
MESSAGES FOR SPECIFIC AUDIENCES

Core Messages

You'll want to convey certain key messages regardless of the nature of your audience. These include the following:

- **Developmental Assets are essential building blocks for young people's achievement and thriving.**
- **Developmental Assets are essential building blocks for young people's avoidance of high-risk behaviors.**
- **All young people—from infants to adolescents, from whatever geographic location or family background—need Developmental Assets.**
- **Assets are built mainly through strong, positive relationships.**
- **Everyone can build assets, including young people.**
- **It's everyone's responsibility to build assets.**
- **Asset building is an ongoing process.**
- **Young people need to receive consistent messages from a variety of sources.**
- **It's important to build assets intentionally.**
- **Building Developmental Assets is consistent with the goals of both individuals and organizations.**
- **Using the Developmental Assets framework can help by providing a common language for talking about what all the different parts of society need to do and by presenting an overview of many of the kinds of important things young people need to succeed.**

The type of audience listening to you may influence the tone as well as the content of your presentation. Obviously, no one wants to be talked down to, and everyone wants to be acknowledged for the fine work they're doing. But, for example, you may want to adopt a more formal tone for speaking to more formal organizations, such as businesses. You may want to adopt a more "we're all in this together" tone for speaking to peers. And you may want to adopt a more "what do *you* think" tone for speaking to young people.

If you *are* able to identify some common characteristics of your audience before you speak—and you may not always be able to do that—consider the basic strategy of determining each group's primary mission and then relating it to the

Developmental Assets framework. For example, school staff are concerned with young people's academic success; parents and guardians are concerned with their children's overall well-being; health-care providers are concerned with young people's health; and people in law enforcement are concerned with young people's relationship with the law. For all these audiences, you can show how building assets for and with young people is consistent with—and contributes to accomplishing—their mission. So here are comments, additional messages, and ways that members of some specific audiences might help build assets (most of the last are from *Pass It On! Ready-to-Use Handouts for Asset Builders*, Search Institute, 1999).

School Staff

School staff are trying to meet all their academic goals as well as their administrative requirements, and they don't have time for more "programs." So the key for speaking to teachers is to emphasize that building Developmental Assets will in all likelihood promote their students' academic achievement, and that in any case you're not asking them to adopt another time-consuming program. You can also point out that even though they may already be doing many of the kinds of things you're suggesting, they can probably do them more intentionally and systematically. You can also remind them of why they got into teaching in the first place—to make a positive difference in children's lives—and how building Developmental Assets will help them do that. For administrators, the key may be to emphasize the "power" of assets—that they are consistent with most school missions, which invariably include helping students achieve and keeping them safe. Another point to make with administrators is that by adopting the asset framework, they gain another tool to motivate their teachers to regain passion for their work.

Messages specific to this audience:

- There is a direct correlation between Developmental Assets and academic performance.
- It doesn't take a great deal of time to build Developmental Assets.
- It's important to build assets with all students, not only the ones in your classroom or the ones you like.

Ways that members of this audience might help build assets:

- Have every school adult (not just teachers) mentor at least one student.
- Focus on students' strengths during both parent conferences and student conferences; help students identify and build on their assets and their sources of support.

- Establish codes of conduct for how school adults treat students, and challenge students to develop codes of conduct for how students treat students.
- Include students on school-improvement management teams, disciplinary teams, and other working groups.

Young People

The key to speaking with many young people is to point out that what you're talking about is not an adult program for young people, and it's not just about what adults could do differently to help young people more. Young people can build assets for themselves and with their friends, and they can do good things for their community. In fact, they're probably the most significant influence on the type of social and emotional environment they live in, because they're the ones who determine how young people treat each other. You can point out in particular the tremendous influence that teenagers have on younger children. Focus on young people during your presentation: What do *they* want? What do *they* think? What would help *them*? How can *they* help others? How would *they* approach this? You can also acknowledge that many young people have boundless energy and creativity, two qualities that are invaluable in building assets.

