

FIVE FUNDAMENTAL RESOURCES  
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

PREPARED BY SEARCH INSTITUTE

# AMERICA'S PROMISE

THE ALLIANCE FOR YOUTH





**This report was commissioned by America's Promise—The Alliance for Youth. It was prepared by Search Institute, whose mission is to generate knowledge and promote its application to advance the well-being of adolescents and children. For information on Search Institute, contact 700 S. Third Street, Suite 210, Minneapolis, MN 55415; 1-800-888-7828. Web site: <http://www.search-institute.org>. Released April 27, 1997, at the Presidents' Summit for America's Future. For additional copies of this booklet, contact America's Promise—The Alliance for Youth.**

## FIVE RESOURCES ALL AMERICAN YOUTH NEED:

# How Are We Doing as a Nation?

Every child and adolescent in America should have the confidence, character, competence, and connections needed to live a healthy, fulfilling life and contribute positively to society. America's Promise—The Alliance for Youth has identified five fundamental resources that, if consistently provided, will not only contribute to youth development, but also significantly reduce problems facing America's youth. The resources are:

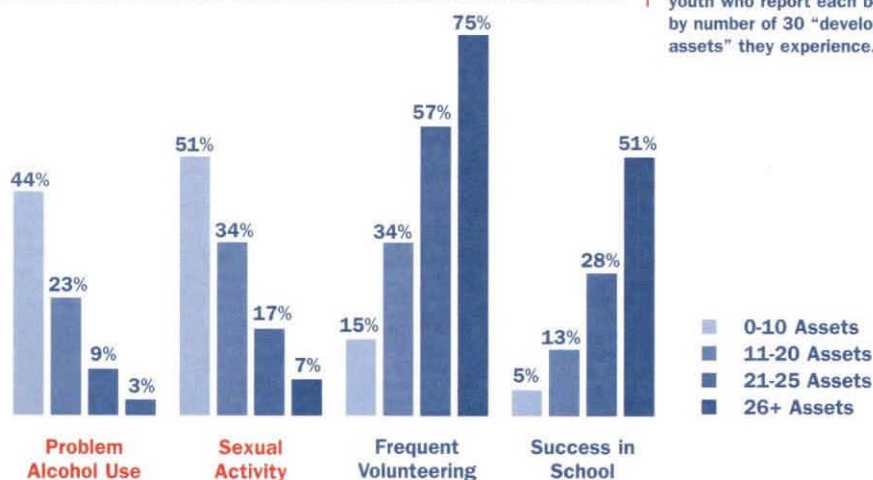
1. **Ongoing relationships with caring adults**
2. **Safe places and structured activities**
3. **A healthy start for a healthy future**
4. **Marketable skills through effective education**
5. **Opportunities to serve**

The goal of America's Promise is to connect 2 million additional

young people, from birth to age 20, to all five fundamental resources. These connections will occur primarily through the natural support systems in neighborhoods and communities—families, neighbors, associations, youth organizations, human service agencies, religious institutions, schools, businesses, and youth themselves.

### THE POWER OF DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

Percent of 6th- to 12th-grade youth who report each behavior, by number of 30 "developmental assets" they experience.



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**How will we know we're making a difference in increasing access to these resources? A monitoring systems is being developed.**

**It will include:**

- **An annual study of young people's experiences**
- **Surveys measuring adults' commitments**
- **Tools for local communities to document their own progress toward the goals.**

Thus, America's communities must work together to provide these resources for their children and adolescents.

The importance of connecting young people with these five resources is underscored by Search Institute's major study of 254,000 6th- to 12th-grade students in 460 communities across the United States. This research identifies and measures young people's experiences of 30 "developmental assets," or critical resources for healthy development. These assets are consistent with the fundamental resources named by America's Promise.

The research findings on developmental assets are powerful: The more of these assets young people experience, the less likely they are to engage in a wide range of negative behaviors and the more likely they are to experience positive outcomes (see chart). In short, the more of these assets young people experience, the better off they—and our society—will be.

The impact of developmental resources on young people's behaviors underscores the urgency and promise of providing young people with key developmental resources. Adding to the urgency are the realities presented in the research gathered for this report: Far too few of our children and youth consistently experience these resources.

This document offers snapshots of the presence—or absence—of the five resources in the lives of children and adolescents. Added together, the findings sound an urgent call for individuals, organizations, and communities—indeed, the nation—to work together for a better future for America's youth.

# Ongoing Relationships with Caring Adults

## The Target

Communities need to provide all young people with sustained adult relationships through which they experience support, care, guidance, and advocacy. Caring and connectedness within and beyond the family consistently are found to be powerful factors in protecting young people from negative behaviors and in encouraging good social skills, responsible values, and positive identity.

