

Search Institute's integrated program of research on the linkages among community, developmental assets, and health outcomes is discussed. Recommendations are made for building a science that is dedicated to exploring pathways to developmental success.

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Adolescent development in social and community context: A program of research

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IN THE LAST DECADE, Search Institute has launched a comprehensive program of theory building and research intended to understand the linkages among communities, developmental assets, and health outcomes. In this integrated stream of work, several arenas of investigation have emerged: (1) definition and measurement of developmental assets, (2) the predictive utility of developmental assets for explaining both risk behaviors and thriving behaviors, (3) the ecological and intrapersonal sources of developmental assets, (4) the nature and dynamics of an asset-building community, and (5) strategies and tactics that mobilize the asset-building capacity of a community. The primary intent is to develop an interdisciplinary, ecological, and applied line of inquiry that understands and

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activates local capacity to reshape and energize the developmental infrastructure within the community.

As described in several recent publications,¹ we use two interchangeable names for this work: community-based human development and asset-based community and human development. The latter concept yokes our work directly with several leading approaches to community development: asset-based community development, with its accent on using the real but often hidden strengths of a community to lead and direct the process of change²; and the national healthy community movement, which accentuates citizen engagement in articulating and addressing local civic, health, economic, and ecological issues.³

In linking the human development and community development spheres, we draw on a number of intellectual and research traditions. The concept of community within the field of child and adolescent development owes considerable debt to Bronfenbrenner's theoretical foundations on the ecology of human development,⁴ as well as to the significant work of Jessor and his colleagues on social—cultural influences on adolescent behavior.⁵ This line of theory and research helped to trigger a coherent view of the child's embeddedness within a complex pattern of social institutions⁶ and design of community-based interventions aimed at a range of issues, including school readiness and prevention of juvenile delinquency.⁷ Lerner's work on developmental contextualization⁸ has added to the understanding of community context in its articulation of the ecologies that inform development and how adolescents influence their social contexts. The implications of this work for policy and program are significant.⁹

The developmental asset framework

As studies of the processes related to resilience and of the relation between community contexts and adolescent development have accumulated, intervention and prevention efforts develop around

these concepts in an attempt to alter the developmental pathways of young people. Some of these efforts have focused on risk reduction; others have focused more intentionally on promoting positive development.¹⁰ Asset development is a relatively new conceptualization of positive human development, synthesizing contextual and individual factors that, when present, serve to protect from, or inhibit, health-compromising behavior and enhance the opportunity for positive developmental outcomes.

Structuring and measuring the developmental asset framework has four major purposes. First, it seeks to provide a language for core elements of positive human development, with emphasis on developmental processes, experiences, and resources known to promote short-term and long-term well-being. Second, it is intended to create a unified picture of positive development capable of uniting citizens and multiple socializing systems around a shared vision. In this way, it is an attempt to create a common language that has the potential of contributing to a public consensus on what “our” children and adolescents need to succeed.

Third, it seeks to empower and mobilize residents, families, neighborhoods, youth organizations, religious institutions, and the rest of the community sector to take action. Finally, through a survey and reporting process that presents a portrait of developmental assets among a community’s youth, the framework and its local measurement serves as a kind of call to action to strengthen developmental processes and experiences for all youth within a community. As of mid-2002, about seven hundred U.S. communities are using the framework to organize and launch communitywide, asset-building initiatives. This national movement is organized and supported at Search Institute through its National Healthy Community–Healthy Youth Initiative.

Scientific and conceptual roots

As described in a series of publications,¹¹ the developmental asset framework emerged by integrating several strands of theory and research. The framework of developmental assets establishes a set

of benchmarks for positive child and adolescent development, weaving together in an priori conceptual model a taxonomy of developmental targets requiring both family and community engagement to ensure their acquisition. The original configuration of thirty developmental assets was described in several publications¹² as well as in data-based reports developed for each of 460 school districts. These reports were based on Search Institute's *Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors*, a survey designed to measure the developmental assets. In 1996, the model was expanded to forty developmental assets, on the basis of analysis of data gathered on 254,000 students, additional synthesis of child and adolescent research, and consultation with researchers and practitioners.

