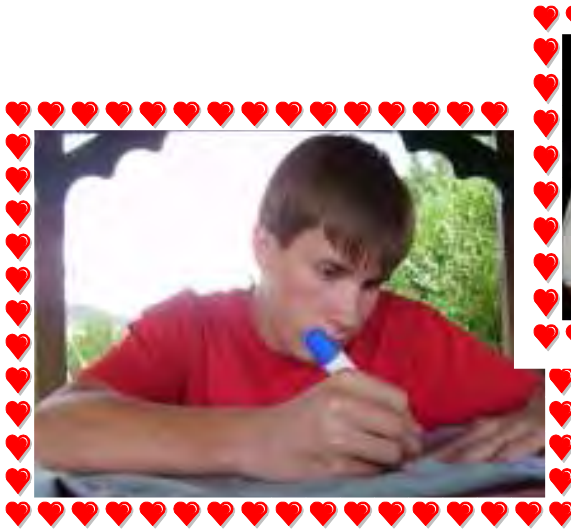


A Profile of La Plata Youth: A Report on their Developmental Assets[®]



Prepared by Onsite-Insights
Winter, 2008

Background

Every community wants what's best for its children, youth and families. We all want our young people to be healthy, happy, and productive and to have a positive view of themselves and their future. We want them to grow into successful, caring and contributing members of our community. But as communities across the country have learned, understanding the issues facing today's young people is hard enough, ensuring they have access to the services, supports and opportunities they need to thrive is overwhelming. And to do this within limited resources is a Herculean task.

Undaunted by this, leaders from La Plata County, Bayfield, Ignacio and Durango have committed significant resources to ensure that they are doing all that they can to continue growing into an economically vibrant area, while maintaining the sense of community that has made the area such a great place to live, learn, worship, work and play. In April 2007, area leaders initiated a long-term strategy to increase the likelihood that all children, youth and families thrive. The process has two distinct components:

- ♥ To create a proactive, strength-based children, youth and family master plan; and,
- ♥ To unify and mobilize La Plata's citizens on behalf of our children, youth and families.

The Children, Youth and Family Master Plan is La Plata's opportunity to make an intentional, public commitment to the healthy development of ALL our youth and to engage young people and families in the community's social contracts. Using National League of Cities' *Platform for Strengthening Families and Improving Outcomes for Children and Youth*, the following seven areas were selected as the focus for the planning process.

- ♥ Early Childhood Development
- ♥ Education & After School Services
- ♥ Youth in Transition
- ♥ Neighborhoods & Communities
- ♥ Health and Safety
- ♥ Family Economics
- ♥ Youth Development

Within these focus areas, over 200 citizens have come together to identify the needs of our youth and families, take inventory of existing resources, identify gaps in services, and develop recommendations to increase the likelihood that all our children, youth and families will thrive.

This Master Plan will serve as the blueprint for improving the support La Plata provides its families and for creating the services and opportunities our children and youth need to thrive. The plan's vision is:

“La Plata County, where all children, youth and families thrive”

To ensure that the plan is not a document created by a few for the many, the process created an inclusive approach designed to ensure all citizens have the opportunity to contribute.

We began by ensuring the master planning process was inclusive. High school youth, 20-30 year olds and older adult citizens are working side-by-side with professionals and elected officials on the core team and other committees. This brings a richness of dialogue and insights that would never occur if done only by professionals. In addition each committee is soliciting input from other citizens through surveys, interviews, focus groups, charrettes and the plan's website at www.childrenyouthandfamily.org.

We also ensured that there were representatives from each of the four municipalities, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and each of the three school districts participating on the core team and the other committees. Since this a countywide plan it is critically important that all concerned parties have equal access and equal voice.

And finally, the municipalities have partnered with District 9-R, 10JT-R and 11JT to administer Search Institute's Developmental Asset[®] Survey. This survey, administered in September 2007, allows us to learn whether the county's youth have the assets they need to thrive. The results provide a powerful catalyst for La Plata to mobilize on behalf of its younger citizens.

This report is dedicated to presenting the survey's results. As you will see the report shows some promising trends and favorable comparisons to national norms. It also shows some troubling statistics about our youth. It demonstrates that, while we are on the right track, we still have a long way to go. Our success depends on each of us finding a role we can play to help our children and youth thrive.

