formidable catalyst and source of support for asset building. The following is a list of the organizations most frequently identified as sources of support for asset building in Colorado, with the number of organizations that listed each as a source of support appearing in parentheses:

- Assets for Colorado Youth (26)
- The Colorado Trust (19)
- Boy Scouts of America (8)
- Mile High United Way (7)
- Girl Scouts, Mile Hi Council (5).

Three of the five organizations above served as a source of financial or funding support for asset-related efforts in Colorado: The Colorado Trust, through the initiative and their role as a grantmaking organization, Assets for Colorado Youth and the United Way. It is also interesting to note that while Boy Scouts of America was not a grantee of the initiative, this organization was actively involved with the developmental assets, as documented by the fact that eight organizations listed Boy Scouts as a partner in or source of support for asset building. Internally, the organization has done a great deal of work to align badge work with the asset framework. The only grantee included in this list was Mile Hi Council of Girl Scouts, which participated in the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative as a statewide partnership grantee with four other Girl Scout councils. This factor may have facilitated

TABLE 5

THE NUMBER OF ASSET-BASED PARTNERSHIPS AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS		
NUMBER OF PARTNERS	SURVEY RESPONDENTS WITH THIS NUMBER OF PARTNERS	PERCENT
1 to 5	23	38.3
6 to 10	12	20.0
11 to 15	12	20.0
16 to 20	6	10.0
21 to 25	7	11.7
Total	60	100.0

ACY topped the list as the organization most frequently identified as a source of support for asset building by organizations across the state – a finding that documents ACY’s role as a formidable catalyst and source of support for asset building.



the council's ability to connect with and support a relatively large number of organizations also engaged in integrating the 40 developmental assets.

The following organizations identified the largest number of partners or sources of support for asset building on these surveys. Presumably, these organizations have some of the largest networks established for asset building (the number of entities that comprise each organization's web of support or network appears in parentheses):

- Cherry Creek School District (25)
- Colorado Springs Assets for Youth (23)
- Summit Prevention Alliance (23)
- Full Circle of Lake County, Inc. (22)
- Healthy Mountain Communities (22).

Having a large network established and mobilized around the assets is one indicator of potential reach and influence.

Another characteristic of these organizations was the fact they participated in the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative as one of two grantmaking strategies: either a statewide partnership or community mobilization grantee. Organizations participating in either grantmaking strategy were charged with systematically spreading the word about the developmental assets and mobilizing others for asset building. The fact that the organizations that reported having the largest asset building networks also participated in these two grantmaking strategies suggests that these strategies may have made important and unique contributions in terms of promoting networking and the spread of assets in Colorado.

While the degree of influence of each of the above entities in terms of promoting the spread of assets is presumably large, the geographic scope and intensity of each organization's influence varied. The evaluation team found some indications that the geographic scope of an organization's service area may be inversely related to influence (i.e., the efficacy with which each type of grantee was able to engage others through the promotion of assets). While the geographic reach of statewide partnership grantees was greater than community mobilization grantees, the influence of statewide partners may have been compromised by geographic distance. The optimum balance of reach and influence may have been obtained more often by community mobilization grantees. This inference is supported by the fact that four of five survey

respondents highlighted above as having the largest networks for disseminating the asset framework were community mobilization grantees: Cherry Creek School District, Colorado Springs Assets for Youth, Healthy Mountain Communities and Summit Prevention Alliance.

Data collected during the evaluation suggests that statewide partnership grantees focused, for the most part, on sharing information about the assets through the distribution of resource materials, newsletters and progress reports. Although a few statewide partners attempted to implement more intensive efforts (e.g., the training of further asset trainers and the establishment of new policies that incorporated or were based on the assets), information obtained through progress reports and interviews suggested that relatively little collaboration or partnering occurred for the specific purpose of promoting the assets between the multiple sites that comprised each statewide partnership.

Statewide partnership grantees most often identified geographic distance and time, as well as the absence of role models and other sources of support within locally based departments, agencies, clubs or councils, as barriers to deeper engagement. These barriers seemed to be particularly important for sites that did not serve as the fiscal or coordinating agency for a statewide partnership and, therefore, felt less directly involved in and connected to the initiative. Community mobilization grantees, on the other hand, may have had more opportunities to share information and to encourage deeper engagement with the assets among potential partners. These grantees had the opportunity to work more closely and on an ongoing basis with organizations, agencies and individuals in their geographic areas. Efforts that were smaller in geographic scope (i.e., focused at the local level) may have also been more intensive and, therefore, facilitated more partnering around the asset framework. Other factors, such as proximity to asset champions, may have contributed to the ability of community mobilization grantees to enroll others in and engage partners for asset building.

The statewide partnership grantee that was shown by survey responses as having one of the largest networks established around assets – Full Circle of Lake County – provided support for these inferences. The Lake County site was one of three sites that comprised the Full Circle statewide partnership grantee; the other

sites were located in Denver and Pueblo. The partners that Full Circle of Lake County listed were primarily entities that were also in Lake County or in neighboring Summit County. Although Full Circle of Lake County was part of a statewide partnership grantee, the strongest relationships reported around asset building were established locally.

While “people connection” through existing relationships facilitated the spread of the asset framework through established networks, the asset-related efforts of organizations and individuals have, in many cases, served as a reciprocal force that fostered the development of new relationships and partnerships. Survey respondents indicated a strong relationship between the establishment of new partnerships and the application of the assets to an organization’s work. While survey findings indicated that some of these partnerships were established through mutual connections with ACY (e.g., as a result of attending a presentation, training, state conference; n=21) they also revealed that many organizations developed new partnerships as a result of local asset-building projects. These data indicate that the asset framework itself served as a catalyst for relationship building and connection between diverse organizations, thus linking established networks in the state.

THE DENSITY OF NETWORKS ASSOCIATED WITH ASSET BUILDING IN COLORADO

The *Web of Support for Asset Building* survey documents a total of 1,151 distinct relationships or connections that exist between entities that reportedly use or support the use of the 40 developmental assets. Because survey respondents could both list organizations that have supported their own asset-related efforts and be listed by others as a source of support for their asset-building efforts, this figure includes both the number of partnerships organizations have established to support their own work with the assets (n=582) and the number of times organizations are listed by others as a source of support for asset building (n=569). For example, Cherry Creek School District listed a total of 25 partners that comprise the school district’s web of support for asset building. Three additional organizations that responded to OMNI’s survey listed Cherry Creek School District as a source of support for asset building. Based on this information, Cherry Creek School District had established 28 distinct relationships to leverage support for their own asset-related efforts and those of others.

The interconnectedness of entities that are using or supporting the use of the 40 developmental assets in Colorado is evident in Figure 4. The network diagram illustrates that the core members of Colorado’s infrastructure for asset building are themselves highly interconnected, meaning that a number of links exist between each entity’s set of networks.

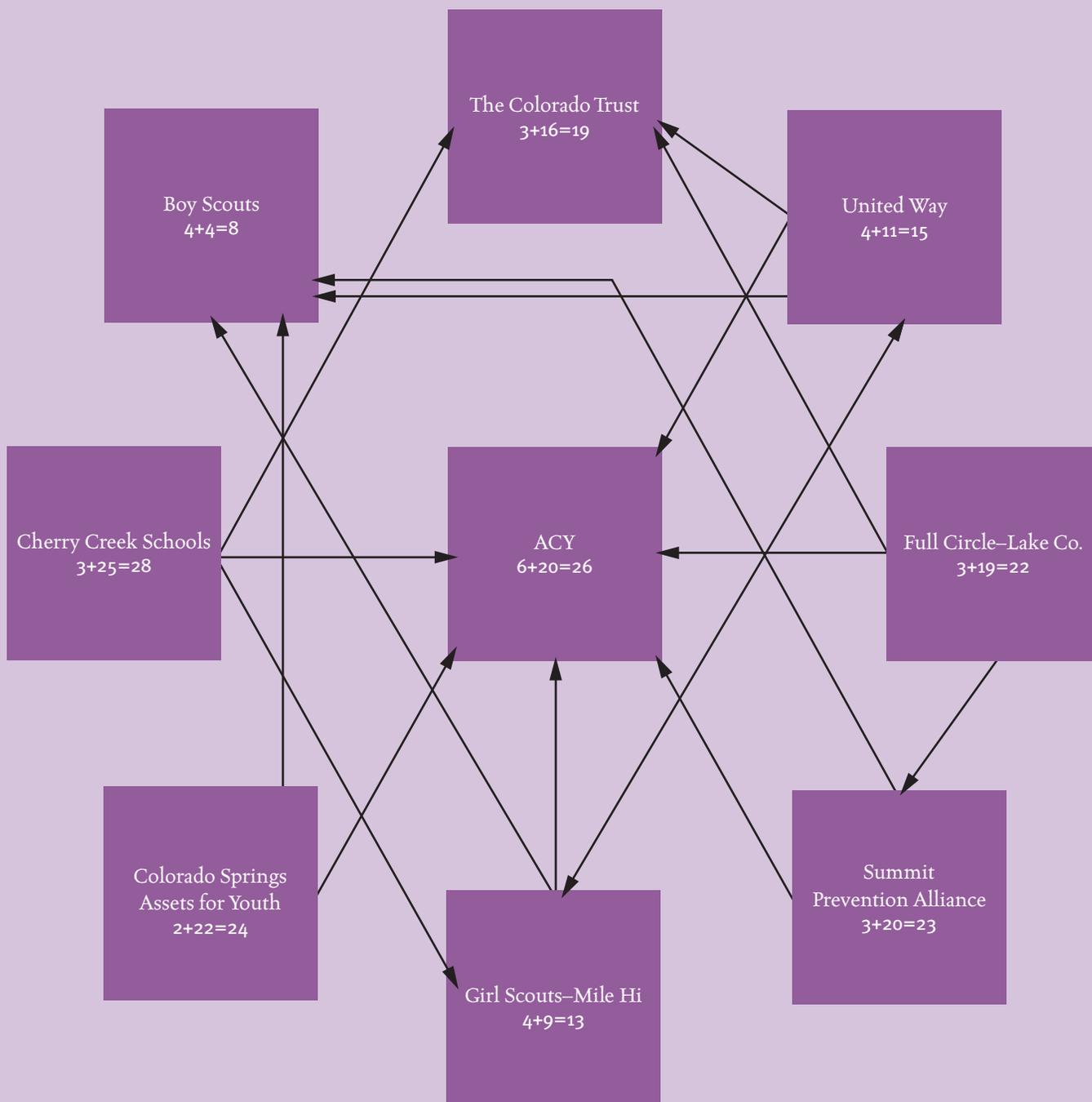
The relationships documented in Figure 4 are somewhat of an artifact of who responded to the survey. Additional relationships likely existed within this core network, such as the connection between Boy Scouts of America and ACY that was highlighted earlier in this section. In the case of Boy Scouts and ACY, the relationship was not documented simply because neither group participated in the survey. Even with incomplete information, this figure serves to show how interconnected members of the core network were with one another. If the figure were expanded to show the networks of each of these agencies, the number of core relationships would grow exponentially.