The framework's intellectual foundations are rooted in empirical studies of child and adolescent development, with additional focus on the more applied literature of prevention, protective factors, and resiliency. How one captures this extensive scientific legacy in a finite number of developmental targets depends on one's definition of health outcomes. The assets initially are framed around the second decade of life, roughly spanning the middle school and high school years. The research synthesis focused on integrating developmental experiences that are widely known to inform three types of health outcome: (1) prevention of high-risk behaviors (substance use, violence, sexual intercourse, dropping out of school); (2) enhancement of thriving outcomes (school success, affirmation of diversity, a proactive approach to nutrition and exercise, and so on); and (3) resiliency, or the capacity to rebound in the face of adversity.

In further delimiting the number of potential elements, we looked for developmental factors that, when present, were particularly robust in predicting health outcomes and for which there is evidence that their predictive utility holds across sex, race-ethnicity, and family income. Finally, the assets were conceived to reflect core developmental processes. Accordingly, they include relationships, social experiences, social environments, patterns of interaction, norms, and competencies over which a community of people has considerable control. That is, the assets are more about the primary

processes of socialization than the equally important arenas of economy, services, and the bricks and mortar of a city.

Asset categories

The forty developmental assets are both a theoretical framework and a research model. Because the model is also intended to have practical significance for mobilizing communities, the assets are placed in categories that have conceptual integrity and that can be described easily to the people of a community. They are grouped into twenty external assets (health-promoting features of the environment) and twenty that are internal (commitments, values, competencies, and so on). The external assets are grouped into four categories: (1) support, (2) empowerment, (3) boundaries and expectations, and (4) constructive use of time. The internal assets are placed in four categories: (1) commitment to learning, (2) positive values, (3) social competencies, and (4) positive identity. The scientific foundations for the eight categories and each of the forty assets are described in more detail in Benson¹³ and Scales and Leffert.¹⁴

The external assets refer to the positive developmental experiences of relationship and opportunity that adults offer young people. They emerge through constant exposure to informal interactions with caring and principled adults and peers, and they are reinforced by a larger network of community institutions. The internal assets are competencies, skills, and self-perceptions that young people develop gradually over time. A community can ensure that young people have external assets, but internal ones do not simply occur; they evolve gradually as a result of numerous experiences. From a community mobilization standpoint, it is conceptually sound to organize around increasing the external assets, but the growth of internal assets is a slower, more complex, and idiosyncratic process of self-regulation.

The support assets cover a range of opportunities for experiencing affirmation, approval, and acceptance, within multiple settings (family, intergenerational relationships, neighborhood, school). These experiences include relational support and a warm and caring environment.¹⁵

The empowerment assets represent a constellation of factors that encourage children and adolescents to become actors within a community, with a focus on being valued and useful within it.¹⁶ The asset of safety is seen as an important subtext for empowerment.

Early models for understanding what affects adolescent development focused on the singular effects of the family environment on child development. Recent explanations have gone beyond those models and suggested that the socialization strategies in the broader community are no less important for adolescent development.¹⁷ As such, the boundary-and-expectation assets address the importance of a clear and consistent message in a number of contexts (including the family) in which adolescents are involved, and the presence of adults and peers who model positive and responsible behaviors.

The constructive-use-of-time assets pertains to the important array of constructive opportunities that should be available to all young people, particularly in the ten-to-eighteen range. Bronfenbrenner¹⁸ suggested that healthy development should include a variety of such activities. Ideally, these are settings that connect youth to caring adults who hope to nurture their skills and capacities.¹⁹ Religious institutions are one of the few remaining intergenerational communities to which youth have access. They are places of multiple generations, with people bound together, to a greater or lesser degree, through a shared perspective and shared values. The congregation as an intergenerational community, however, represents potential more than reality, because most communities of faith have become as age-segregated as is the rest of society. Nevertheless, there is an extensive scientific literature showing that religious participation broadly enhances caring for others and helps reduce multiple forms of risk-taking behavior, even after controlling for family background.²⁰

The commitment-to-learning assets include a combination of personal beliefs, values, and skills known to enhance academic success.²¹ They include engagement in learning activities, a sense of belonging to the school environment, the motivation to do well, and expectations for success.²² Commitment to learning has a num-

ber of sources; parental attitudes, encouragement, involvement, and modeling are vital. The quality of schooling matters, through its formal and informal curricula. Norms that encourage high attention to educational tasks, by peer group and community, also are instrumental.

