



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 document is designed to help adults throughout Silicon Valley develop materials and activities to promote the asset of youth programs.

Newsletter Content

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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 be in contact 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 problems such as loneliness, shyness, and hopelessness; decreased risk behaviors; and more thriving indicators.

Nearly half of the youth in Santa Clara County don't participate in youth programs. In Project Cornerstone's 2004 survey, **53% of 4th-6th graders and 54% of 7th-12th graders** reported that they participate in youth programs three or more hours each week. To help raise awareness of the importance of this developmental asset, April 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 can't 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 his or her interests.

This article was provided courtesy of Project Cornerstone's Asset-a-Month program. For more information, visit www.projectcornerstone.org.

*Peter L. Benson, et al., *What Teens Need to Succeed: Proven, Practical Ways to Shape Your Own Future*. (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 1998) 145.

Activities

For families

- Make sure that your children are participating in positive, asset-building youth programs that they enjoy. If they're 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'll 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. It's a good way to spark conversation and to make sure that their programs are meeting 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 and 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.

June Asset of the Month: Safety!

If you or your organization can share ideas related to the developmental asset of safety (young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood), please contact Elissa Miller at (408) 351-6425 or by email at Elissa@projectcornerstone.org.

About the Asset-a-Month Program

The Santa Clara County Asset-a-Month program is an initiative of the Project Cornerstone public policy team, which contains representatives from local governments, agencies, and youth-serving organizations. The goals of the Asset-a-Month program are to help align adults throughout our diverse community in their efforts to promote positive youth development by fostering developmental assets. For more information about the Santa Clara County Asset-a-Month program, contact Anne Ehresman, Project Cornerstone's executive director, at (408) 351-6424 or Anne@projectcornerstone.org.