What are Developmental Assets®?

Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets® are concrete, common sense, positive experiences and qualities essential for allowing young people to thrive. These assets have the power during critical adolescent years to influence choices youth make and to help them become caring, responsible individuals.

The Developmental Asset® framework is divided into two groups of twenty assets. **External assets** are the positive experiences young people receive from the world around them. These twenty assets are about supporting and empowering young people, about setting boundaries and expectations, and about positive and constructive use of young people's time. External assets emphasize the important roles that families, schools, congregations, neighborhoods, and youth organizations play in the promotion of healthy development.

The twenty **internal assets** identify those characteristics and behaviors that reflect positive internal growth and development of young people. These assets are about positive values and identities, social competencies, and commitment to learning. The internal Developmental Assets® help young people make thoughtful and positive choices and, in turn, better prepare them for situations in life that challenge their inner strength and confidence. (For additional information visit www.search-institute.org)

External Assets

The first 20 Developmental Assets® focus on positive experiences that young people receive from the people and institutions in their lives. Four categories of external assets are included in the framework:

Support - Young people need to experience support, care, and love from their families, neighbors, and many others. They need organizations and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments.

Empowerment - Young people need to be valued by their community and have opportunities to contribute to others. For this to occur, they must be safe and feel secure.

Boundaries and expectations - Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether activities and behaviors are "in bounds" or "out of bounds."

Constructive use of time - Young people need constructive, enriching opportunities for growth through creative activities, youth programs and faith-based activities.

Internal Assets

A community's responsibility for its young people does not end with the provision of external assets. Caring adults must make a similar commitment to nurturing the internal qualities that guide positive choices and foster a sense of confidence, passion, and purpose. Young people need this wisdom to make responsible decisions about the present and future. The framework includes four categories of internal assets:

Commitment to learning - Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning.

Positive values - Young people need to develop strong values that guide their choices.

Social competencies - Young people need skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, to build relationships, and to succeed in life.

Positive identity - Young people need a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth, and promise.

Why Are the 40 Developmental Assets® Important?

Search Institute® has surveyed over two million youth across the US and Canada. They learned about the experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and the number of Developmental Assets® at work for these young people. Studies reveal strong and consistent relationships between the number of assets present in a young person's life and the degree to which he or she develops in positive and healthy ways. Results show that the greater the number of Developmental Assets® present in the life of a young person, the more positive and successful his or her development is likely to be. The fewer the number of assets present, the greater the possibility youth will engage in risky behaviors such as drug use, unsafe sex, and violence. They will also be less likely to exhibit thriving behaviors such as success in school, valuing diversity, and good health.

The list of 40 Developmental Assets® paints a descriptive image of the positive experiences and characteristics that La Plata wishes for all of its youth. The Developmental Assets® serve as a powerful influence on a young person's behavior. The effect is cumulative—the more the better! Search Institute's national research also found that African American, American Indian, Asian American, Latino/Latina, White and Multiracial youth all benefit similarly from having more of the 40 Developmental Assets® in their lives, regardless of their socioeconomic status or the kind of community in which they live. La Plata County is fortunate to have a rich diversity of races and cultures living here, so it is important to recognize that the Assets will impact all of our young people similarly.

The reality is that the average number of assets the youth in La Plata believe they have is only 19.2 of the 40 assets. Looking at the results in another way we found that only 46% of La Plata's youth report having 20 or more of the 40 assets. In short, the majority of our young people—regardless of their background or current social status—are lacking in the Developmental Assets® needed for thriving. (See page 9 to view the thriving definition created by those serving on the planning committees.) These statistics, as well as the role assets play in predicting both positive and negative outcomes for youth, underscore the importance of us all focusing on providing a greater level of support and nurturing to all of our young people.

The graphs on the following page demonstrate the importance of helping all young people reach their greatest potential. Graph 1 breaks down the assets reported by youth in each of the grades surveyed.