Messages specific to this audience:

- This is not an adult program intended to “fix” young people: Although the framework focuses on changing adults' attitudes and behaviors, young people can also build Developmental Assets themselves.
- Young people can help their friends, adults, younger children, and their community through building Developmental Assets.
- Young people can have a significant influence in changing their physical environment through artwork and other creative efforts.
- Young people can have a significant influence in improving their community through service projects and through working with their local asset-building initiative.

Ways that members of this audience might help build assets:

- Get to know adults they admire by striking up conversations with adults they'd like to get to know and reaching out to adults who may not know they're welcome.
- Sample a variety of experiences and activities in music, theater, art, and athletics, at school and in their community.

- Volunteer to:
 - ♦ Help out at a local nursing home, community center, or animal hospital;
 - ♦ Serve on boards and committees;
 - ♦ Be a peer helper;
 - ♦ Be a cross-age tutor;
 - ♦ Reach out to other young people who may be lonely or troubled;
 - ♦ Work on speakers bureaus; or
 - ♦ Set up formal acknowledgments of adults who make a positive difference for young people.

People Who Work with Young Children

When you speak to people who spend time with young children—e.g., child-care workers, Head Start staff, or parents of preschoolers—it’s important to emphasize the connection between Developmental Assets and the healthy development of children. It’s likely that if children have lots of Developmental Assets early in life, they’ll be more protected from high-risk behaviors and more predisposed toward successful behaviors in their adolescence. You can point out the significance of not only building up early experiences of Developmental Assets but also instilling the idea that it’s beneficial to have positive relationships with adults.

Messages specific to this audience:

- Assets can be built early in the life of a child.
- People who work with young children are in an excellent position to build these assets.

Ways that members of this audience might help build assets:

- They can say yes to toddlers more than they say no, praising them often and enthusiastically.
- They can set safe boundaries and have high expectations.
- They can take breaks and play with young children, getting down on the floor at their level.
- They can admire young children’s skills, especially when the children indicate that they want someone to watch what they’re doing.

Parents and Guardians

The bottom line for speaking to parents and guardians is to emphasize that building Developmental Assets helps them get what they want for their children. Even when you run into the attitudes expressed by “I don’t have the time or energy to

do anything more than I'm already doing" and "I don't have access to any more resources," you can acknowledge the good things that parents and guardians already do as well as the welcome statement that they don't have to do it alone. In the first case, you can suggest that they identify and congratulate themselves on the good things they do, and then be more intentional about doing them. You can also point out that little things count: Building assets consists of small but important gestures—like stopping and talking to young people—and doesn't take much time. In the second case, you can suggest that, with just a little effort, they can help their children connect with others to bring more resources to their children's lives—extended family, other adults, community institutions, and so on. (If they're ready for another step, they can also try to be a resource for another family's children and have a positive impact on other children's lives.) Another key to speaking with parents and guardians is to emphasize that as the most important influences on their children's lives, they have a responsibility to continually try to communicate with their children. You can point out that many of the assets—three of the first six, in fact—can come only from them.

Messages specific to this audience:

- Building assets is consistent with what parents and guardians want for their children.
- Parents and guardians are probably already building Developmental Assets, but perhaps they could be more intentional, consistent, or systematic.
- Parents and guardians can have positive influences not only on their own children but on other children as well.

Ways that members of this audience might help build assets:

- For older children, negotiate family rules and consequences for breaking those rules.
- Do intergenerational activities with extended family and with other neighborhood adults and families, e.g., a game night, a barbecue, a dance, or a cross-generational discussion about some local or current issue.
- Teach their teenagers something practical, such as how to change a tire on the car, prepare a meal, or create a monthly budget.