The six positive-value assets represent prosocial values and those of personal character.²³ These six reflect a significant public consensus on values, with some evidence that they approximate a universal core of values within an advanced technological society. Just as important, there is research evidence supporting the role of each in health promotion.²⁴

The social-competency assets include a personal skill set needed to deal with the myriad choices, challenges, and opportunities presented in a complex society. They generally refer to adaptive functioning in which the individual may call on personal and environmental resources.²⁵ Social competence is thought to develop within a social context²⁶ and includes planning and decision-making skills, interpersonal and cultural competence, resistance skills, and the ability to resolve conflict peacefully.²⁷

Identity formation is a critical task of adolescent development.²⁸ As such, the positive-identity assets focus on young people's views of themselves in relation to their future, self-esteem, and sense of purpose and power.²⁹

Research on developmental assets

Descriptive and predictive data on developmental assets have recently been summarized by Benson.³⁰ The developmental assets are assessed in a 156-item survey instrument, administered anonymously in public school districts in a classroom setting guided by standardized instructions. The instrument also assesses numerous thriving indicators (for example, school success, affirmation of diversity) and risk behaviors (violence, substance use, sexual behavior, and so on). Students place completed surveys in an envelope, which is then sealed and mailed to Search Institute for processing

and generation of a school district report. Typically, school districts choose to survey a complete census of all sixth to twelfth grade students attending school on the day the survey is administered.

A large and diverse sample

Since 1990, more than fifteen hundred cities have conducted this survey, many as an early step in launching a communitywide asset-building initiative. There is a significant mix of urban, suburban, and rural districts included in this ongoing survey assessment process. Our recent scientific publications use an aggregate sample of 99,462 sixth to twelfth grade youth from public alternative schools in 213 cities and towns in the United States that administered the survey during the 1996–97 academic year.

An updated and expanded sample will become the focus of a next wave of analysis, which was begun in early 2002. This sample of 217,277 sixth to twelfth grade students aggregates across 318 communities. All data were collected in the 1999–2000 school year. Using U.S. census figures, data have been weighted on urban or nonurban setting and race or ethnicity. A preliminary comparison of the older and newer samples suggests only minor and largely nonmeaningful changes in asset profile.

The survey is primarily used as a means of communicating aggregate data on a community's youth. A report, developed for each city or school district that uses the survey, often becomes a widely shared document and is used to frame communitywide discussion and serves as a focal point for mobilization around raising healthy youth.³¹ A dichotomous form of reporting the assets, whereby each asset is simplified into a single percentage of youth who have, or do not have, each asset, is used as an effective method for communicating the asset profile to diverse community audiences. This also permits simple summation of the average number of youth assets in any given community.

Survey results

A growing body of publications describe the psychometric properties of the survey instrument,³² demographic differences in asset

profile,³³ and the predictive utility of the asset framework for explaining both risk and thriving behaviors.³⁴

Two themes dominate these studies. First is the consistent finding that most adolescents show only a minority of the developmental assets. The mean number of assets is 19.3, on a scale comprising forty binary variables. More than half (56 percent) of the newer aggregated sample evince twenty or fewer developmental assets. When the sample is broken into four asset levels, we find that 15 percent possess a total number of assets of ten or fewer, 41 percent possess eleven to twenty, 35 percent have twenty-one to thirty, and 9 percent attain thirty or more.

Diminishing assets

By grade, the mean decreases from 23.1 in grade six to 18.3 in grade twelve. Boys average about three assets fewer than girls (17.8 and 20.7, respectively). A particularly important finding is that the mean number of assets is relatively similar when comparing students in communities of varying size (from ten thousand to a quarter million or more). Variation across communities is less than expected and reinforces the idea that every community has a significant proportion of adolescents who lack key developmental building blocks in their lives. It should be noted here that these findings are based on youth who attended American middle schools and high schools. If out-of-school twelve-to-eighteen-year-olds were also captured in this assessment, the reported percentages would likely be lower.