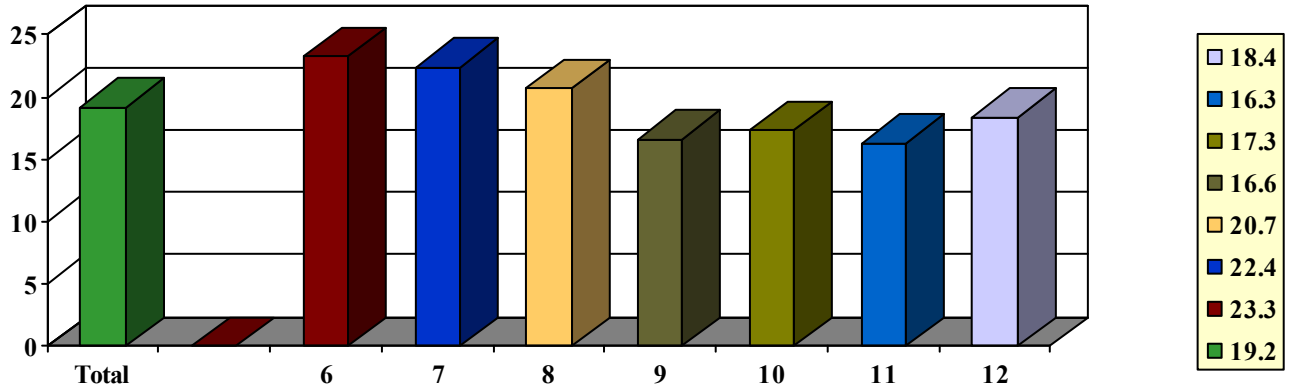
As you can see, young people in grades 6, 7 and 8 did relatively well, while grades 9, 10 and 11 were somewhat lower than the other grades. La Plata youth in 6th, 7th, 8th, and 12th grades reported having more assets than the national average for young people in those grades. Please understand that it is not important for us to figure out why certain grades did better than others. What is important is that all grades reported averages of fewer assets than what we would want for our children.

Graph 2 presents two of the risk-taking behaviors measured by the survey: alcohol use in the past 30 days and school truancy in the past four weeks. The data is divided by the number of assets young people reported. These two graphs demonstrate the power of assets to protect young people from involvement in risk-taking behaviors. In graph 2 you can see that the greater the number of assets, the lower the incidence of young people skipping school or using alcohol. For example, a young person with 0 – 10 assets is 56 times more likely to have used alcohol in the past thirty days than a young person with 31 – 40 assets.

Graph 3 presents two of the thriving behaviors measured by the survey, getting mostly 'A's on report card and maintaining good health, presented by the number of assets young people reported. These two graphs demonstrate the power of assets to promote involvement in positive or thriving behaviors. In graph 3 you can see that the young people in La Plata who have a greater number of assets are more likely to succeed in school or practice healthy nutrition and exercise. For example, a young person with 31-40 assets is 45 times more likely to get mostly 'A's on his or her report card than a young person with 0 – 10 assets.

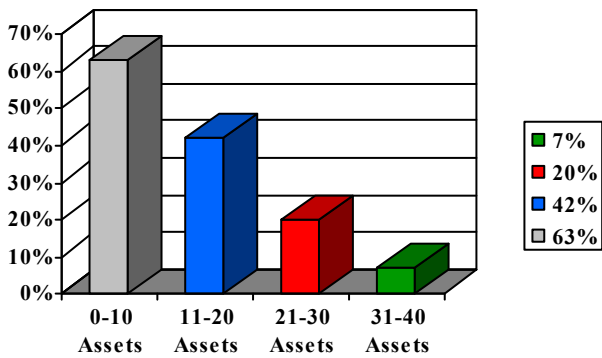
In summary, the greater the number of assets in a young person's life the greater the likelihood that he or she will participate in thriving behaviors and avoid risk-taking behaviors. This is true for all young people regardless of race, culture, gender, socioeconomics or age. That's why it is important that we do everything we can to increase the assets of La Plata's young people.