Health-Care Providers

Expanding "health" to include "behavioral health" is key for this audience. You can point out the data showing inverse correlations between the level of Developmental Assets young people report having and use of drugs and acts of violence, but you can also extend the discussion to other forms of health—self-esteem, the ability to get along with others, and a positive view of the future. And you can

remind them of “lifestyle diseases” (e.g., lung cancer and heart disease)—diseases that perhaps people wouldn’t have gotten had they led a healthier lifestyle, starting when they were young. What is often key for audiences like this is to get them to think about what they can do to *prevent* disease and to *promote* healthy outcomes in the language of Developmental Assets; that way, they can more deliberately continue what they’ve been doing and perhaps fill in some gaps. Finally, you can point out that health-care providers are often primary, trusted sources of information, and as such they have the opportunity to talk to others about building assets as well as building assets themselves.

Messages specific to this audience:

- Health-care providers can promote Developmental Assets as a way to prevent lifestyle diseases.
- Health-care providers can use their reservoir of trust not only to forge positive relationships with young people but also to encourage families to build Developmental Assets.
- Hospitals and other health-care providers are often in good positions to spearhead community events to promote Developmental Assets.

Ways that members of this audience might help build assets:

- Distribute to parents and guardians—in clinics, offices, and anywhere else they meet the public—a list of the 40 Developmental Assets with an explanation of what they mean.
- Train employees in how to have positive interactions and relationships with young people.
- Host a community event focused on health, health care, and the Developmental Assets.
- Publicize the asset framework via advertising, calendars, newsletters, and any other avenues of communication at their disposal.

Businesspeople

Focusing on building assets—with employees as well as customers—is good for business; building a strong community also builds a strong employee and customer base. Many businesspeople don’t automatically think of themselves in the role of supporting young people, other than by giving them jobs. But you can point out the many ways that businesses can build assets for and with young people who are their employees: by giving their young employees more training and responsibility; by giving their older employees opportunities to mentor at schools; by inviting groups of young people to observe how their business works. You can illustrate

all this by relating stories about the satisfaction businesspeople have gotten when they've participated in asset-building activities. You can also point out the ways that businesses can build assets with young people who are their customers, e.g., by treating them with the same respect and courtesy as they do older customers, or by offering discounts to students who get good grades. Such attitudes and behaviors may promote reciprocal attitudes and behaviors, cutting down on vandalism and increasing patronage by young people.

Messages specific to this audience:

- Businesses can support their young employees in a variety of ways.
- Businesses can give back to their community, not only by setting up or sponsoring partnerships with local schools, e.g., mentoring programs, but also by helping to fund community initiatives.
- Businesses can offer incentives to attract and maintain young customers, and to make them feel valued.

Ways that members of this audience might help build assets:

- Offer internships for young people with concrete learning opportunities, good supervision, and plenty of support and guidance.
- Use the asset framework as a resource for employee training and development programs and for setting policies and practices friendly to families.
- If they advertise, consider using part of their advertising space—for example, billboards, signage—to celebrate young people's strengths and accomplishments.

People from Youth-Serving Organizations

When you talk to representatives from youth-serving organizations—for example, the volunteers and paid employees of Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Little League, or the YMCA—you need to acknowledge them for what they're doing and help them to translate that into asset language. It's important to state that in many cases you're describing what they already do, and that using the Developmental Assets framework will help them to focus more intentionally on their actions, speak a common language about what they're doing, and communicate to others the strategies they've been using so effectively. You might also want to talk about how powerful the shift from a problem focus to a strengths focus can be in their work with young people. You may want to emphasize those assets that they are in particularly good positions to affect—Adult Role Models (Asset 14), Youth Programs (Asset 18), and Interpersonal Competence (Asset 33), to name a few. And you can point out the overall importance of establishing and maintaining personal relationships with young people.

Messages specific to this audience:

- Building Developmental Assets will help focus the efforts of representatives from youth-serving organizations.
- People who work with young people are in excellent positions to build respectful, caring, genuine relationships with them.
- People who work with young people are in excellent positions to determine the youth's strengths and to affirm and increase them.

Ways that members of this audience might help build assets:

- Establish clear boundaries for staff working with young people.
- Train paid and volunteer staff in how to have positive interactions and relationships with young people.
- Place young people on the organization's board and give them real responsibility, e.g., with hiring and programming.