Surveys identified a total of 616... [Colorado organizations] that reportedly used or provided funding to use the 40 developmental assets in their work.



FIGURE 4: COLORADO'S CORE OF SUPPORT FOR ASSET BUILDING



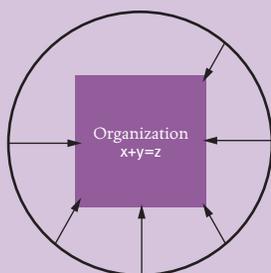
Note:

$x+y=z$

x =Number of relationships with other organizations that are members of this core network

y =Number of relationships with other organizations that are not members of this core network

z =Total number of relationships with other organizations



Arrows point away from survey respondents and toward those they identified as sources of support.

Reciprocal arrows indicate that each entity identified the other as a source of support for their asset building efforts.

Where reciprocal arrows are not indicated, it often reflected the fact that one partner did not participate in the survey.

The data indicating that the asset-related efforts of grantees and non-grantees served as a catalyst for relationship building and networking suggest another mechanism whereby the assets spread and reached diverse organizations across the state. While any inference about the impact of this enhanced interconnectedness among agencies in Colorado extends beyond the scope of the current evaluation, such enhanced relationship building and connectedness does support the perspective that the asset model has a contagious quality that may inspire social movements.

FUNDING AS A CATALYZING FORCE FOR THE SPREAD OF THE ASSETS

Funding support provided by The Colorado Trust and other sources accelerated and supported the spread of the asset framework in Colorado by:

- Generating a critical mass of individuals and organizations that had been exposed to the asset framework and philosophy
- Disseminating asset-related materials and resources that addressed asset-integration questions or needs, and kept the message fresh, relevant and in people's consciousness
- Creating opportunities for networking with others who could serve as a resource and source of support for asset building.

Within a three-year period, 45 grantees were selected by ACY to receive grants. Nine of these grantees were statewide partnership grantees comprised of three or more sites. The significant financial investment of The Colorado Trust not only funded the work of grantees to build and promote the assets, it also led to the establishment of ACY as a nonprofit organization dedicated to endorsing the asset framework and carrying

the asset message forward in Colorado. In addition to ACY's grantmaking function, the organization promoted the assets among hundreds of non-grantees through trainings, presentations, a website and other innovative means.

Funding provided through the initiative allowed ACY to dedicate staff time to developing asset-related products, which further facilitated the spread of assets. Some of the resources that were most popular with grantees included the *Spirit of Culture* and *Power of Parent Engagement* publications and companion trainings. Search Institute also developed a number of resources that were popular among grantees. During interviews, grantees most frequently mentioned *Pass It On!*, a handbook that includes 92 asset-building handouts that could be copied and distributed to the audience or population with whom grantees were working. Financial resources provided through ACY's grants allowed grantees to purchase these materials, which supported their work to integrate the assets and assisted them in engaging others not previously exposed to the asset approach.



This financial support also permitted staff of grantee organizations to devote time to developing asset-related products internally. Examples include trainings and associated curricula, newsletters, posters and banners, as well as the translation of the asset framework and materials into the native languages of the clients that grantees were serving. Funding provided by the initiative contributed to the creation and distribution of practical, user-friendly products that made the asset framework and philosophy accessible to diverse populations. These resources served as a way to reach more individuals with the asset message and a mechanism to remind people of the practical ways that they could apply assets in their lives.

With financial support, grantees also sent staff members and young people to state and national conferences. These events provided forums for grantees to learn about asset-related efforts being conducted in other parts of the state or country, as well as innovative strategies for promoting assets in different settings. The number

of people who attended statewide and national conferences reinforced for grantees that interest in asset building extended beyond the scope of the Assets for Colorado Youth Initiative and that they were part of a larger movement. Grantees indicated that this aspect of the conferences, as well as other events that attracted asset builders, was critical to maintaining the commitment and enthusiasm of those who struggled to promote the assets in their workplace or community. Conferences also provided important and very visible opportunities for youth to give presentations, speak publicly and receive positive acknowledgment. According to grantees, conferences contributed to the transformation of youth into more empowered individuals as a result of these opportunities. Some grantees indicated that conferences were a transforming experience for themselves as well.

An important factor in the spread of the asset framework in the state has been, and will continue to be, the provision of funding specifically dedicated to supporting the integration of assets. The Colorado Trust, for its part, has expanded its financial commitment to the asset framework to its five-year, \$11 million after-school initiative. Applicants to the after-school initiative were encouraged to incorporate the asset framework along with other strength-based approaches into their proposal and, therefore, their after-school programming. This endorsement of the assets through significant financial investment by one of the state's largest foundations continues to have an impact in promoting the spread of assets.

A number of other philanthropic partners have financially supported asset-related efforts as well, and a few grantees have reported incorporating the assets into successful grant proposals. Table 6 features philanthropic partners that survey respondents listed as part of their web of support for asset building. Funding from these sources most often supported specific asset-related events, the purchase of additional materials and resources, and asset-building efforts such as the Youth as Resources (YAR) model. In the YAR model, youth were responsible for soliciting proposals from their peers for projects that would address issues of particular concern or interest to young people in the community. Youth reviewed these proposals and, with funds provided by philanthropic entities such as the Piton and El Pomar Foundations, made grants for projects they felt had good merit and the strongest potential to make a positive difference

Applicants to [The Colorado Trust's] after-school initiative were encouraged to incorporate the asset framework along with other strength-based approaches into their proposal and, therefore, their after-school programming.

in their community. The YAR model empowered young people by providing opportunities for leadership and decisionmaking responsibility. This is just one example of the types of asset-building projects that philanthropic agencies have supported in the state.

THE REACH OF THE ASSET MOVEMENT IN COLORADO

What makes the reach of assets in Colorado remarkable is the diversity of organizations using assets or serving as a source of support for asset building. Information

collected from the *Web of Support for Asset Building* survey indicates that organization that have integrated or supported the integration of assets vary in their geographic scope, focus populations and their asset-related efforts. The organizations represented by survey respondents also represent diverse sectors. Table 7, which shows the complete list of sectors, as well as the number and percentage of partnerships established, is an important indicator of the reach of the assets in the state.

The range of sectors that has been infiltrated by the assets is another measure of their reach. The extent to which specific sectors were represented by organizations using or supporting the use of the 40 developmental assets provides an important indication of the degree to which particular sectors may have been permeated by the asset framework. The education sector emerged from survey responses as the sector most engaged in asset building. Survey respondents most often reported having partnerships and sources of support for asset building established with organizations in the education sector. Specifically, 113 relationships were reportedly established with organizations in this sector, representing nearly 20% of all partnerships documented through survey responses. While only eight grantees that represented the education sector took part in the survey, survey responses identified many non-funded organizations within the education sector that were using the 40 developmental assets.