Graph 1: Average Assets Reported by Grade Level

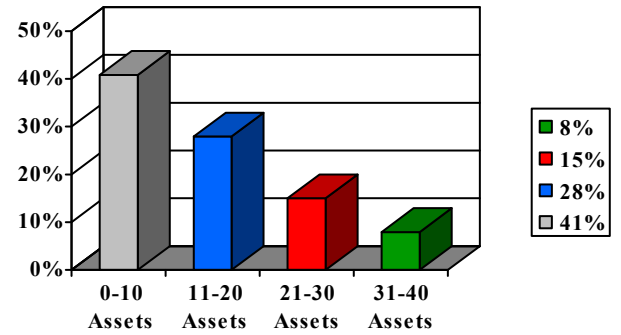


Graph 2: The Power of Assets to Protect

Alcohol Use – Used alcohol once or more in last 30 days

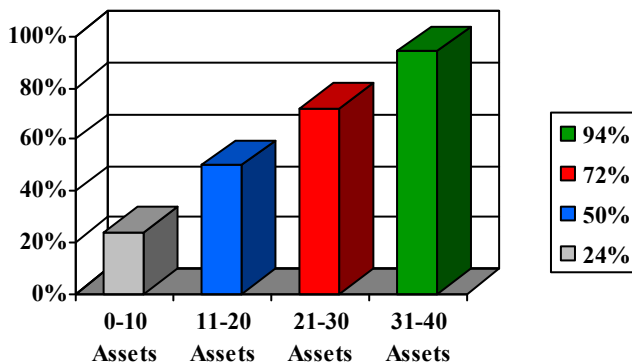


School Truancy—Skipped school once or more in the last four weeks

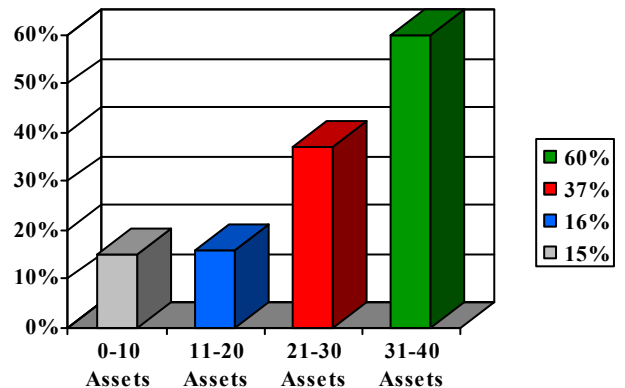


Graph 3: The Power of Assets to Promote

Maintains Good Health – Attends to healthy nutrition and exercise



Succeeds in School – Gets mostly A's on report card



A Closer Look at the Assets of La Plata's Youth

The Developmental Assets[®] survey, called the *Survey of Student Resources and Assets*, was administered to 972 randomly selected youth in grades 6 through 12, all of whom reside in La Plata County. The survey had 143 forced choice items to which they responded. All surveys were anonymous and Search Institute[®] computed the results.

The data generated from this survey is presented throughout this report. Appendix A depicts the percentage of La Plata youth reporting their experience with each of the forty assets. The assets are grouped into the eight categories with the left-hand page presenting the External Assets and the right-hand page the Internal Assets. The numbers in both the La Plata and National columns are the percentage of students whose responses to the questions indicated they agreed with the asset description.

The report produced by Search Institute[®], analyzes and presents the data in ways that provides La Plata County a fairly comprehensive insight into how its young people view the external services, supports and opportunities available to them and how they view their own personal competencies.



The following are some of the positive findings and conclusions that can be drawn from how La Plata youth perceive the availability of external and internal assets in their lives:

- ♥ Generally, La Plata's young people appear to see their families as the core of their support system (71%).
- ♥ La Plata youth believe that their schools (60%) provide them clear rules and consequences.
- ♥ Communication between La Plata youth and their parents is significantly greater (51% vs. 30%) than what other communities reported.
- ♥ La Plata's youth care about their school (66%) and are motivated to do well (67%).
- ♥ A very encouraging finding was that a high percentage of La Plata's youth are optimistic about their personal future (72%) and that their life has a strong sense of purpose (62%).
- ♥ La Plata's middle school aged youth very consistently reported higher percentages than youth of the same ages in other communities.

- ♥ La Plata's cultural diversity appears to be having a positive impact on our youth with a significant number (50% vs. 42% nationally) reporting they are comfortable with people of different cultures, races, and ethnicities.