Family income is not measured in the survey. However, in a study done in Minneapolis, we looked at how the developmental assets vary as a function of the city's eleven planning districts, which differ substantially in average family income, property values, and resources. Across these eleven geographical areas of the city, the average number from among the forty assets ranged from 16.7 to 20.1.³⁵ Not surprisingly, as average wealth rises, assets rise. But to put this in context, note that the difference is only about three developmental assets when comparing the least and most affluent planning districts.

In all demographic categories, certain asset groups are particularly fragile. Among these are many of the specific assets in the support, engagement, boundary-and-expectation, and social-competency categories. Total sample and subgroup percentages for each of forty assets are reported in a number of publications.³⁶

The power of multiple assets

The second theme has to do with the cumulative or additive nature of the developmental assets in explaining risk and thriving behavior. That is, as assets rise in number, we see a profound reduction in each of nine risk behavior patterns (alcohol use, tobacco use, illicit drug use, antisocial behavior, violence, school failure, sexual activity, attempted suicide, and gambling). The cumulative effect is equally powerful in predicting thriving behaviors, with an increase in assets associated with a dramatic rise in academic achievement, school grades, leadership, prosocial behavior, delay of gratification, and affirmation of diversity. Many of our studies pinpoint subsets of assets that are particularly germane to a risk or thriving behavior, but addressing a more comprehensive vision of child and adolescent health (that is, protection from many types of risk behavior and the pursuit of many forms of thriving) requires attention to the full complement of developmental assets.

More sophisticated analysis documents the relative power of the asset framework. Regression analyses are used to assess the extent to which the developmental assets are useful in predicting either a reduction in risk behaviors or a promotion of thriving indicators. Those analyses have shown that demographic variables accounted for a range of 5–14 percent of the total variance of each model constructed to examine risk behavior. In each analysis, the developmental assets contributed a significant amount over and above the influence of demographic variables, accounting for 16–35 percent of the variance explained in the reduction of each individual risk behavior pattern and for 57 percent of the variance in a composite index of them. The total regression model (assets with demographics) explained 66 percent of the variance in this composite index.

“Problem-free is not fully prepared”

Adolescent health is often understood as the absence of symptom, pathology, or health-compromising behavior. This incomplete view of well-being, of course, mimics the “medical model” approach to health. The emerging field of youth development places particular emphasis on expanding the concept of health to include the kind of skills, behaviors, and competencies needed to succeed in employment, education, and civic life. A common mantra in youth development circles is that “problem-free is not fully prepared.”³⁷

The concept of thriving indicators has been posited to reflect this domain of positive outcomes.³⁸ Multiple thriving behavior measures are embedded in the developmental asset survey instrument. Regression analyses show that the developmental asset framework is also a powerful prediction of thriving measures taken one at a time or in combination. Across each of six racial or ethnic groups (African American, Asian American, Hispanic and Latino, Native American, multiracial, white), developmental assets explained 47–54 percent of the variance in a composite thriving index (prosocial behavior, leadership, affirmation of diversity) over and above demographic variables.³⁹

Of particular import is the role of developmental assets in academic achievement. Students who report a high number of assets (thirty-one to forty) are 2.5 times more likely (53 percent versus 19 percent) to report “getting mostly A’s” in school compared to students with eleven to twenty assets and about 8 times more likely than those reporting ten or fewer assets (7 percent).⁴⁰ A recent study in a midwestern city allows us to merge individual asset profiles with school records. We find that developmental assets are strongly linked to grade point average and to actual grades in English, science, and mathematics.⁴¹ Other research is under way that links developmental assets with archival data on state benchmark tests.

The observation that assets have a cumulative or pile-up effect adds to an emerging literature on this phenomenon. Heretofore, most of this research has focused on the pile-up effect of risk indicators on problem behavior. One exception to this, and consonant

with the cumulative impact of developmental assets, is Jessor's work on the additive nature of protective factors in reducing several forms of risk taking.⁴²

The sources of developmental assets

Built into the design of the developmental asset framework are a series of external, or ecological, assets. They are organized into the domains of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and structured time use. The generators of these strengths are, of course, many and varied.