TABLE 6

GRANTMAKING PARTNERS IDENTIFIED BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS

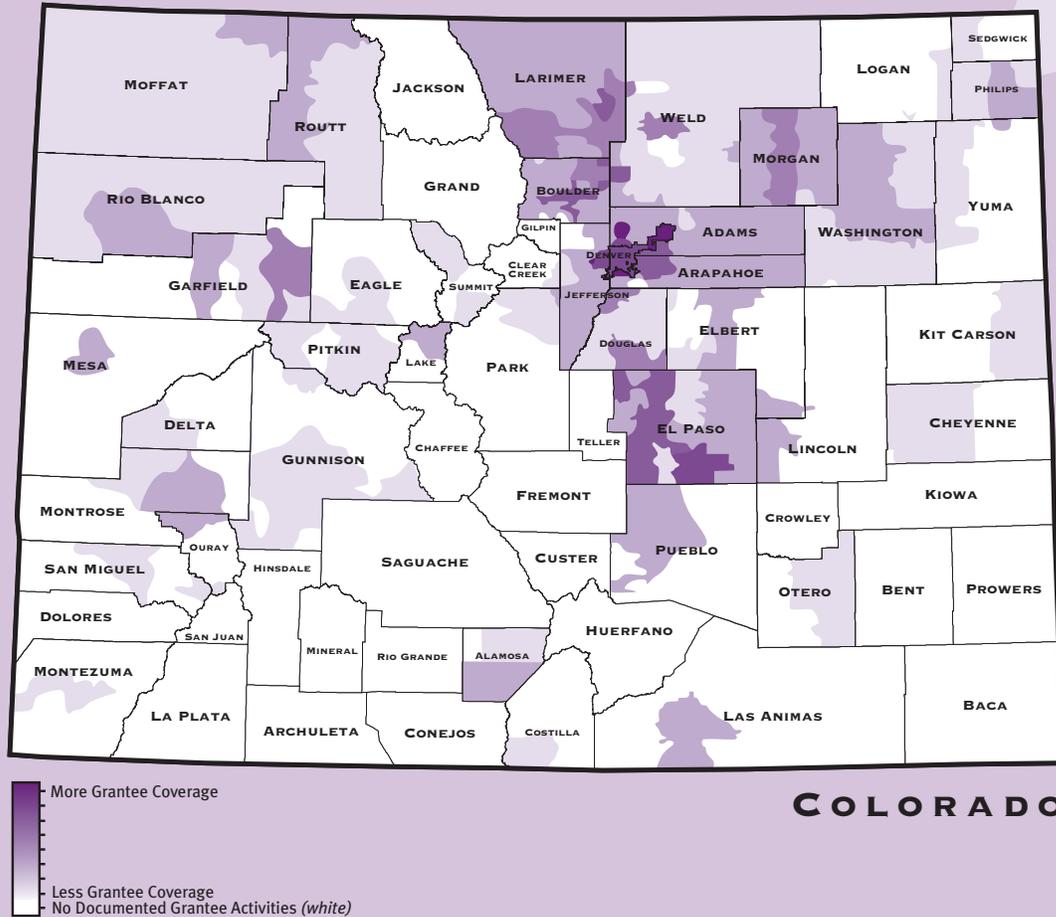
Arthur & Helen Johnson Foundation
 Aspen Valley Community Foundation
 Aspen Valley Medical Foundation
 AU Hunter Trust
 Colorado Children's Trust Fund (grantee)
 The Colorado Trust
 Department of Criminal Justice
 Denver Osteopathic Foundation
 Edmondson Foundation, Joseph Henry
 El Pomar Foundation
 Giddings Foundation, Hester E. & Edwin W.
 Gill Foundation's Gay & Lesbian Fund
 Hopper Foundation
 Human Resource Coalition (Steamboat Springs)
 Johnson Foundation, Arthur & Helen
 KN Energy
 Luther T. McCauley
 Lutheran Brotherhood
 Mile High United Way
 Montrose County Foundation
 Nutrition Camp School Foundation
 Piton Foundation
 Poudre Valley Hospital Foundation
 Rotary Clubs (Durango, St. Vrain Valley)
 Safe City
 Sturm Foundation
 Summit Foundation
 Temple Hoyne-Buell Foundation
 Vail Valley Cares
 Vision 2020
 Yampa Valley Community Foundation

TABLE 7

THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF ASSET-BASED PARTNERSHIPS BY SECTOR		
SECTOR	NUMBER	PERCENT
Education	113	19.4
Youth serving	105	18.0
Nonprofit	102	17.5
Government	75	12.9
Philanthropic/grantmaking	64	11.0
Business	45	7.7
Health	44	7.6
Faith-based	34	5.8
Total	582	100.0

Note: The sector sum is 100.0%; individual line item numbers have been rounded to the nearest 0.1.

MAP 1: ASSETS FOR COLORADO YOUTH GRANTEE COVERAGE-2001



A number of factors contributed to this finding. ACY, which worked to promote the assets among non-grantees as well as grantees, devoted significant efforts to fostering engagement with the asset framework among school faculty and staff and parents. For example, ACY conducted parent and teacher trainings in a number of Denver Public Schools. ACY also developed resource materials specifically tailored to support asset building in academic settings, as well as for use by parents at home. Most of the asset champions identified during the evaluation also were involved in promoting asset building in schools. Specific school districts associated with identified asset champions spanned Colorado and included:

- Aurora Public Schools
- Boulder Valley Schools
- Cherry Creek Schools
- Colorado Springs School District #11
- Denver Public Schools
- Lake County Schools
- Montrose County School District RE-1J
- Summit RE-1
- Trinidad School District #1.

The youth-serving and nonprofit sectors also were heavily engaged in asset-related work. The survey captured and documented a total of 105 organizations using and 102 organizations supporting the use of the 40 developmental assets in each of these sectors (representing 18% and 17.5% of all partnerships, respectively).

Another measure of the reach of the asset framework in the state was its geographical spread. For the purposes of mapping this spread, grantee service areas were geo-coded.

Given limited time for the evaluation period and limitations of the survey data, OMNI determined not to attempt to include non-funded agencies on this map. Map 1 shows what grantees received funding in 2001 or had indicated that asset-building efforts were still sustained at that point in time. The evaluation team removed the asset-related efforts of those grantees that indicated through progress reports and exit interviews that they were not sustaining their asset-building efforts. Thus this map documents the geographic spread and ultimate reach of the asset movement near the conclusion of the initiative's funding from The Colorado Trust.

Agencies Identified as Partners in Asset Building

BUSINESS

- Alpine Bank

EDUCATION

- Aurora Public Schools
- Lake County School District
- Roaring Fork School District

FAITH-BASED

- Catholic Charities
- Smoky Hill Methodist Church

GOVERNMENT

- Colorado Springs Mayor's 100 Teens Program
- Pitkin County

HEALTH

- Vail Valley Medical Center
- San Juan Basin Health Department

NONPROFIT

- Assets for Colorado Youth
- Colorado Springs Assets for Youth

PHILANTHROPIC/GRANTMAKING

- The Colorado Trust
- Mile High United Way
- Summit Foundation

YOUTH SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

- YMCA of Metro Denver
- Girl Scout Council - Mile Hi
- Vail Recreation District - Meet the Wilderness SOS



Chapter 5

ENGAGING YOUTH THROUGH ASSETS

NATIONALLY, THE DEVELOPMENT OF EVALUATION METHODOLOGIES AND TOOLS THAT ADEQUATELY CAPTURE THE PROCESS OF ASSET BUILDING AND DESIRED OUTCOMES IS STILL IN ITS INFANCY. SINCE THE ASSETS OFFER A FRAMEWORK RATHER THAN A SPECIFIC INTERVENTION MODEL, IT IS CHALLENGING TO ADDRESS THE EVALUATION NEEDS OF ORGANIZATIONS UNIVERSALLY. YET, AS THE ASSET MOVEMENT HAS GAINED MOMENTUM, THE NEED HAS GROWN TO DEMONSTRATE THE POSITIVE IMPACTS OF THE ASSETS ON YOUTH. WITH THIS IN MIND, OMNI DEVELOPED A FOCUS GROUP STUDY TO EXPLORE TWO CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. WHAT IS POSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE WITH YOUTH AS A RESULT OF ASSET BUILDING?
2. HOW DO THE ASSETS ENGAGE YOUTH?



THE FOCUS GROUP STUDY

Although interviews with grantee staff provided important insights and evidence of the positive effects of asset building, OMNI anticipated that the perspectives of youth would not only help validate these findings, they also would potentially offer new ways for researchers to begin conceptualizing impacts. It was determined that the focus group format would prove most useful in helping youth recreate their experiences as participants in local asset initiatives. To collect data from a cross-section of participating youth, OMNI concentrated data collection efforts on the case study sites. OMNI developed a focus group guide to explore the research questions and then tailored it to the specific settings and efforts of local asset-building initiatives.

In total, OMNI facilitated seven youth focus groups, each at a different case study site. Selection of sites for participation was based on the timing of grantee events that could offer a natural setting for focus groups. Thirty-four youth participated in these focus groups. OMNI asked that, when possible, youth participants be selected based on their knowledge and involvement in local asset-building efforts, as well as on a longer period of exposure to the asset framework. In four of

the seven focus groups, participants were predominately youth of color. Selected participants belonged to asset-building clubs, youth advisory groups and train-the-trainer programs.

To supplement and further elucidate data collected through these focus groups, OMNI examined grantee data for staff observations about the impacts of asset building on youth. These data begin to illuminate the individual-level change that the asset framework promises for youth.

YOUTH VOICES ON THE IMPACTS OF ASSET BUILDING

The analysis of youth focus group data uncovered two main domains of positive change for youth participating in asset-building efforts.

- The first domain, strengthening youth, includes a sense of belonging, stronger and more effective relationships, self-confidence, skill building and a positive future orientation.
- The second major domain of impacts describes the emergence of youth asset builders.

These domains are explored in the following paragraphs.