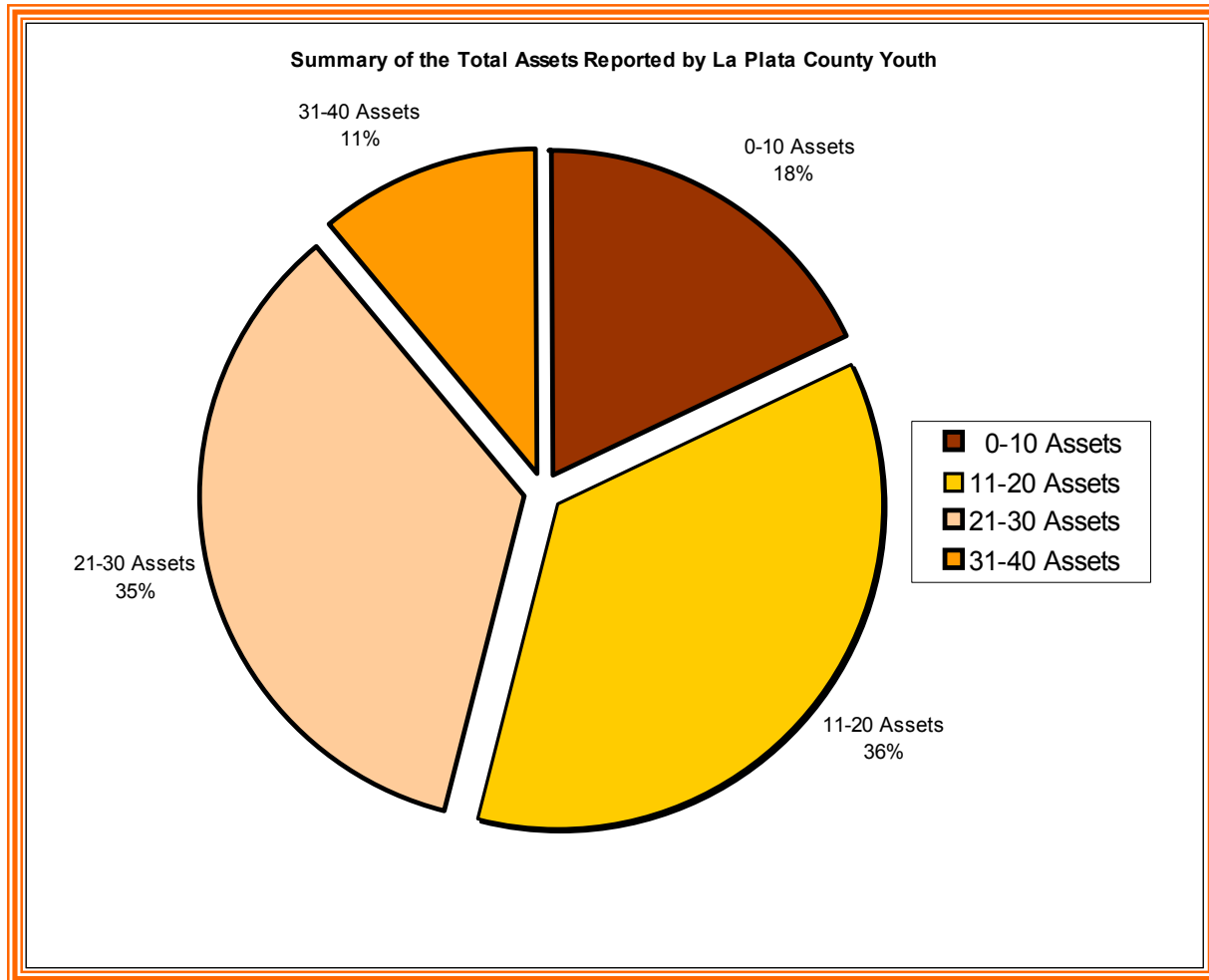


The following are some of the findings and conclusions that should cause some concerns.

- ♥ Our youth do not believe that La Plata adults value them (25%), nor are they given useful roles within the community (32%), nor are they given opportunities to contribute in their schools (46%). If a young person doesn't believe he or she has value to the community, there is little reason for them to positively contribute.
- ♥ Only 34% of La Plata youth report their school provides a caring environment and only 40% believe that their neighborhood does. While these are either equal to or better than the national averages, we still need to determine what young people mean by caring and find ways to increase this perception.
- ♥ Only 28% of La Plata's youth believe the adults in their lives are modeling positive and responsible behavior. A great number of the behaviors young people adopt are learned from the adults in their lives.
- ♥ Research supports the importance of young minds having access to creative outlets and time to read for pleasure. Only 14% of La Plata's youth benefit from creative opportunities and only 25% read for pleasure.
- ♥ Girls reported higher percentages of assets than boys for 35 of the 40 assets. Young males in La Plata view both the community and themselves less positively than young females. Where the boys did better was on the family support, safety, self esteem, sense of purpose and positive view of personal future asset indicators.
- ♥ Only 42% of La Plata's young females feel safe in their home, school or neighborhood, while 62% of boys feel safe.