Each potential asset-building resource available to a child or adolescent can be examined from several vantage points.⁴³ Such resources—whether family, school, peer, playground, or program—can directly influence one or more developmental strengths (support, boundaries, values, and so on). They also have the potential to serve a bridging or linking role to other developmental resources, as when a neighborhood builds connections across families or schools to connect youth to an after-school program. This linking role is akin to the concept of the mesosystem.⁴⁴ In turn, developmental settings are also dependent variables, being shaped and informed both by other proximal contexts (say, the impact of crime rates on neighborhood cohesion) and interventions (policy, a public education campaign, community education, a reform movement, social services) intended to increase the capacity of developmental settings.

Family has surely been the most studied socialization system and presents a useful prototype for understanding these multiple strength-building capacities. Lerner, Fisher, and Weinberg⁴⁵ present a particularly compelling family ecology model, linking the nurturance and socialization capacity of the family to the concept of civil society. It describes two core strategies needed to enhance these family capacities: public policy framed to build family strengths and resulting programs made accessible and available on a national scale.

In their study of adolescent success in urban families, Furstenberg and colleagues⁴⁶ focus on two complementary processes found in the success-promoting family. One is the internal life of the family and how parents or guardians deliver nurturance, support, and discipline. The second is a linking process, including how the family manages opportunity and risk in other developmental ecologies and the degree to which the parents model civic engagement.

Several recent syntheses of the family literature offer an in-depth account of family and parenting influence on a range of developmental strengths.⁴⁷ Other work draws our attention to a new generation of parenting research, aided by advances in theory, design, and analytical procedures. In essence, the search for “broad, general, main effects” in environmental influences such as parenting is giving way to “statistical interactions and moderator effects”.⁴⁸ Hence, family—like any socializing system—does its work and has its effect within a dynamic of networks and webs. Though this makes isolation of specific sector effects elusive, it fuels advances in conceptualizing and studying the multiple and interconnected systems and sectors that shape and are shaped by children and adolescents.

In recent years, it has appeared that schools exist for one and only one reason: to advance achievement test scores. Learning and achievement may be the core mission, but schools have the additional capacities and accountabilities too often lost in the recent escalation of testing as a national priority. Schools, like families and neighborhoods, are also an instrument of socialization. Hence, they are a potential generator of the kind of developmental strength needed to maintain or advance societal well-being.

We choose here to make three points about the role of the school in generating developmental strengths. First, a school possesses an array of resources that can be directly brought to bear on development. One particularly cogent, recent conceptualization shows how school-level policy, climate, resource allocation, norms, training and leadership, classroom-level teaching, time management, and curriculum can be mobilized and aligned to address nearly all the developmental strengths enumerated in the first part of this chapter.⁴⁹

The second point has to do with the powerful linking capacity of the school. In theory, a school is at the hub of a wheel, with spokes to family, neighborhood, employer, youth organization, and social service delivery system. The lines of potential influence, of course, go two ways: schools can help to mobilize the strength-building capacity of these constituencies and draw them into learning and human developmental partnerships.

Finally, academic achievement is strongly informed by a child's developmental strengths. A new line of inquiry connecting developmental assets to educational outcomes is emerging.⁵⁰ Initial results, reviewed in depth earlier in this chapter, suggest two major conclusions: first, the higher the total number of developmental assets, the stronger a variety of educational attainment outcomes, including class rank and grade point average in core subjects; and second, the total number of assets as well as a particular configuration of assets account for as much variance (or more) in educational achievement as do conventional schooling factors such as per-pupil expenditures, curricular requirements, teacher preparation, and leadership. As noted earlier, assets play a similar role in lessening the rate of school dropout.⁵¹

Though research on families and schools dominates the so-called socialization literature, there are other significant contexts of development that can, depending on their quality, developmental attentiveness, and connectedness with other community sectors, become part of the formula for building developmental assets. Four contexts have particular potential to play an additive role in building developmental strengths or a compensator role if other sectors are absent, incomplete, or dysfunctional. They are neighborhood, national and local youth organizations, faith community, and primary support (a sector to be defined in a moment).