Strengthening Youths' Sense of Belonging

Among youth, participating in asset-building efforts generated a new and much broader sense of belonging. They indicated that in schools, other organizations and communities, anonymity was most often the status quo. Their experiences in asset-building organizations and with asset champions stood in stark contrast with most of their experiences. In the context of the asset framework, youth found that adults remembered their names and faces. Moreover, adults expressed happiness about their opportunities to meet youth. Adult recognition, or the lack thereof, was identified implicitly and explicitly by youth as a major contributing force in determining youths' sense of belonging in different contexts.

Youth reported that asset building created new opportunities for youth to interact with adults. They also found a qualitative difference in their interactions with participating adults: youth explained that they enjoyed the rare experience of being listened to by an adult. One youth stated with surprise, "They're (adults) excited and hearing their (adults') questions, and that they are genuinely interested in what we're doing." Youth further elaborated that it was not just that adults listened, but, more importantly, the way in which adults listened to youth. In the context of asset building, youth indicated that adults sought out their perspectives and opinions on issues that really mattered to organizations and communities.

Forums such as advisory councils placed youth in the position of decisionmakers, presenters and consultants within organizations and interagency networks. These positions generally created opportunities for youth to work with adults. Based on both interviews and focus groups, close working relationships with adults seemed particularly important in affirming the value of youth roles and contributions toward collective goals. This affirmation created a sense of belonging that often extended beyond a particular class or program to an entire school or agency or community as a whole. One grantee commented on the difference that she/he saw in youth: "Well, I think for the youth, they're just more connected to their communities now. And they're part of something bigger." Data suggested that the formalization of youth roles and close working relationships with adults were significant factors in creating a sense of belonging among participating youth.

As described by youth, asset building created a sense of belonging through the new relationships established between adults and youth, and the esteem of youth contributions. Both of these findings can be related back to specific assets identified by Search Institute:

- Asset #3: Other adult relationships
- Asset #8: Youth as resources.

Based on available data, it appears that asset building, as it occurred during the initiative, contributed to the development of these assets in youth. In the future, the issues identified relating to youths' sense of belonging may help advance the understanding of these particular assets, as well as the indicators that can measure their growth in youth.

**"In the community,
they (adults) recognize
you and know you're
there, and they remember
you and that feels good.
That really feels good."**

**– A youth focus
group participant**



Strengthening Youths' Relationships With Others

Another key finding from the focus group study was that youth generally found asset building a powerful force in strengthening and improving relationships with significant individuals in their lives. Youth attributed positive changes in their relationships with family members, teachers and friends to their participation in asset-building projects. Strengthening these relationships, many youth indicated, proved a transforming experience. Some could identify ways in which changes in these relationships translated into other areas of their lives, such as grades. Youth, however, tended to talk more generally about how the assets had changed their “entire outlook” or way of being with others.

A salient factor that youth identified as facilitating a change in these relationships was a shift in their perceptions of adults. Youth indicated that as they witnessed adults listening and working with them differently, they began to question many of the assumptions that they held about adults. One youth explained, “Once I started realizing that there were adults in the community that cared about kids, and wanted to be our friends and talk to us and stuff... it’s definitely changed my opinion on adults.” A shift in perceptions encouraged many youth to reassess their relationships with the significant adults in their lives, as well as to look for new opportunities to meet, work with and learn from others. At all but one of the case study sites, youth reported having strong and enduring relationships with adults, which supports youths’ positive perceptions about the impacts of the assets on relationships.

The following assets best corresponded to the impacts youth described:

- Asset #2: Positive family communication
- Asset #14: Adult role models
- Asset #33: Interpersonal competence.

Based on available data, the asset building that took place during the initiative contributed to the development of these assets in youth. Future research should further explore the improvements that youth observed in their relationships – specifically the transformative effects that youth identified, the shift in youth perceptions of adults and how strengthened relationships functioned to develop these identified assets.

Strengthening Youth Through Skill Building

In addition to enhancing youths’ sense of belonging and improving their relationships, young people found that asset building encouraged skill building. Youth explained that their roles in local efforts often placed them in the position of presenting to adults, developing new resources and making decisions that affected programs and policies in communities. Both youth and adults took these positions seriously. This encouraged participants to work together to build the skills of youth in areas such as planning, accounting and public speaking.

Development of these skills, focus group participants suggested, gave youth an important sense of accomplishment. Describing some of the qualitative aspects of these impacts, one grantee confided, “His face was different; he was smiling; he was thrilled; he had accomplished this wonderful task.” Beyond creating a sense of achievement, skill building in specific areas also translated into other areas of youths’ lives. As one youth explained, “I’ve learned responsibility and just different things to make better decisions.”

Focus group and interview data suggested that the assets that were built when youth had the opportunity to work side by side with adults were:

- Asset #16: High expectations
- Asset #30: Responsibility
- Asset #32: Planning and decisionmaking.

Working on the development of specific skills provided youth with opportunities to build these assets.

“I live a lot better and have better relationships... It changed me completely.”
– A youth focus group participant

Strengthening Youth by Building Self-Confidence and a Positive Future Orientation

The data showed another area of positive impact on young people: self-confidence and a positive outlook on the future. As one youth explained, “It really made me focus on what I want to do in the future, my career and a more successful life.” Focus group participants expressed excitement about their future and attributed many of their accomplishments to their involvement in asset building. These youth relayed plans to attend college and to pursue specific career paths. In the more immediate future, youth indicated that they were committed to performing well in school to prepare for the future.

Youth indicated that it was the sense of belonging, accomplishment and acquired skills that made them feel more confident in their capabilities and positive about their futures. Data also revealed a common theme among youths’ experiences with the assets: asset-building organizations and asset builders encouraged youth to speak for themselves and to voice their concerns. This appeared to be the common thread that linked the development of a sense of belonging and accomplishment, skills, self-confidence and a positive view of the future in youth.

Many young people believed that learning the 40 developmental assets and applying their definitions to their everyday lives was important. Knowledge of specific assets, youth reported, helped them identify and act upon positive opportunities in their everyday lives. Young people indicated that this self-knowledge contributed to growth in their self-confidence and promoted a more positive outlook on their current and future circumstances.

Collectively, young people’s stories about growth in self-confidence and a more positive outlook appeared most tied to building the following assets:

- Asset #21: Achievement motivation
- Asset #22: School engagement
- Asset #28: Integrity
- Asset #37: Personal power
- Asset #40: Positive view of personal future.

The data suggested not only that these assets were built, but also that the development of integrity in youth – defined as acting on one’s convictions and standing up for one’s beliefs – may be leveraged as a means of building other assets, including asset #21, achievement motivation. In other words, integrity appeared to be highly related to building other assets.

Emergence of Youth Asset Builders

The emergence of youth asset builders also was identified as an important impact of assets on young people. Many grantees explicitly targeted this outcome with a focus on training youth to become presenters in the asset framework in communities. However, focus group and interview data suggested that even when asset building was not defined as a formal role for youth, youth tended to hone their ability to build assets in their own and other individuals’ lives. Learning about the asset framework and specific developmental assets helped youth direct their energies toward positive change.

“With assets, it’s harder to stereotype somebody. You look at them in a little bit different light.”

– A youth focus group participant

Youth explained that their participation in local asset-building initiatives helped them more clearly see the link between their own individual actions and positive change in the broader community. Youth reported that the assets inspired them to take care of the community, to see beyond differences and to feel empathy toward others. One young person said that the assets inspire youth “to live a better life and be a better person.” For many youth, this meant making others feel good about themselves. In their daily interactions, youth reported, they began to see opportunities to positively impact others and to develop an understanding of the importance of building assets.

Youth could identify many ways that their individual asset-building efforts affected others, including:

- Parents became better communicators with their children
- Youth learned how to talk more effectively to adults
- Adults became involved in asset building
- Assets were nurtured in other youth
- Youth became role models for other youth.

Given these findings, teaching youth about the framework and its application may be an important mechanism for nurturing the following assets:

- Asset #26: Caring
- Asset #27: Equality and social justice
- Asset #33: Interpersonal competence.

CONCEPTUALIZING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Youth involvement was integral to the asset-building process and its positive outcomes. In its efforts to further understand youth involvement within the context of the asset framework, OMNI explored the following questions:

- What are the characteristics that distinguish youth involvement in the context of developmental assets from other efforts to involve youth?
- How do the assets engage youth so that improved outcomes are possible?

To begin inquiry, OMNI identified a list of grantees for which there were multiple and rich sources of data describing the engagement of youth within their organizations. The following criteria were applied to narrow this list for more in-depth analysis of the unique qualities of youth engagement:

- Youth returned to the organization after the period for participation had ended (e.g., a class or the summer ending)
- Youth sustained involvement in asset building into adulthood.

Eight grantees were identified through this process. OMNI then examined the key characteristics that distinguished youth involvement at these sites. From this analysis, nine elements emerged, as noted on page 60.



NINE ELEMENTS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Among the eight grantees studied, OMNI found evidence of these nine elements present. Table 8 describes which elements were present at each of these grantee sites.

Nine Elements of Youth Engagement

1. Adults share some degree of power with youth.
2. Youth have significant levels of responsibility.
3. Youth are viewed as actors and major players (as opposed to recipients of services).
4. Youth act on opportunities.
5. Adults and youth work together.
6. Strong, enduring relationships exist between youth and adults.
7. Strong, enduring relationships exist among youth.
8. An adult asset champion is present.
9. A youth asset champion is present.