La Plata's Challenge



The information in the full report provides a portrait of how La Plata's youth experience the 40 building blocks of positive human development. Our responsibility as a community is to ensure that all our children and youth feel nurtured and supported throughout the first two decades of their lives; that they are born healthy and enter school ready to learn; and that they feel safe in their homes, schools, neighborhoods, and throughout the community. It is also our responsibility to support their parents and other care givers, and the organizations that serve, educate, protect and support them. This is an effort that requires all of our citizens—youth and adult, professional and parent, educator and nurturer—to contribute.

To this end, the information from this survey is being incorporated into the discussions held in the planning process for the *Children, Youth and Family Master Plan*. This Plan will provide a shared vision of youth development that will unite all sectors of community life. It is our intent to mobilize every citizen of La Plata County to support the Plan's short and long-term goals and to play a role in ensuring our children, youth and families are thriving.

The Plan will identify what is already working in La Plata and ways for us to continue to support and expand these efforts. It will identify gaps in our services and recommend strategies for filling those gaps, and it will recommend creating and supporting an ever increasing number of opportunities where youth can make a difference. Our youth want to be seen more for their contributions to the solutions, rather than for being part of the problems.

What Can I Do?

In each community that administers the Developmental Asset[®] survey, citizens ask, “Is there anything that I can do?” The answer is a resounding and hopeful **YES!** Adults and youth—in big and small ways—can help increase Developmental Assets[®] in the daily lives of young people.

“Asset-building”—the term for purposefully helping youth experience more assets in their lives—is occurring in hundreds of communities by thousands of people across North America. Growing numbers of youth and adults—in big cities and small towns—understand the awesome power they have to make positive and lasting impacts on the lives of young people. Individually and collectively, these youth and adults are actively engaged in the movement to grow healthy communities and healthy youth.

We need an understanding of the actions and behaviors that breed success, the willingness and ideas to apply that knowledge, and most importantly, a desire to see young people grow up happy, healthy, and confident.

Many things you personally do—or could do—every day make a big difference for children and teenagers. Whether you're a parent, grandparent, neighbor, aunt, uncle, friend, mentor, volunteer, or someone who just sees young people in the mall, in the neighborhood, or on the street corner, there are many ways you can help young people succeed. Peter Benson, the President of Search Institute[®] calls this help “the power of one”—the potential for one individual to help, heal, support, challenge, or change the life of another.

When thinking about increasing the external assets in a young person’s life it is important to remember that children and teenagers need care, affection, love and encouragement from the people in their lives. They need to spend time in places that are caring and accepting. They also need to recognize the ways they can, and do, make a difference by serving others and having useful roles in their families and communities. In addition, they need to see adults behaving in healthy and responsible ways. They need people to expect and help them to do and be their best. All children and youth need access to programs and activities that challenge, shape and enrich their lives. These can include music, drama, and the other arts; sports and hobbies; and involvement in a religious community.

When thinking about increasing the internal assets in a young person’s life it is important to nurture their natural curiosity into a lifelong commitment to learning by helping them value and enjoy learning. Adults must also nurture a young person’s development of positive values by modeling those values and by allowing youth to practice their values by living them. Supporting the development of social competencies in young people is critical to their life-long ability to deal with choices and challenges, maintain healthy relationships, and understand the importance of contributing to their community and society. Finally, it is critical that adults nurture in young people a positive identity of themselves and of their personal future.

To help people think about the range of possible asset-building acts, we present the following six principles:

Everyone can build assets. Building assets isn’t just about great families or schools or neighborhoods.

It’s about each person playing a role in the raising of La Plata’s children.

All young people need assets. While it is crucial to pay special attention to youth who struggle—economically, emotionally, or otherwise—nearly all young people need more assets than they have.