Ideally, youth develop sustained connections with:

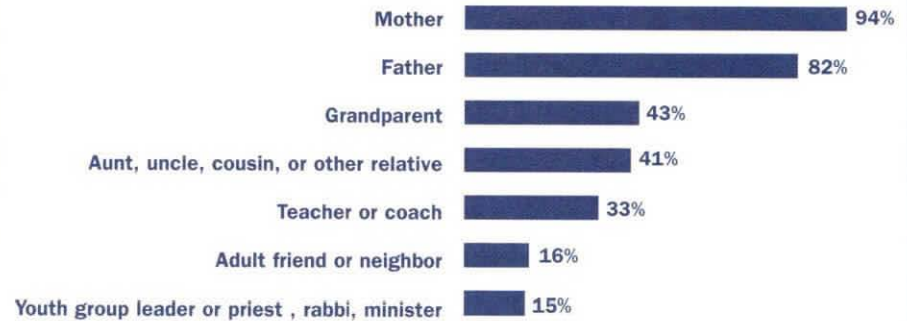
- Parents or other caregivers.
- Extended family members.
- Neighbors and other adults youth see in their daily lives.
- Adults who spend time with youth through programs, including coaches, teachers, mentors, child care workers, youth workers, and employers.

While all of these relationships are important, most youth do not experience this web of adult support and care beyond their families.

## The Realities

### SOURCES OF SUPPORT

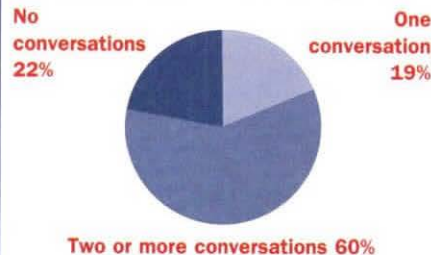
Percent of 10- to 17-year-old youth reporting that these adults "really care about me."



SOURCE: National Commission on Children (1991)

### CONVERSATIONS WITH ADULTS

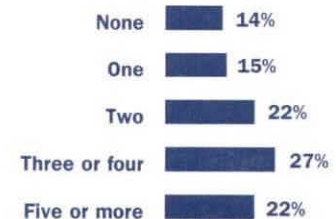
Percent of 6th- to 12th-grade public school students who report having "a good conversation with an adult (not a parent) that lasted 10 minutes or more" in the past month.



SOURCE: Search Institute (1997)

### ACCESS TO ADULT RESOURCES

Number of non-parent adults to whom 6th- to 12th-grade students say they would feel comfortable going if they needed advice or help.



SOURCE: Search Institute (1997)

Percent of 7- to 14-year-olds reporting they would like to connect with an adult they can trust and who respects them: **65%**

SOURCE: Saito, R.N., et al. (1995)

## Safe Places and Structured Activities

### The Target

Children and youth need structure, and they need to be physically and emotionally safe. Providing safe places and structured activities has many benefits both to young people and society. This resource can:

- Connect children and youth to principled and caring adults.
- Nurture young people's skills and capacities, including social skills, vocational interests, and civic responsibility.
- Protect youth from violence and other dangerous or negative influences.
- Create a peer group that exerts positive influence on each other.
- Provide opportunities for young people to contribute to their community and society.
- Enrich young people's academic performance and educational commitment.

Research consistently affirms the value of these opportunities. Yet far too many children and adolescents do not have ongoing access to this critical resource.

### The Realities

#### WHAT HAPPENS IN NON-SCHOOL HOURS?

##### UNSUPERVISED TIME

Percent of 6th- to 12th-grade youth who spend two hours or more per school day at home without an adult: **60%**

##### PROGRAM INVOLVEMENT

Percent of youth engaged six hours or more per week in clubs, teams, and organizations in schools, youth programs, or religious institutions: **54%**

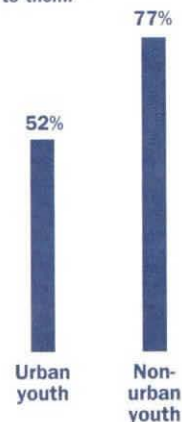
##### JUVENILE CRIME

Percent of violent juvenile crime occurring between 2 and 6 p.m. on school days: **22%**

SOURCE: Search Institute (1997); Snyder, H.N., et al. (1996)

#### PROGRAM ACCESSIBILITY

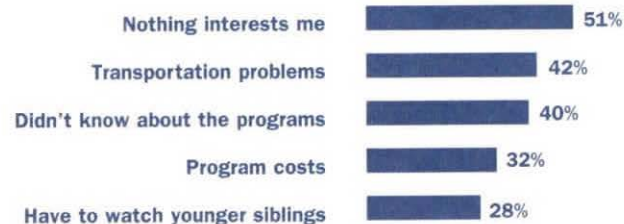
Percent of low-income youth reporting that clubs and youth organizations are available to them.