OMNI observed that although the number and specific elements present varied by site, two of the nine elements characterized asset building across each of the sampled grantee organizations:

- Youth have significant levels of responsibility
- Strong, enduring relationships exist between youth and adults.

This finding suggested that significant levels of responsibility and strong, enduring relationships between adults and youth were essential elements upon which youth engagement might be founded.

While these two elements were constant across sites, the presence of other elements varied. OMNI concluded that, as different elements more strongly characterized some asset-building efforts than others, different combinations of the nine elements might help account for the various forms of youth involvement observed at sites. Further, OMNI observed that the presence or absence of elements might provide a way to account

TABLE 8

PRESENCE OF THE NINE ELEMENTS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AT A SAMPLE OF SITES	
GRANTEES	ELEMENTS PRESENT
Site 1 and Site 2	All elements present
Site 3	All elements present except an adult asset champion
Site 4 and Site 5	All elements present except strong, enduring relationships among youth
Site 6	All elements present except strong, enduring relationships among youth and a youth asset champion
Site 7	Elements present: Youth have significant levels of responsibility; strong, enduring relationships exist between youth and adults; an adult asset champion is present
Site 8	Elements present: Adults share some degree of power with youth, youth have significant levels of responsibility, and an adult asset champion is present

for varying levels or intensities of youth engagement. If the number of elements was associated with a different degree of youth engagement, the nine elements could be used to help rank-order youth engagement observed at grantee sites. OMNI's next step in this analysis was to test whether these elements or indicators of youth engagement, in fact, could be used to differentiate between different levels or intensities of youth engagement.

OMNI's assessment of the presence or absence of the nine elements was used to locate grantees on *The Spiral of Youth Engagement*. Simply using a count of the number of elements present at the site, OMNI rank-ordered grantees on a diagram of a spiral. OMNI then assessed the validity of this placement based on information available about innovation that had occurred at the site in creating new mechanisms for youth involvement and what youth and grantees expressed about the enduring nature of youth involvement in the grantee organization and the surrounding community.

There was a high level of agreement between placement on the spiral and OMNI's independent assessment of these sites. OMNI proposes that this spiral of youth engagement presents a useful way to conceptualize youth engagement. The conceptualization of youth engagement as a spiral incorporates the idea that as youth are engaged, youth themselves become resources that promote deeper and stronger patterns of youth engagement in the organization. The spiral of youth engagement visually captures this process as dynamic and continual. Further, the spiral encourages practitioners to chart organizational progress in terms of youth engagement. The engagement of youth was already identified as a facilitator of the asset integration-transformation process and organizational effectiveness. The concept of a youth engagement spiral links integration of the nine elements not only to the transformation of organizations but also to the strengthening of youth. Movement up the spiral of youth engagement, through the integration of the nine elements, promises deeper and more positive impacts on youth.

As a final step in the analysis, OMNI examined the broader dimensions underlying and shaping youth engagement in the context of the asset framework. To do this, OMNI identified core, unifying themes around which the nine elements could be clustered. The evaluation team identified three dimensions that could be used to frame the defining elements of youth engagement: youth empowerment, relationship building and the presence of an asset champion. Table 9 reflects the clustering of the nine elements by each of the identified dimensions.

TABLE 9: DIMENSIONS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT	RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING	PRESENCE OF ASSET CHAMPIONS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adults share some degree of power with youth 2. Youth have significant levels of responsibility* 3. Youth are viewed as actors and major players (as opposed to recipients of services) 4. Youth act on opportunities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Adults and youth work side by side 6. Strong, enduring relationships exist between youth and adults* 7. Strong, enduring relationships exist among youth 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. An adult asset champion is present 9. A youth asset champion is present

* Bold indicates elements that were found across all the selected sites.

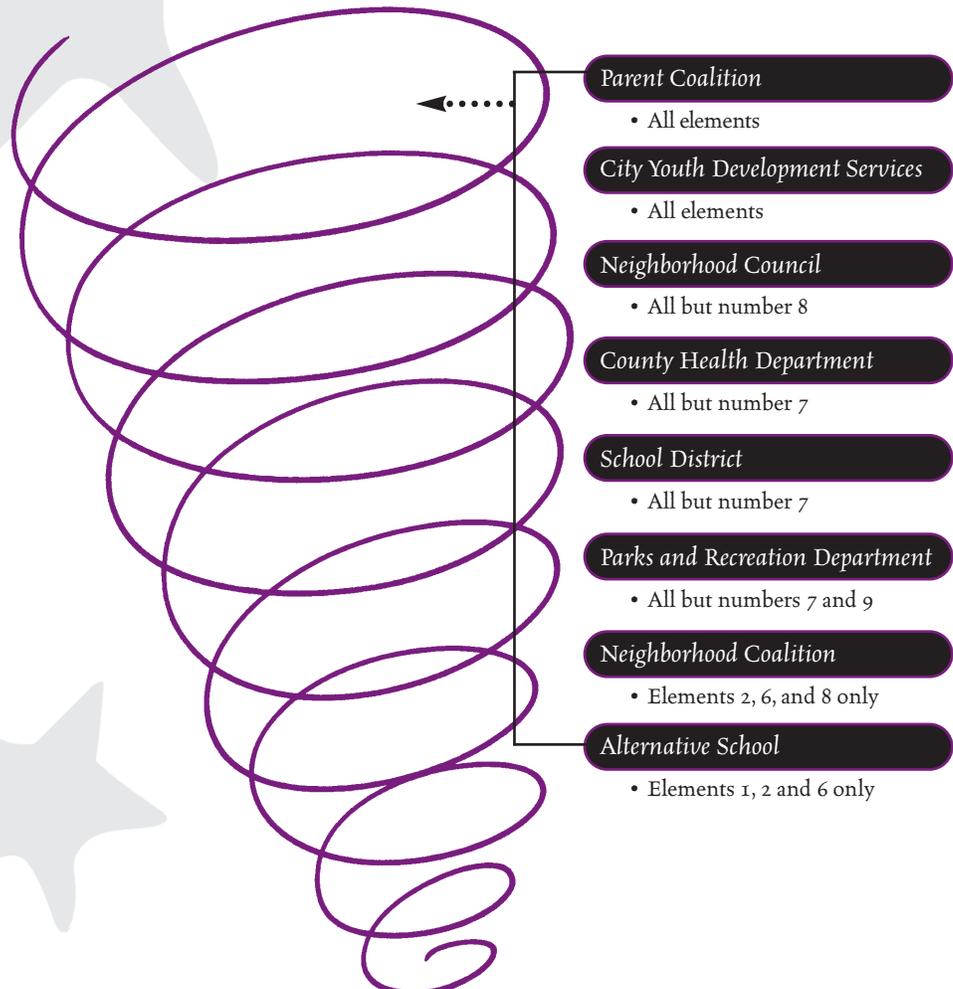
These dimensions provide another way of conceptualizing youth engagement within the context of the assets. To the extent that they can be generalized, these dimensions represent facets of youth engagement that may be more easily communicated than a list of elements. Moreover, these dimensions help organize and explain how different elements translate into positive outcomes for youth. For example, “youth have significant levels of responsibility” is an element of youth engagement that empowers youth to strengthen their skills and assets. Similarly, “adults and youth work side by side” creates opportunities for skill and asset development in the context of new and strengthened relationships between youth and adults.



Grantees mapped on this spiral were selected because there was adequate data available about youth engagement at these sites and there was evidence of significant youth engagement, as indicated by two criteria: youth continued to return to the grantee organization long after formal involvement had concluded and youth sustained a commitment to asset building into adulthood. These grantees were not necessarily case study sites. OMNI's analysis of the nine elements of youth engagement that cut across these groups provides a way of thinking about how youth engagement can be intensified to increase youth engagement and positive outcomes for youth. Below, OMNI placed grantees on the spiral based on the number of elements consistently present at the organization during the data collection period. Additional data (e.g., collective data gathered from all the different methods) about innovation and the enduring nature of youth involvement in these organizations were used to distinguish between grantees that shared the same number of elements.

Nine Elements of Youth Engagement

1. Adults share some degree of power with youth.
2. Youth have significant levels of responsibility.
3. Youth are viewed as actors and major players (as opposed to recipients of services).
4. Youth act on opportunities.
5. Adults and youth work together.
6. Strong, enduring relationships exist between youth and adults.
7. Strong, enduring relationships exist among youth.
8. An adult asset champion is present.
9. A youth asset champion is present.



Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS



CORE QUESTIONS IN THE FIELD OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

As the Search Institute's 40 developmental assets have become more widely recognized as a framework for youth and community development, the dialogue and debate have grown about the nature of asset building and its effectiveness, particularly in terms of demonstrating positive impacts on youth. Some of the core questions that have emerged concerning asset building include:

- How is the asset-building approach distinct from other youth and community development strategies? What are the benefits for organizations and individuals that employ this approach?
- What does application of the framework look like in action? How does one recognize asset building when one sees it?
- How does one determine if an asset-building effort is effective? What methods can be used to increase the effectiveness of asset building?
- What types of changes should be expected as a result of asset building? What are some of the indicators of positive change in communities and youth? How should these indicators be measured?

These same questions face practitioners, evaluators and grantmakers when implementing a statewide initiative to build assets.

