



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT™
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



MAY Asset of the Month: **YOUTH PROGRAMS**

Young people spend three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.

This handout is designed to help adults throughout Silicon Valley develop materials and activities to promote the asset of **Youth Programs**. Developmental Assets®, created by Search Institute, are the positive values, relationships, skills, and experiences that help children and teens thrive.

The Importance of Youth Programs

Youth programs, which include sports, scouting, recreation, camps, after-school programs, and religious programs, can provide fulfilling experiences that help young people develop new skills and master challenges. They also provide a safe place for youth outside of school where they can connect with caring non-parent adults.

Research shows that the Developmental Asset of participation in youth programs results in increased self-esteem; better development of life skills, leadership skills, and public speaking abilities; fewer psychosocial challenges such as loneliness, and hopelessness; decreased risk behaviors; and more thriving indicators.

Nearly half of the youth in Santa Clara County do not participate in youth programs. As families think about the time available in young people's lives, consider the benefit of participating in youth programs instead of spending time online. In person connections through youth programs are needed and beneficial. In the 2016 Search Institute Developmental Assets Survey, implemented by Project Cornerstone for Santa Clara County schools, **52% of 4th-6th graders and 58% of 7th-12th graders** reported that they participate in youth programs for three or more hours each week. To help raise awareness of the importance of this Developmental Asset, May is *Youth Programs* month in Silicon Valley.

The following discussion topics, adapted from the book *What Teens Need to Succeed**, can help young people of all ages recognize the value of youth programs, and better understand the benefits of the programs in which they participate:

- Overall, are you happy with how many different things you do with your time?
- Are your activities stimulating and challenging?
- Are you making friends with caring, responsible adults in your activities?
- Are you learning new skills and talents, and acquiring new knowledge?
- Do these activities bring out your best?

If the young person cannot answer "yes" to most of these questions, then it may be time to discuss the program's activities with the adults in charge or to help the youth find new, meaningful activities that better meet their interests.

Activities

For families

- Make sure that your children are participating in positive, asset-building youth programs that they enjoy. If they are not, help them find new programs that meet their interests. Help them understand that they might not fully enjoy or benefit from the program immediately and encourage them to make a time commitment of a certain number of weeks or months to give the program an adequate chance.
- When your younger children join a new program, help them with introductions to their peers. They will feel more comfortable and confident when they know the other participants.
- At mealtime, ask your children specific questions about the activities, leaders, and other participants in their youth programs. This is an effective way to spark conversation and to make sure that the programs meet their needs and interests.
- While participating in sports can be positive for young people, the intense competition that can occur in sports programs typically is not. Make sure that coaches balance the competitive aspect of sports with the development of positive skills like leadership, teamwork, and good sportsmanship.
- Role-model positive behavior when attending sporting events. Good sportsmanship in the bleachers helps youth practice managing their own responses to challenges and successes.

For all adults

- Youth programs can provide excellent volunteer opportunities! If you have a skill or talent to share, offering it in a youth program is a great way to make a difference.
- Looking for ongoing or one-time youth volunteers? Check with the leaders of youth programs near you. Your needs might dovetail with one of their service or skills development projects, making it possible for youth to serve as resources and gain valuable experience.

At school or in youth programs

- Youth program staff have exceptional opportunities to serve as asset builders for the youth they serve, acting as role models, mentors, and caring, non-family adults. Make sure that all program staff have been trained in the Developmental Assets framework, with additional guidance to identify and take advantage of asset building opportunities that arise.
- Regularly review activity plans with an eye toward providing opportunities for youth members to help decide/plan activities and finding ways to incorporate service opportunities into the program's primary mission. Intentionally make it a top priority for program staff to be a positive influence on the youth in your program.

About the Asset of the Month Toolkit

The Asset of the Month toolkit is designed by YMCA of Silicon Valley Project Cornerstone using Search Institute's research-based Developmental Assets framework. The toolkit highlights 12 Developmental Assets and provides an editable poster (available in English and Spanish) and an overview handout for each asset. To access all 12 months of resources, go to <https://www.ymcasv.org/ymca-project-cornerstone/developmental-assets/asset-month-toolkit>

About Project Cornerstone

Project Cornerstone is an initiative of the YMCA of Silicon Valley with a mission to ensure all youth feel valued, respected, and known so they grow into healthy, caring, and responsible adults. For more information, visit www.projectcornerstone.org or email us at info@projectcornerstone.org.