SOURCE: National Commission on Children (1991)

#### WHY YOUTH DON'T PARTICIPATE

Percent of middle school youth who say each factor has kept them from participating in youth development programs.



SOURCE: Saito, R.N., et al. (1995)

# A Healthy Start for a Healthy Future

## The Target

To many, “a healthy start” focuses on what children need before they go to school—prenatal care, immunizations, and school readiness. Indeed, these early years are crucial. But we must also think about this resource more broadly—as “a healthy start” for adulthood. This shift in thinking highlights the urgency of providing the following types of services and opportunities during the entire birth-to-20 age span:

- Economic security.
- Accessible and affordable prenatal care.
- Reliable and affordable health care, including immunizations, regular check-ups, and treatment of illnesses.
- Quality health education.
- Adequate nutrition and exercise.
- Safety at home, in schools, and in neighborhoods.
- Support systems for adolescent parents and their children.

Too few young people have access to these resources in their communities. We’re not providing them a healthy start.

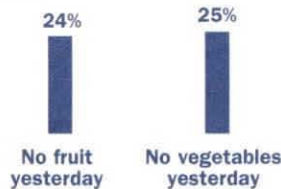
## The Realities

U.S. children under age 18 living in families below the poverty line in 1995: **20%**

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau (1997)

### HEALTH PRACTICES: HEALTHY DIET

Children in grades 2 to 6 who report each of the following eating habits.



SOURCE: Chilton Research Services (1995)

### YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN MULTIPLE HIGH-RISK BEHAVIORS

Percentages of 6th- to 12th-grade youth reporting involvement in one or more, or three or more health-compromising behaviors (e.g. use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs, violence, sexual intercourse, attempted suicide, drinking and driving), by gender.

	Involvement in one or more of 20 high-risk behaviors	Involvement in three or more of 20 high-risk behaviors
All	82	54
Male	84	62
Female	78	47

SOURCE: Benson, P.L. (1997)

### TRENDS IN CHILD MORTALITY

Child death rates per 100,000 in age group, by year.

	1960	1970	1980	1990	1992	% Change from 1960 to 1992
Under age 1 (per live births)	4,980	4,000	2,520	1,840	1,700	-66%
1 to 4 years	109	85	64	47	44	-60%
5 to 9 years	49	42	30	22	20	-59%
10 to 14 years	44	41	31	26	25	-43%
15 to 19 years	92	110	98	88	84	-9%

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1996)

### HEALTH CARE RESOURCES

Children ages 19 to 35 months not fully immunized **25%**

Children without health insurance **14%**

18- to 20-year-olds without health insurance **23%**

High school seniors receiving no routine physical checkup in the past 12 months **48%**

SOURCE: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (1996); GAO Health, Education, and Human Services Division (1997); Johnston, L.D., et al. (1995)

## Marketable Skills Through Effective Education

### The Target

Employers increasingly need workers who can think, learn new skills rapidly, work in teams, and solve problems creatively. Yet too few youth—whether college bound or not—have these qualities or, in many cases, even basic work skills.

Making a successful transition from school to work is a critical milestone in the developmental journey. Yet significant shifts in both the workplace and the skills needed make it harder for young people to make successful transitions into the world of work.

There are many important qualities, skills, and competencies that young people need to be successful and productive workers. Among these are:

- A foundation in basic skills, such as reading, writing, mathematics, science, technology, and communication.
- Thinking skills, such as creativity, decision making, problem solving, and reasoning.
- Personal attitudes and qualities, such as responsibility, self-motivation and management, and integrity.

Particular supports are needed to enhance skills and readiness for work. These include school reform efforts (to ensure that students are engaged in relevant, challenging, and interesting learning) and education about economics and business, internships, work study, vocational and career counseling, and on-the-job experience that expose them to career opportunities and job skills. Such efforts prepare young people to be valuable workers throughout their lives.

### The Realities

#### BASIC SKILLS

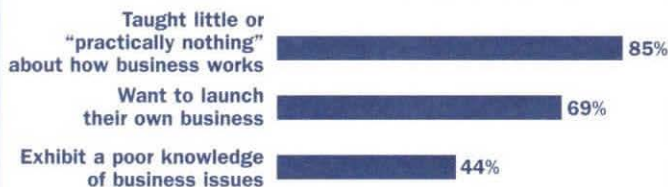
Percent of students who are at or above proficiency levels for their grade in each subject, based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (1992).

