40 Developmental Assets: A Research Analysis: Healthy Youth Committee & Fairmont's Youth Surveys

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Introduction/Literature Review

This writer teamed together with the Healthy Youth Committee of Fairmont, Minnesota. The Healthy Youth Committee is a committee comprised of adults of 15 various community professionals who want to make a positive change for the youth of Fairmont. The committee includes court administration staff, police chief, preschool directors, teachers, non-profit leaders, and social workers. The Healthy Youth Committee and the Search Institute combined to create the 40 Developmental Assets survey Profile of Student Life: Attitudes and Behavior with the youth in Fairmont, in 1997, 2002, and 2011. 40 Developmental Assets is a research-based framework that identifies basic building blocks of human development and in both cross-sectional, and longitudinal studies it has been found that assets affect youth outcomes. The Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota has surveyed nearly three million students on how they experience the 40 Developmental Assets. The 40 Assets are split into two categories, External (networks of support, opportunities, and people that nurture personal development in youth) and Internal (a youth person’s own competence, values, and competencies), and in each of these two categories there are four sub-categories including, Support, Empowerment, Boundaries & Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competence, and Positive Identity (Search Institute, 2011). The Search Institute has found that these assets kids have less. For example, youth with high asset levels are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors including, but not limited to violence, sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, and suicide. Since data has already been collected, this writer used this data to complete a secondary analysis focused on the strong and weak assets the youth portrayed in their survey responses.

Methodology

In 1997, 2002, and 2011 the Healthy Youth Committee of Fairmont, requested the Search Institute to complete Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors survey with youth (whose parents gave parental consent) to measure the 40 Developmental Assets of the youth of Fairmont area. Standardized administration procedures were provided to school staff by Search Institute to enhance the quality of data. To ensure complete student anonymity, no names or identification numbers were used.

Each year the survey was given several checks were made on individual survey responses and within each survey “group” surveys were eliminated due to inconsistent responses, missing data on 40 or more items, and reports of unrealistic high levels of alcohol or other drug use. The Search Institute grouped responses by gender, grade, and race, and printed final reports for each year.

• The Healthy Youth Committee received these reports with numbers and some percentages of the response the youth gave, and some suggestions to build assets. However, they needed someone to take these reports and compare them, and analyze what is not consistent and assist with ideas on improving the assets in the youth in the Fairmont area. This writer then took on this as her capstone project. The Healthy Youth wanted more of a community approach and gathered a small group of community professionals, and citizens to view this data and pledge to assist with asset building.

• This writer created a survey on survey monkey.com to administer to the stakeholders (approximately 4-50 people). This writer wanted to obtain the opinions of the stakeholders involved, in regards to the 40 Developmental Assets. Due to the layout of survey monkey this writer split the 40 assets by External and Internal assets (20 questions) in each category. The first page had the first ten external assets and the stakeholders were asked to rank their opinion, how well Fairmont utilizes the first 10 External assets using the following Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Poor, 2 = Slightly Poor, 3 = Average, 4 = Above Average, and 5 = Excellent, 24 out of 41 stakeholders responded.

• This writer then compiled the results from the stakeholders into graphs and compared and analyzed responses to the youth’s responses. The stakeholders and the Healthy Youth Committee came up with four asset areas they wanted to work on. This writer compiled the results, and four asset areas and placed them into a power point for the HY Committee and stakeholders to view, this writer then e-mailed it out to the HY Committee and stakeholders.

Results

• Responses from all three years varied over the years, as numbers of youth, grades, and schools surveyed differed. Overall, the survey given in 2011, showed a higher number of assets as reported by the youth. Since data had differed. Overall, the survey given in 2011, showed a higher number of assets as reported by the youth. Since data had differed. Overall, the survey given in 2011, showed a higher number of assets as reported by the youth. Since data had differed. Overall, the survey given in 2011, showed a higher number of assets as reported by the youth. Since data had differed. Overall, the survey given in 2011, showed a higher number of assets as reported by the youth. Since data had differed. Overall, the survey given in 2011, showed a higher number of assets as reported by the youth. Since data had differed. Overall, the survey given in 2011, showed a higher number of assets as reported by the youth. Since data had differed. Overall, the survey given in 2011, showed a higher number of assets as reported by the youth. Since data had differed. Overall, the survey given in 2011, showed a higher number of assets as reported by the youth. Since data had differed. Overall, the survey given in 2011, showed a higher number of assets as reported by the youth. Since data had differed. Overall, the survey given in 2011, showed a higher number of assets as reported by the youth. Since data had differed. Overall, the survey given in 2011, showed a higher number of assets as reported by the youth. Since data had differed. Overall, the survey given in 2011, showed a higher number of assets as reported by the youth. Since data had differed.

• The largest differences between the youth and stakeholders responses were Caring School Climate, Community Values Youth, Service to Others, Adult Role Models, Creative Activities, and Self-Esteem (Search Institute, 2011). The studies done by the Search Institute show compelling results that the number of Assets a youth has the less likely they are to engage in high-risk behaviors (violence, sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, and suicide) and more likely to engage in thriving behaviors (helping others, doing well in school, and taking on leadership roles).

• This writer recommends that the Healthy Youth Committee of Fairmont and the community begin by looking, and working at five assets a year. These five assets are: Healthy Relationships, Planning and Decision Making, Community Values Youth, Cultural Competence, and the whole group of Positive Identity. Due to the data and analysis this writer completed, these are the lowest reported assets by the youth and should be addressed first.

• Communities can show open and honest strengths of youth and adults to increase assets in young people and do the following: Give adequate adult support through long-term, positive, intergenerational relationships, provide meaningful leadership and community involvement opportunities, engage young people in youth serving programs, provide consistent and well-defined behavioral boundaries, help youth connect to their community and create critical opportunities to develop social competencies and form positive values (Search Institute, 2011).

• This writer recommends applying for grants and advertising for donations to have this survey administered once every two years, and continue including grades 7,8,9,10,11, and 12. In doing this, the Healthy Youth Committee can analyze and compare results to see, if their actions have helped the youth assets grow. It would be measured by “catching” many of the same youth in more frequently given surveys. Now is the time to improve the community take action, and establish and work toward the goal of a higher average total number of assets that each of it’s young people experience. Everyone; parents, grandparents, educators, neighbors, children, teenagers, youth workers, employers, health care providers, businesses people, religious leaders, coaches, mentors, and many others, can build Developmental Assets in youth.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths include:

• Analysis of assets for the Fairmont Youth that the Healthy Youth Committee and Stakeholders can begin with.

• The Healthy Youth Committee can attempt to begin giving the survey on a more consistent (i.e every 3 years) basis and track their attempts/activities to raise assets.

Limitations:

• The survey was not given consistently enough to track the same youth to see if positive changes to the assets from the same youth are noticed.

• The youth and the stakeholders did not use the same survey, making responses different slightly.

• The number of youth, grades, and area schools differed in 2011.

Implications for Practice

Results show that social workers can do have the ability and potential to add to the assets the youth they work with. Many of the assets work closely with the values and ethics of social work. Working together with the Healthy Youth Committee and the community is a part of our duty. Social workers, and other community members should engage people as partners in the helping process and seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, nurture, maintain, and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities (NASW, 2008).

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References

References are available from the author upon request.