People from Faith Communities

For many faith communities, giving young people a sense of right and wrong and helping them to care about others are important challenges. You can point to the Positive Values assets—Caring, Equality and Social Justice, Integrity, Honesty, Responsibility, and Restraint (Assets 26–31)—as being consistent with these challenges. In addition, you can emphasize that central to helping young people build assets is developing caring relationships with them, and that developing these relationships with young people can increase spiritual growth as well as help build assets. Finally, a faith community comprises people from all generations, providing opportunities for young people to interact with others from various backgrounds and cultures.

Messages specific to this audience:

- Promoting Developmental Assets is consistent with many of the values promoted by most faith communities, and modeling these values for young people is important.
- Establishing and maintaining positive relationships with young people helps nurture their spiritual growth.
- Faith communities provide many opportunities for young people to interact with others, particularly with those from other generations.
- Faith communities can be important asset-building resources for youth in the community—both in their programs and activities as well as in their influence on many members who live and work in the community.

Ways that members of this audience might help build assets:

- Plan ways for families and other intergenerational groups to participate in service projects together; follow up these service activities with reflection about what people learned about themselves, each other, and their faith.
- Provide responsible, meaningful roles for young people alongside adults, e.g., as active members of a governing board, or as hands-on participants in the congregation's activities.
- Create a book study group that gives young people and adults opportunities to read and reflect on books with asset-building themes.
- Highlight the ways the faith community can be a resource for young people who don't participate in congregational programs. Identify physical resources (such as a gym or computer room) that could be helpful for asset building. Or encourage people in the congregation to be asset builders in all areas of their lives.

People in Law Enforcement

A good way to show that police officers, for example, have something in common with the asset framework is to emphasize that building Developmental Assets with young people helps to protect them and therefore benefits the community in general. You can encourage people from law enforcement to see that focusing on building assets will make their jobs more pleasant: They won't always be thinking about taking care of something after it's too late to prevent, or interacting with young people only because they've done something wrong. The perspective of looking for what's right in young people (even the seemingly most "incurable" young people), as opposed to always focusing on what's gone wrong, can be both refreshing and challenging to those who work in law enforcement. In addition, building assets complements the work they do, from preventing crime to promoting restorative justice to community policing.

Messages specific to this audience:

- Police officers are often very visible in their communities, and that gives them opportunities (through their attitudes and through their interactions with residents) to positively influence young people.
- People who work in juvenile justice have an opportunity to focus on young people's strengths as well as their deficits, which may give both the workers and the community they serve a more positive, optimistic attitude.
- People who work in law enforcement have opportunities to systematically adapt and promote a Developmental Assets philosophy, i.e., to focus on and draw other people's attention to young people's strengths.

Ways that members of this audience might help build assets:

- When handling family disputes or arguments between people, encourage peaceful conflict resolution.
- Volunteer to visit a school to talk about safety and how everyone can contribute to a healthier, safer neighborhood climate.
- Work with families with teenagers to create “safe houses” that will host teenage parties where liquor will not be available or tolerated.
- Train resource officers in particular in how to have positive interactions and relationships with young people.
- Sponsor open intergenerational forums at which community members can share their thoughts on and experiences in the neighborhood with young people.

Social Service Workers

The focal points for many representatives from social services are the community and the family, and you can emphasize the assets that relate to those areas—for example, Family Support (Asset 1), Caring Neighborhood (Asset 4), Community Values Youth (Asset 7), Youth as Resources (Asset 8), and Neighborhood Boundaries (Asset 13). As with other audiences, you can acknowledge that these people already do build assets, and give them a slightly different way to look at their work. You can also point out the role that systems such as social services play in the successful development of young people. Finally, you can point out that adults need assets, too, and when social workers, for example, put the Developmental Assets framework into practice, they’re helping change the lives of people of all ages.

Messages specific to this audience:

- Social service workers don’t have to choose between providing basic physical needs and building assets; each complements the other.
- Focusing on young people’s and their family’s strengths may provide social service workers with a more positive view of their own jobs in addition to affirming the potential of their clients.
- Promoting strengths as well as protecting against risks is an effective approach to helping families.