In Colorado, the design of the initiative's evaluation reflected the need to better understand the asset-building approach and to begin uncovering some of the underlying principles and indicators of change that should guide future evaluation efforts. OMNI employed a number of qualitative research strategies to learn about:

- How individuals and groups involved in asset building experienced this work
- What it meant to be an asset champion
- What positive change asset builders and champions attributed to their work.

Through this research, the evaluation team began to reveal some answers to the questions surfacing within the field of positive youth development. These contributions are highlighted in the following pages.

HOW IS THE ASSET-BUILDING APPROACH DISTINCT FROM OTHER YOUTH DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES?

THE ASSET FRAMEWORK:

Weds youth development to community development. The asset-building approach recognizes that youth development is community development. The asset framework suggests that when the assets of youth are strengthened, so too is the community. Similarly, the framework encourages community leaders to recognize that community development is youth development, that building healthier communities involves building the assets of youth.

Underlying principles of the asset-building approach suggest that when community members acknowledge that youth are resources in communities and tap their potential, both the community environment and young people will be enriched with assets and benefit from the healthier behaviors that assets promote.³ In the Colorado initiative, asset-building projects linked youth development to community development through community service programs, intergenerational activities involving the elderly or disadvantaged youth and youth advisory groups that influenced local policies and community-based programs.

Connects social change to everyday actions. A salient finding of the evaluation was that learning and applying the asset framework made individuals more aware of the opportunities they had to positively influence youth on a day-to-day basis. An important aspect of the asset-building approach is that everyone has the potential to become an asset builder and make a difference in the community. The framework of the 40 developmental assets offers individuals simple steps they can take with youth to build assets. Application of the framework, individuals found, helped them recognize teachable moments, or opportunities to build assets, that they were not conscious of previously. These were often opportunities already embedded in their daily interactions with youth.

Bridges personal and professional spheres of life. In the Colorado experience, asset builders found that youth development work did not stop when they left the

workplace. Participants found that asset building was easy to incorporate into their everyday activities with family, friends and neighbors. In turn, they discovered that building the assets of the young people they knew in their personal lives made them more impassioned advocates of youth in professional settings. The asset-building approach, for many participants, was something that was internalized and applied in all spheres of life.

Engages young people in the enterprise of youth and community development. By promoting the understanding that youth are important resources in the community, the framework encourages community leaders and professionals to ask youth for information, feedback and advice. In the Colorado initiative, asset builders created opportunities for youth to participate in program development, to make funding decisions and to evaluate programs. Youth who took part in these activities were able to make positive contributions to programs and services that affected them, as well as other young people and the broader community.

Underlying principles of the asset-building approach suggest that when community members acknowledge that youth are resources in communities... both the community environment and young people will be enriched with assets...

Opportunities to take on meaningful roles in organizations and communities allowed youth to enter domains often reserved for adults. Asset builders who worked with young people in these roles assisted youth in developing new skills and exposed them to experiences that would promote the development of assets. Asset-building efforts often placed youth in the position of educating adults, whether about the framework, youth perspectives or community issues. These experiences reinforced the skills young people were learning and allowed them to take part in forums as serious participants. In these settings, youth were active participants in developing their own capacity and in promoting the ability of communities to respond to the needs of young people.

Supports innovation in communities. Innovation represents a new idea or practice that offers opportunities for social change. A significant finding of the evaluation was that the framework supported asset innovation, or new applications of the framework that could be replicated under similar conditions. Asset innovation often occurred when those who championed the assets translated the framework into their work with specific populations (e.g., Spanish-language families or disadvantaged youth) and within unique settings (e.g., an alternative high school or a health department). This is a process that some scholars have referred to as reinvention.⁴

An important form of asset innovation that OMNI encountered during the evaluation was cultural innovation. When asset champions translated the asset-building approach for use by different cultural groups, this involved adaptation of the framework into ideas and experiences that resonated with the group.

It is the strength-based approach of the asset framework that seems to promote asset innovation. The framework directs the attention of asset champions to the strengths of individuals and the assets available in the local setting. The strength-based approach encourages asset champions to adapt the framework to the life experiences of participants so that existing strengths can be built upon.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF AN ASSET-BUILDING APPROACH?

THE ASSET FRAMEWORK:

Strengthens organizational effectiveness. OMNI found that the integration of the asset framework was associated with several advancements in organizational effectiveness. These included a renewed and shared sense of an organization's mission, improvement in staff relations and morale and more effective engagement of youth by staff. Within the context of Colorado's initiative, the integration of the asset framework into all aspects of an organization's infrastructure and culture promoted the re-examination and refinement of:

- Organizational vision and policies
- Staff and volunteer training
- Materials used to support youth development, community outreach and staff development.

The asset integration process also brought about asset innovations that facilitated the engagement of youth and community groups. In general, local asset-building projects seemed to renew the commitment of participants to youth and community development.

Utilizes an empowerment approach. The asset framework focuses the attention of asset builders on the strengths of individuals and the local community. For individuals and communities that are often described in terms of their deficits (e.g. school dropout, juvenile delinquent), asset building may be a particularly appropriate and useful approach. That is, asset building may present important opportunities to engage disenfranchised individuals and community groups. Moreover, the asset approach encourages people to build on existing strengths and, in doing so, may help participants better recognize their own strengths, as well as those of others in their community. Becoming more aware of individual strengths and those of other groups encourages people to utilize collective strengths more intentionally and strategically to promote a healthier community environment. The experiences of Colorado's asset champions and initiative grantees provided testimony of the potentially empowering effects of asset building, with youth and populations such as Spanish-language families.

WHAT DOES APPLICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK LOOK LIKE IN ACTION? HOW DO YOU KNOW ASSET BUILDING WHEN YOU SEE IT?

APPLICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK PROMOTES:

Asset integration and transformation. When grantees of the Colorado initiative began to utilize the asset framework, they found that it had implications not only for how they worked with youth and communities but also for practices and the overall climate within their organizations. Organizing the work of agencies around the developmental assets often called for new internal policies, new ways of involving youth and new partnerships with other organizations in the community.

Assets for Colorado Youth, the nonprofit organization spearheading the Colorado initiative, defined this process of re-organizing and re-aligning agencies to reflect the asset framework as asset integration.

Asset integration is recognizable in such actions as:

- The asset language and framework is intentionally incorporated into all programs and staff training
- The composition of boards and advisory groups reflect a shift in decisionmaking processes and power that include more youth and youth advocates
- Asset champions emerge who “walk the talk” in their personal and professional lives.

Integration of the asset framework within organizational contexts led to important transformations for organizations and individuals involved. These included:

- Alignment of programs and staff roles with the larger organizational mission
- New partnerships and networks that emerged to support asset-building efforts and to create a stronger safety net for youth in the community
- Heightened awareness among staff about the importance of youth engagement

- Improved aspects of organizational climate, like staff morale and relations, as staff become more adept at working from a strength-based perspective (which can be applied, not only with youth, but also with other adults) and felt more effectual in their work.

Youth engagement. Application of the framework helps individuals become more aware of the absence of youth voices in the agencies that affect the lives of young people. It also makes them more aware of the opportunities to engage youth in these settings. New forums for youth involvement emerge when the asset framework is integrated and applied within a community or organizational context. These new forums become vehicles for engaging youth in settings that can offer supports and opportunities to develop and nurture assets.



ASSET BUILDING PROMOTES:

Awareness of strengths. Asset building, or intentional actions taken to develop assets in youth and in communities, promotes the awareness of strengths of young people. An important technique that many asset builders in Colorado employed was to teach youth about the developmental assets and how to apply them in their everyday lives. After learning to recognize the assets, youth indicated that they felt better equipped to make good decisions and healthier choices. In other words, greater awareness of the assets available in their lives (e.g., a significant adult relationship) facilitated positive actions on the part of youth to access these resources.

Relationship building. Asset building, in many regards, is about relationship building. It, however, involves a re-definition of previous patterns of relating at individual and organizational levels. A core principle of the asset-building approach is that the reconfiguration and realignment of relationships will make new resources available and partnerships possible, in service to both youth and communities. The strength-based approach of asset building is the basis of this reconfiguration and realignment; relationships are founded upon the strengths recognized in one other. The Colorado experience suggests that it is these new relationships that provide the context for asset building.

A core principle of the asset-building approach is that the reconfiguration and realignment of relationships will make new resources available and partnerships possible, in service to both youth and communities.

Skill building. When youth work side-by-side with adults and take on meaningful responsibilities in the community, a natural context is created for the development of skills that youth will need to transition successfully to adulthood. In this way, asset building is a mechanism that promotes skill building by youth. Colorado youth reported development of skills such as the following:

- Public speaking
- Program planning
- Training and mentoring
- Conflict resolution
- Accounting.

HOW DOES ONE DETERMINE IF AN ASSET-BUILDING EFFORT IS EFFECTIVE?

The answer to this question remains somewhat elusive. However, evaluation findings from the Colorado initiative suggest that the following conditions will be present when an asset-building effort is effective.