	Grade 4/ Age 9	Grade 8/ Age 13	Grade 11/ Age 17
Reading	62%	62%	43%
Writing	58%	75%	36%
Mathematics	81%	78%	59%
Science	78%	61%	47%

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1996)

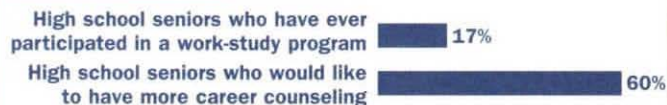
#### EXPOSURE TO BUSINESS

Percent of high school students who report exposure to issues in business



SOURCE: Walstad, W.B., & Kourilsky, M. (1996)

#### SCHOOL-TO-WORK SUPPORTS



SOURCE: Johnston, L.D., et al. (1995)

Percent of 16- to 19-year olds not attending school and not working (1993): **10%**

SOURCE: Annie E. Casey Foundation (1996)



## The Target

It's time to see young people as part of the solution, not as the problem. Yet even though youth are more likely to volunteer than adults, fewer than half of all youth consistently serve others. A result is that they miss this powerful opportunity for growth.

Giving children and adolescents opportunities to serve others is an important strategy in shaping America's future. Though school-based community service has received the most attention, there are many different avenues through which youth can contribute to their community. These include:

- Religious congregations
- Family volunteering
- Neighborhood teams
- Youth organizations
- Service clubs
- Schools

Though service by youth is often "packaged" as a single program run by an organization or social institution, promoting service as a lifelong commitment is enhanced when youth participate at many ages, through multiple avenues, and when opportunity is given to reflect on the act of service—hence, the term service-learning.

An emerging body of research suggests that service-learning

experiences enhance self-esteem, a sense of personal competence and efficacy, engagement with school, and social responsibility with others. With appropriate training and support, there are hundreds of different types of service young people can perform in their communities. Just as important is to remember that youth are much less likely to volunteer if they are not asked.

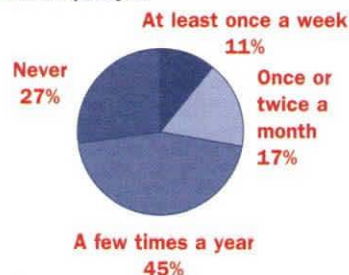
Percent of U.S. high school seniors who report engaging in any community service in the past two years: **44%**

SOURCE: Johnston, L.D., et al. (1995)

## The Realities

### SERVICE PARTICIPATION

U.S. high school seniors who report engaging in community affairs or volunteer work in the past year



### SERVICE PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

Middle and high school youth who report engaging in service one hour or more "in a typical week."



### THE IMPORTANCE OF ASKING

About half (51 percent) of youth report being asked to volunteer in 1996. Here are the percentages who actually volunteered, by whether or not they were asked.

Volunteered after being asked	93%
Volunteered without being asked	24%

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics (1995)

SOURCE: Search Institute (1997)

SOURCE: Hodgkinson, V.A., et al. (1996)

# The Importance of Caring Communities

## STRATEGIES FOR MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES

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- Establish baseline data on access to the five resources.
- Create a “map” of the people, places, and programs currently addressing one or more of the five resources.
- Bring all stakeholders in the community for planning, learning, and networking.
- Develop a vision and a plan for expanding the reach of the five resources.
- Mobilize leaders and other residents to design and implement new efforts.
- Provide technical assistance, support, visibility, and celebration of efforts.
- Tap into the commitments of national organizations.
- Monitor change in access to the five resources.
- Sustain commitments and efforts across time.

The long-term success of the important efforts launched by the Presidents’ Summit and sustained by America’s Promise hinges, to a large extent, on how well communities work together to provide the five resources described in this document. Four principles should guide community planning and action:

**1. The five resources build on each other.** Children and adolescents need all five of the resources. It’s the weaving together—the integration—of the five resources that offers real promise. The more they have, the more likely they are to be successful, contributing members of society.

**2. Developmental resources are too fragile for most U.S. youth.** As the data in this report suggest, too many young people in the United States lack ongoing, consistent access to the five resources. While special attention needs to be paid to increasing access to the five resources among economically or socially marginalized youth, community efforts are also needed to expand access among all youth.

**3. Young people need ongoing exposure to each resource throughout the first two decades of life.** All five resources gain power when they are experienced multiple times in multiple settings. For example, the caring adult resource has more impact when it is experienced not only through a formal mentoring program but also informally within neighborhoods, schools, congregations, and youth organizations. Similarly, opportunities to serve have a more lasting benefit when young people participate in multiple service-learning experiences, not just one.

**4. All residents and organizations can provide these resources.** For example, neighborhoods, congregations, schools, and agencies can provide safe places. Many citizens can choose to identify and connect with young people, thus increasing access to caring adults. Hence, the success of America’s Promise depends not only on developing new programs, but also on residents recognizing and tapping into their own capacity to make a difference in young people’s lives.

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