Ways that members of this audience might help build assets:

- Point out the strengths and the positive, caring behaviors of young people and their families, including those with serious problems.
- Assist family members in identifying small changes they could make that would help them feel better about themselves and each other.
- Incorporate strengths and capacities into assessment instruments.

- Try to make personal connections with all families to see their strengths as well as their needs.

People from Distressed Communities

As noted in Search Institute's *The Possible Dream* (2000), "Research strongly suggests the power of neighborhoods to increase the likelihood that their young residents will grow up with the Developmental Assets they need to succeed." The key message, then, to people from distressed communities is that, indeed, they can make a difference. You can take an "assets" approach with this audience, i.e., help them to identify the strengths and resources they have, and work with them to focus those strengths and resources to build assets for and with their young people. Many families earning low incomes are working extremely hard and succeeding in giving their children every advantage they can. However, they're not accustomed to being appreciated for what they do and often may not even be aware of all the good things they're doing. Citing the asset approach, then, as identifying and building on strengths may resonate with this audience.

Messages specific to this audience:

- Families from distressed communities deserve credit for all their hard work and successes.
- Building assets doesn't require great amounts of money.
- Communities that work together toward a common good can achieve their goals.

Ways that members of this audience might help build assets:

- Identify effective organizations and institutions within their community that can take the lead in coordinating efforts to build assets.
- Establish safe spaces—parks, community centers, and so on—where people of all ages can gather to form positive connections with one another.
- Identify informal systems of support and be more intentional about how they help young people.

People Who Are Already Aware of Developmental Assets

Sometimes you'll find yourself making a presentation in order to remotivate or sustain previous efforts. For these audiences—which can come from any of the previously mentioned sectors—you need to talk not so much about the assets and the framework as you do about process and successes. First, point out that there are always some people in the vanguard of change—"early adopters"—and always some people who take a little more time to get on board—"late adopters." You

can explain to participants that their task is to energize the ones who need only to be shown the effectiveness of a movement in order to get on board. Second, you can ask them what they've already done, acknowledge it, discuss what obstacles they're facing, and suggest thinking "outside the box" to get more participation. And you can share more in-depth stories about what people have been doing around the country, not only to generate interest in asset building, but also to actually build assets with young people. Finally, address the possible frustration of people who have been trying to establish asset-building initiatives in their communities: first, by telling them that getting across such messages takes time and continual effort (community change is long-term change); and second, by encouraging them to "live" assets themselves. By actually building assets with young people in their own lives and by being models for those around them, they're increasing the chances of being able to influence others.

You can also discuss the dynamics of change in communities and perhaps help them pinpoint where they may be stuck. For example, consider the following phases of community change (refer to the handout **Phases of Positive Community Change [H30]**):

- **Receptivity:** cultivating openness to change;
- **Awareness:** highlighting the possibility of change;
- **Mobilization:** organizing for change;
- **Action:** making change happen; and
- **Continuity:** ensuring that the change becomes a way of life.

If you can gather the appropriate information beforehand, you may be able to help your audience come up with ideas for moving on to the next phase or going deeper or broader with a current phase.

Messages specific to this audience:

- Changing norms takes time and a continual repetition of messages.
- Understanding the nature of change in communities may help determine how to further the change.
- Sometimes it takes a new way of looking at a process—and new people—to reinvigorate the process.
- Networking with other communities who are acting for positive community change can bring understanding, affirmation, and great new ideas.

Ways that members of this audience might help build assets:

- When recruiting, include people who are sometimes overlooked as potential volunteers because they're assumed to be too busy, not interested, or "recipients" rather than providers of service. Be sure to include people who are

knowledgeable, who have relationships with influential members of the community, and who can “sell” ideas.

- Conduct a youth leadership retreat with high school students.
- Create easy, short-term projects for busy people and long-term commitments for people willing to give more time and energy.
- Plan how to make the asset messages relevant to various segments of the larger community.