EFFECTIVENESS MAY BE INDICATED BY:

Clear focus and purpose of programming and activities with youth. Asset building had the effect of making staff more aware of the potential of young people. The framework also helped staff clarify the objectives of specific youth programs, drawing a link between program design and the 40 developmental assets. Day-to-day interactions between staff and youth also assumed new meaning in the context of the asset framework. Asset building encouraged staff to look for opportunities to build and nurture the assets of youth in these daily interactions. Implementing an asset approach did not necessarily require the development of new programs; rather, it encouraged a new awareness about the opportunities already available in programs and organizations to build assets. This heightened awareness, in turn, had the effect of making youth programs and activities with youth more deliberate or intentional, as Colorado participants described it.



Dense and diverse networks. The asset framework encourages organizations to realign their networks, so that collectively network partners can provide youth with support and opportunities to build assets. This approach helps organizations clarify where the strengths and gaps are in their community, in terms of supporting youth in becoming healthy adults. Further, it encourages organizations to turn outward to other agencies and groups to share and maximize resources, as network partners seek to provide youth with a continuum of opportunities and supports in each major area of life (e.g., education, family, leisure, etc.). Given these principles, “dense” and “diverse” networks can serve as indicators of effective asset-building efforts. Density reflects the number of relationships that exist between each agency and other network partners – in other words, all of the ways that agencies work together to provide opportunities and supports to youth. Another important measure of effectiveness may be the diversity of sectors that are represented within the networks, as an asset-building approach facilitates partnerships between agencies that address different aspects of youths’ lives (e.g., school, recreation center, local transportation and grocery stores). Greater density and diversity of network partners helps ensure that agencies work together to shape healthy youth behavior and quality of community life.

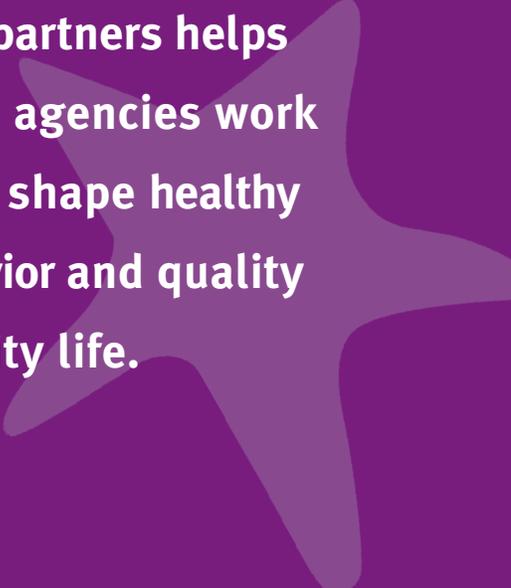
Sustained youth engagement. A powerful indicator of the effectiveness of asset-building efforts may be youth engagement, specifically the duration, consistency and, to the extent possible, intensity of sustained youth involvement. Youth involvement is typically measured in terms of attendance, program dosage and types of activities attended. The asset building approach reveals the inadequacy of this model, which reflects a view of youth as “objects” of programming rather than as “community builders.” While OMNI did not examine youth engagement as a measure of effectiveness, the evaluation did explore the following indicators of youth involvement in a preliminary manner:

- Innovation that created new forums for youth involvement
- The consistent involvement of participating youth over time in grantee organizations and surrounding communities
- The return of youth to a project after the period of expected participation had ended
- Sustained involvement in asset building into adulthood.

Further research is needed in the area of youth engagement, so that it can be measured and used to evaluate the effectiveness of asset-building projects.

The emergence of asset innovations and asset champions. Visible indications of effective application and integration of the asset framework are the emergence of asset innovations and asset champions. As described previously, innovation appears to go hand-in-hand with application of the framework in agencies and among community groups. Asset innovations create a bridge between the asset philosophy and the community group or organizational setting that is targeted. This is achieved by translating the asset-building approach into a new sense of identity, focused on the strengths revealed by the framework and actions directed toward positive change.

Asset champions also emerge when the asset-building approach is applied. In Colorado, asset champions were individuals who were ambassadors of the asset framework and advocated for youth in their local communities and personal and professional circles. In part, what distinguished these individuals from other asset builders was that they served as messengers who helped spread the word about the assets to broad and diverse audiences and served as a “hub” between different organizations involved in asset-building projects. New asset champions can emerge as the framework is spread to new communities and groups. They, in turn, serve to inspire the engagement of local community groups with the asset approach.



Greater density and diversity of network partners helps ensure that agencies work together to shape healthy youth behavior and quality of community life.

WHAT METHODS CAN BE USED TO INCREASE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ASSET BUILDING?

ASSET BUILDING CAN BE MADE MORE EFFECTIVE BY:

Developing a more active approach to asset integration.

A significant contribution of the evaluation was the examination of the qualities associated with more active integration of the asset framework. OMNI found that the following characterized more active approaches to asset integration:

- The asset framework is a core philosophy that permeates the organization and serves as the basis for organizational culture
- The assets inform program objectives and are at the forefront of all programming
- Staff are proactive and reflective about how, and the extent to which, the organization builds assets in youth
- Staff seek the perspectives of youth on an ongoing basis to inform program planning and development
- The asset framework is used to strengthen organizational infrastructure.

These five characteristics can be used by individuals to informally assess the magnitude and quality of asset integration. In this way, being able to determine a more active approach from a more passive one assists individuals in reflecting on ways to deepen asset integration within organizations.

Advancing the level of youth engagement. An important focus of the evaluation was youth engagement. This focus grew out of the investigative study that was conducted on the youth impacts of asset building. OMNI observed that when young people are change agents, it becomes difficult to disentangle the process from youth outcomes. In fact, as a growing number of scholars have commented, current frameworks for evaluation may be limited in their ability to capture impacts as they occur within the context of asset building.

OMNI found youth engagement an important key to understanding the changes that youth experienced in asset-building projects. The evaluation revealed three major dimensions of youth engagement: youth empowerment, relationship building and activation by youth and adult asset champions. In teasing apart the factors promoting youth engagement, OMNI identified nine important elements:

1. Adults share some degree of power with youth
2. Youth have significant levels of responsibility
3. Youth are viewed as actors and major player as opposed to recipients of services
4. Youth act on opportunities
5. Adults and youth work together
6. Strong, enduring relationships exist between youth and adults
7. Strong, enduring relationships exist among youth
8. An adult asset champion is present
9. A youth asset champion is present.

Youth engagement may offer important opportunities to increase the effectiveness of asset-building projects. Asset builders can use this list as a point of reference for assessing the quality and scope of youth engagement. To advance the level of youth engagement, asset builders can consider ways to build on the identified elements.



WHAT TYPES OF CHANGES SHOULD BE EXPECTED AS A RESULT OF ASSET BUILDING? WHAT ARE SOME OF THE INDICATORS OF POSITIVE CHANGE IN COMMUNITIES AND YOUTH? HOW SHOULD THESE INDICATORS BE MEASURED?

OMNI observed a number of positive changes that may be attributed to asset building, including: personal transformation, enhancement of organizational effectiveness, engagement of youth and expansion of community networks on behalf of youth. In general, however, the outcomes of asset building and their deeper impacts on youth and communities are not well understood. This is due, to a large extent, to the new paradigmatic qualities of the asset-building approach. It is also due to the fact that the results of asset building manifest at very different levels of analysis – the individual, the organization and the community – and interact with one another. Overall, the field of positive development is in the nascent stages of addressing questions about impacts, indicators and measurement. Yet, this is the area to which asset champions, grantmakers and researchers turn in order to document and debate the benefits of asset building.

The evaluation of the Colorado initiative constructed a limited investigative study of some of the potential impacts that asset building had had on youth. A focus group study was designed to learn about the positive changes that youth attributed to their participation in asset-building projects. These data, supplemented with staff perceptions of the impacts of asset building, began to illuminate some common areas of positive change in the lives of youth that took part in an asset-building project. These are outlined below.

ASSET BUILDING WILL CONTRIBUTE TO:

Positive change in the lives of individual youth.

More Effective Relationships With Adults

- Youth reported having a greater number of interactions with a wider circle of adults
- Youth and adults found that their interactions with one another were more positive
- Youth indicated that participation in asset-building projects had helped them strengthen their relationships with significant adults in their lives.

Other Areas of Positive Change

- A stronger sense of belonging
- The development of new skills
- Increased self-confidence
- A more positive future-orientation
- Empowerment and efficacy as change agents (asset builders).

These areas begin to illuminate some of the types of changes that may be possible to achieve with youth when working from the asset framework.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINING A STATEWIDE ASSET-BUILDING INITIATIVE

Another contribution that the evaluation made was its analysis of the different roles that individuals and organizations played in the Colorado initiative. This analysis elucidated some of the unique strategies employed to mobilize community groups around the assets. Specifically, the evaluation examined the roles of asset champions, asset-building organizations, agencies leading state initiatives and grantmakers. The experiences of these groups have implications for others who wish to influence their states. Below, core strategies and lessons related to each of these key groups are outlined.

...transformation into an asset-building organization is an ongoing process and involves significant changes at all levels of an agency's infrastructure and overall culture.

ASSET CHAMPIONS

Colorado asset champions have developed a number of strategies for spreading the asset approach and translating the framework into everyday actions. The following recommendations are suggested based on these strategies and more general lessons learned from asset champions.