New lines of inquiry are shedding light on these four contexts. The neighborhood is currently being studied through two lenses. In a series of studies about social control and crime in Chicago neighborhoods, Sampson and his colleagues⁵² suggest that the level of social cohesion among neighbors, combined with the level of shared commitment to take action when an understanding of the

common good is threatened, is strongly linked to the rate of violence, beyond what is accounted for by demographic factors such as income and residential stability. What is particularly germane here is that the definition of the common good—the glue uniting the neighborhood in shared purpose and action—typically has to do with the welfare of neighborhood children.

A relatively high percentage of American youth connect locally with such national youth-serving organizations as YMCA, YWCA, Camp Fire Boys and Girls, Boys and Girls Clubs of American, and 4-H; or with a range of other structured voluntary activities that tend to evolve at the community level.⁵³ The term *primary supports* has been used in a series of studies to cover the territory of before-and-after-school programs; sports teams and athletic activities; programs dedicated to dance, drama, music, and the visual arts; and libraries, museums, parks, and community centers.⁵⁴ This is a potentially rich area of developmental influence, though studies of its role in human development lags behind the social need to build or expand this sector in light of dramatic changes in other contexts of youth's lives (family, neighborhood, and so on).

Faith communities

Faith communities are too rarely on the social science radar screen. For the roughly one-half of American youth who connect to mosque, synagogue, parish, congregation, or spiritual place, developmental resources within these contexts can be brought to bear on developmental strengths. There is an historic academic interest, though certainly not in mainstream academe, in religion operationalized as both independent and dependent variables. However, when the object of inquiry is the source of young people's support, adult connection, engagement, boundary, structure, skill, and identity, these settings become as germane to the inquiry as any other. Indeed, an emerging line of study reveals important links between adolescent religious affiliation and indicators of positive development.⁵⁵ Wagener and colleagues⁵⁶ advance this line of inquiry by proposing, testing, and confirming the hypothesis that developmental assets mediate the relationship of religious influences for

both risk and thriving indicators. That is, religious communities appear, in a general sense, to increase participants' access to some of the developmental strengths known to inform health outcomes.

Other contexts that could be a "delivery system" for developmental strengths are not as well studied. They include places of employment, public spaces (parks and shopping malls), and community-based rituals and ceremonies celebrating children, youth, and families. Increasingly, the role of media in its many and varied forms must be factored into any conceptual model of the contextual forces that advance (or limit) developmental strengths.

Asset-building communities

An asset-building community is a geography of place that maximizes attentiveness to promoting developmental strengths for all children and adolescents.⁵⁷ The dynamics and processes by which a community mobilizes its asset-building capacity is a relatively unexplored line of inquiry, both theoretically and empirically. An initial framework for understanding the asset-building capacity of a community offers a set of core principles.⁵⁸ Among these are the developmental redundancy (exposure to asset-building people and environments within multiple contexts), developmental depth (a focus on nurturing most or all assets in children and adolescents), and developmental breadth (extending, by purpose and design, the reach of asset-building energy to all children and adolescents).

Five sources of asset-building potential are hypothesized to exist in every community, each of which can be marshaled by way of a multiplicity of community mobilization strategies: (1) sustained relationships with adults, both within and beyond family; (2) peer group influence (when peers choose to activate their asset-building capacity); (3) socializing systems; (4) community-level social norms, ceremony, ritual, policy, and resource allocation; and (5) programs, including school-based and community-based efforts to nurture and build skills and competencies.

In this model, sources one, two, three, and five have *direct* impact on the development of youth. A common thread across them is the primacy of relationships in positive child and adolescent develop-

ment. Activating all four of these energy systems—yoked together in a shared and common purpose to build developmental strengths—is a necessary process for attaining breadth, depth, and redundancy.

Within the context of American society, this vision requires considerable transformation in prevailing resident and socialization systems, norms, and operating principles. As argued in numerous publications defining this conceptual model of asset-building community,⁵⁹ American cities are typically marked by age segregation, civic disengagement, social mistrust, a loss of personal and collective efficacy, and lack of collaboration across systems.