Use personal stories and experiential learning exercises to help convey the asset message to new audiences. Asset champions tended to share the asset-building approach by telling others about their own experience of personal transformation and the ways they had learned to use the framework to positively affect the lives of youth and the climate of local neighborhoods. These stories provided testimony about how one individual can make a difference in the lives of many. They also provided testimony about what youth are capable of achieving when provided with asset-based supports and opportunities. Testimonies served several important functions. First, personal testimonies helped establish the authenticity of the messenger and the credibility of the message. Second, these testimonies served as a source of inspiration for participants. Third, they provided participants with concrete examples of how to apply assets in their own personal lives.

Another strategy that asset champions employed was the use of experiential learning exercises. The intent of these exercises was to guide individuals in learning how to apply the framework to their personal lives. Experiential learning also allowed participants to experience the asset-building approach firsthand and to realize what new possibilities were available to them in their interactions with youth and community members. In other words, asset champions created learning opportunities that promoted a transformative, consciousness-raising experience.

Support youth in learning the 40 developmental assets and how to apply them in their everyday lives. A key strategy utilized by a number of asset champions was to teach young people about the 40 developmental assets and how to apply them in their everyday lives. This strategy had the effect of empowering youth to recognize positive opportunities and supports in their lives and how acting on these would benefit them as individuals. It also activated youth to become asset champions in their schools and neighborhoods. A number of the youth who participated in OMNI's focus group study were young people who had received extensive training in the framework and experienced building assets in others. These individuals had testimonies of their own about the positive effects they had had on others.



Support the development of new asset champions. A third major strategy of asset champions was to inspire and nurture the development of new asset champions. This was an important way to broaden the reach of asset champions in communities and surrounding areas, both in terms of the spread of the assets and the positive changes they inspired. Asset champions employing this strategy might think of their work as “changing the world one by one.”

ASSET-BUILDING ORGANIZATIONS

Some of the key lessons that emerged from the experiences of the Colorado initiative focused on the transformation of agencies into asset-building organizations. Asset integration and youth engagement were two major forces that facilitated this transformation. The following recommendations reflect the experiences of asset-building organizations and the lessons they offered to the Colorado initiative.

Integrate the framework to enhance organizational effectiveness. Transformation is not automatic. Much like the development of learning organizations, transformation into an asset-building organization is an ongoing process and involves significant changes at all levels of an agency’s infrastructure and overall culture. A major reward for organizations is the enhanced effectiveness that asset integration and transformation inspire. Staff of agencies that were undergoing the developmental process of becoming an asset-building organization perceived many areas of increased effectiveness that they attributed to this transformation, including:

- Staff development
- Youth involvement
- Community outreach
- Stakeholder involvement
- Partnerships with other organizations in the community on shared goals.

Enhancing the effectiveness of the service infrastructure in communities is a major contribution that asset-building organizations make in statewide initiatives. Individuals spend much of their daily lives within organizations. Moreover, the policies of different organizations exercise tremendous influence in how individuals carry out day-to-day activities. These two facts underscore the significant contribution that organizational change can make within a statewide initiative.

Apply the nine elements of youth engagement. Asset-building organizations have a tremendous contribution to make in terms of their work with youth. Whether a school, a recreation center or a mentoring organization, an asset-building organization will have direct contact with potentially large numbers of youth from diverse backgrounds. The nine elements of youth engagement can guide organizations in engaging youth effectively so that skills and confidence can be built, important adult-youth relationships can be formed and organizations can benefit from the perspectives and energy of young people.

AGENCIES LEADING STATE INITIATIVES

In Colorado, the statewide agency spearheading the asset movement built organizational competencies in a number of different areas, including resource development, networking and the specialized knowledge of specific sectors and Spanish-language communities. These competencies provided support and direction to the Colorado initiative as it grew and expanded into new areas. Three core lessons that emerged from ACY’s experience in the Colorado initiative that can serve to guide other agencies leading state initiatives are:

Asset-building organizations have a tremendous contribution to make in terms of their work with youth.



Bridge awareness to action. Early on, ACY learned that commitment and awareness do not mean that individuals know how to apply the framework in organizational and community contexts. Organizations and communities can be very complex, and individuals may have experience with only a narrow segment. Having to navigate complex social systems and political divisions present a number of obstacles. Pioneering the application of the framework within these social settings can be overwhelming. While awareness was an important first step, guidance was generally needed to support the asset integration-transformation process.

The process of introducing assets in Colorado reveals the critical role that statewide organizations can play in providing a bridge from awareness to action. ACY provided this support through the development of trainings for asset builders (e.g., how to work with Spanish-language communities, engage parents in school, etc.), the packaging of successes and lessons from the field to share with broader audiences and the creation of new forums for leaders and policymakers to reflect on their role in meeting the needs of youth (Educator's Forum and Conversations for Kids).

Be strategic about spreading the framework. The Colorado statewide initiative benefited from ACY's work to spread the asset framework in three different but complementary ways. First, ACY spread the asset framework by awarding community grants to diverse regions of the state. The regional spread of the assets was further supported by the public presentations and tailored trainings that ACY delivered throughout the state. A second, major strategy to spread the framework was the development of resources that facilitated cultural adaptation and engagement with the developmental assets. Third, ACY targeted specific sectors, such as the education sector, through policy forums, the development of educational materials and strategic partnerships with agencies in the sector. This focus provided ACY with the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge and experience concerning targeted sectors. This included insights into the facilitators and barriers to asset building within the sector and the types of resources required to advance asset integration.

These strategies helped to support a broad reach of the asset framework in Colorado, as well as more in-depth integration of the framework within strategically targeted sectors and communities. Adaptation of these strategies for other state initiatives may help statewide agencies disseminate information about the framework while supporting asset integration in more strategically targeted communities and sectors. Other strategies suggested by the evaluation include networking and supporting the work of asset champions. A related strategy is to celebrate and showcase youth asset champions, who appear to play a powerful role in transforming adults and other youth.

Convene and celebrate asset builders. Asset building is at once energizing and empowering, and intense and tiring. An important role for statewide agencies is providing asset builders and champions with opportunities to:

- Enhance their knowledge and skills in asset building
- Share challenges and lessons from the field
- Rejuvenate before returning to communities that may be resistant to asset building for a variety of reasons, including pressure to score well on standardized tests or general distrust of social agency systems and research-based approaches.

FUNDERS

In the Colorado initiative, The Colorado Trust played a major role in advancing the statewide asset-building initiative. The Colorado Trust partnered with Search Institute in the development and unveiling of the initiative, and The Trust made more than \$10 million available to support the establishment of a statewide agency, spearhead the initiative and provide community grants. The following recommendations are based on the Colorado experience and the information that participants shared about the role of community grants in their local asset-building projects. These recommendations may support funders in making strategic decisions about grantmaking.

GRANTMAKING STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT THE SPREAD AND INTEGRATION OF THE ASSET FRAMEWORK:

Endorse youth involvement. Important asset innovations that supported integration and transformation, as well as the spread of the assets in the state were the new forums (youth councils, youth-led speakers' bureaus and train-the-trainer programs) that asset-building organizations created to heighten youth engagement. While these forums were not generally a new program, they required financial support and staff time to develop and build into existing programs and the structure of the organization. Ear-marking funding that focuses on the promotion of youth engagement within organizations may be an important role for grantmakers that are interested in supporting the spread of the assets in their states and nationally.

Support resource development and innovation. Grantmakers should consider ways to support resource development and innovation more generally. Resource development allows organizations to share lessons learned about working within specialized sectors or with specific populations, while learning from the work of others. It also promotes dialogue between different sectors engaged in asset building about how leaders in these fields may learn from one another and work together on behalf of youth and communities. Finally, resource development may provide an important mechanism for documenting stories about what is being achieved through asset-building efforts.

Fund networking activities. In Colorado, a major contribution of funding that grantees identified was the support of networking activities, including:

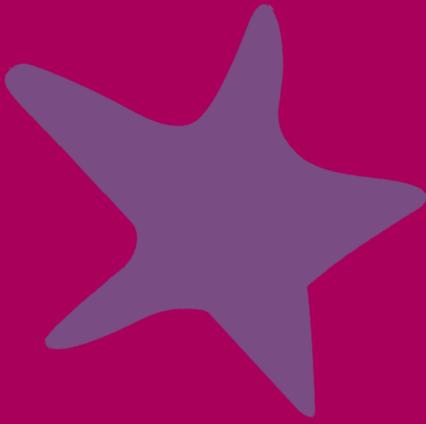
- Participation in state and national conferences on asset building, as well as the sponsorship of youth to take part in these events
- Development of local coalitions
- Participation in established community forums.

Colorado grantees found that the support of networking activities played a critical role in advancing staff skills and community buy-in. Further, these varied activities promoted conversation between different agencies and sectors that enhanced the development and sustainability of local asset-building efforts. Finally, networking also created opportunities to celebrate local and national advancements in the broad-base movement for social change. This was an important source of inspiration noted by many individuals and grantees in Colorado.

Endnotes

- ¹ Assets for Colorado Youth. *The Power of Parents: Parent Engagement in Schools and the Developmental Assets*. Denver, Colorado: Assets for Colorado Youth; 2001.
- ² Guajardo Lucero M. *The Spirit of Culture*. Denver, CO: Assets for Colorado Youth; 2000.
- ³ Benson P. *All Kids Are Our Kids*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass Publishers; 1997.
- ⁴ Rogers E. *Diffusion of Innovations, 4th ed.* New York, NY: The Free Press; 1995.





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