The study of change

Marshaling community capacity to consistently and deeply attend to development of children and adolescents is conceived less as implementing a program and more as awakening latent human and institutional potential to build developmental strengths. A series of practical tools targeted to community residents and civic leaders extends conceptual and strategic counsel for mobilizing asset-building capacity. The first asset-building initiative began in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, in 1995. In the ensuing seven years, more than seven hundred other American communities began to craft communitywide initiatives. Organized as a social movement, the community is encouraged to tailor its initiatives to local reality and capacity and in response to the data from local asset profiles. Because these initiatives are complex, multisector experiments in changing local culture, and because they occur in a variety of rural, suburban, and urban settings, there is increasing investment in learning from these communities about innovation and effective practices in mobilizing residents and systems, with a feedback loop emerging to inform both the theory of community change and the development of practical resources. Several longitudinal studies under way in Colorado and Minnesota will add additional insight to this evolving knowledge about the influence of community on

human development. A rigorous case study approach to studying community change is in progress.

How does change occur?

The study of how change occurs in a developmental ecology is, in actuality, an incomplete science. Much more intellectual and research energy has been invested in naming developmental nutrients and demonstrating their role in youth outcomes than in studying the complex array of strategies and procedures for moving the developmental needle forward.

A science of change and change making in service of advancing access to developmental nutrients and assets should be directed to the study of five pathways and interactions⁶⁰:

1. Pathways to adult engagement (how to mobilize adults, both within a community and as a national force engaging in asset-building action)
2. Pathways to adolescent engagement (how to mobilize adolescents to become proactive in their own developmental journey and to activate their asset-building capacity with peers and younger children)
3. Pathways to sector transformation (how to increase delivery of developmental nutrients by way of extant socializing systems, including the family, neighborhood, congregation, school, youth organization, and place of work)
4. Pathways to community change (how to orchestrate and sustain transformation and engagement within and across multiple actors, settings, and ecologies)
5. Pathways to social change (how to promote developmentally attentive and asset-enhancing social norms, national policy, local policy, and media influence)

In building a science of pathways to change, we would be well served to look at and learn from scholarship devoted to promoting

change in other arenas, among which are organizational development, economic policy, economic development, and marketing.

Igniting adult engagement in the lives of children and adolescents requires more than changing the valence of adult sentiments. Also needed is attention to giving the public skill, practice, and social norms that demand and expect constructive engagement. Recent research on social norms suggests a variety of strategies for norm change.⁶¹

A recent review of the community development field suggests a rich legacy of research for understanding a range of dynamics ultimately germane to building a developmentally attentive community.⁶² Among them are dynamics for promoting common good ideals, citizen engagement, collective efficacy, social trust, and social capital.

Scientific exploration of a strength-based paradigm requires a deeply interdisciplinary approach, integrating at a minimum the fields of anthropology, sociology, and economics with psychology to understand and mobilize a full arsenal of ritual, social norms, and system and individual capacities necessary to the complicated but essential task of becoming a developmentally attentive community.⁶³ If indeed community is an important context for “production” of developmental strength, our methods of learning and discovery require approaches currently too underused and undervalued. To a considerable extent, knowledge about crucial asset-building dynamics such as intergenerational community, sustained connection with elders (of all sorts), and rituals for moving from adolescence to adulthood are vested in nonexperts—in communities organized around race, ethnicity, or worldview. Tapping this wisdom requires a significant shift in how the academy typically works, requiring instead a knowledge-generation process that brings community residents and scholars together in pursuing and producing knowledge.⁶⁴

Producing an interdisciplinary knowledge grounded in the inherent capacity of community also requires a long-term investment in discovering the nature and sequencing of community change. This kind of comprehensive, collaborative, citizen-engaged approach also requires a patient evaluation system.⁶⁵ The American way,

when it comes to evaluation, is at best an impatient system. We would argue that the demand by government agencies and foundations to show impact after a relatively short period of time fuels quick programmatic solutions and diminishes inquiry into the complex, long-term and invigorating exploration of how this culture and its communities can and must reimagine the norms, rituals, ceremonies, relationships, environments, and policies needed to grow healthy, competent, whole, and caring human beings.

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