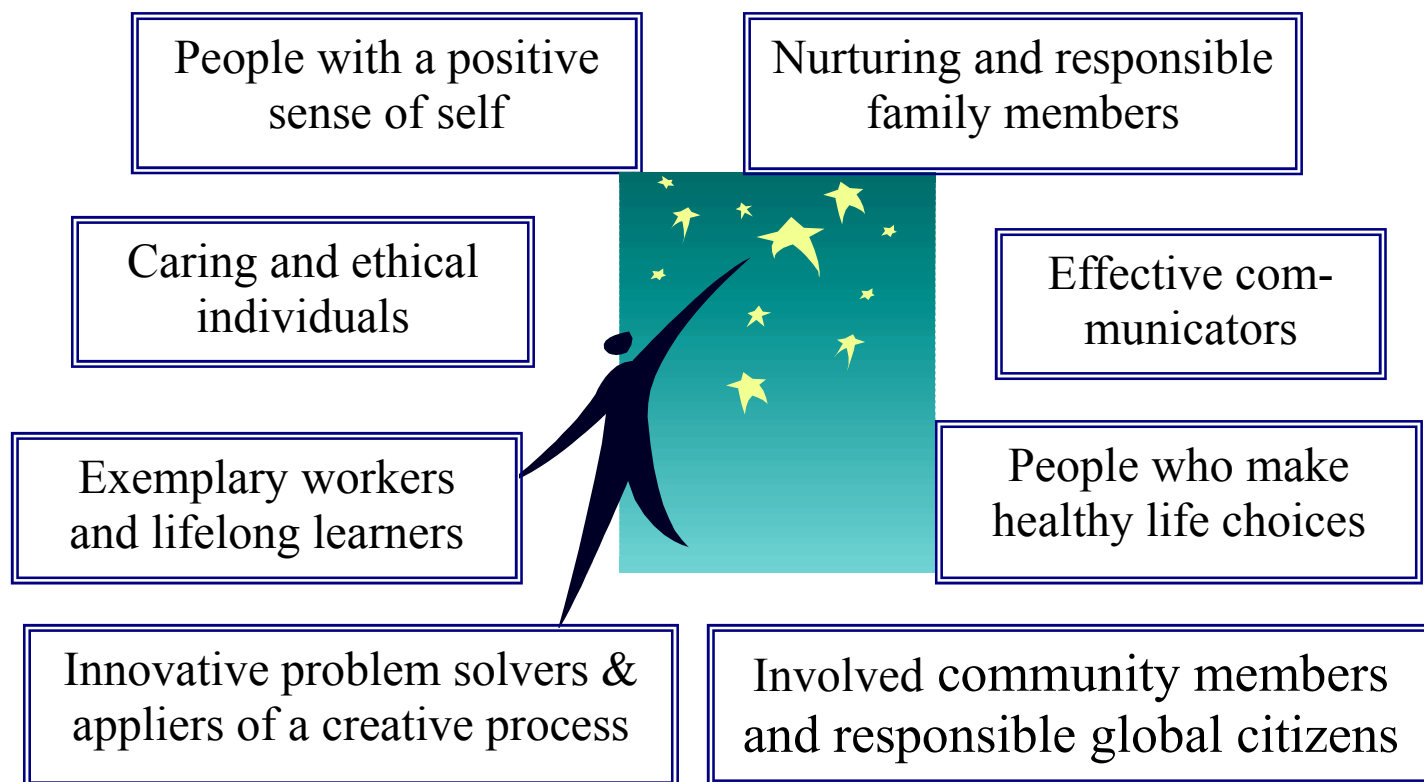
Relationships are key. Strong relationships between adults and young people, young people and their peers, and teenagers and children are central to asset building.

Asset building is an ongoing process. Building assets starts when a child is born and continues through high school and beyond.

Consistent messages are important. It is critical that families, schools, communities, the media, and others all give young people consistent, similar messages about what is important and what is expected.

Intentional redundancy is important. Assets must be continually reinforced across the years and in all areas of a young person’s life.

Thriving youth and adults are steadily growing towards and becoming . . .



Every citizen of La Plata County can play a role in assuring that all our children and youth are able to thrive. The thriving definition above was developed by over 200 youth and adult citizens who participated in the planning process. This definition reads:

Thriving youth and adults are steadily growing towards and becoming people with a positive sense of self, nurturing and responsible family members, effective communicators, people who make healthy life choices, involved community members and responsible global citizens, innovative problem solvers and appliers of a creative process, exemplary workers and lifelong learners, and caring and ethical individuals.

It is important to realize that this definition describes a journey more than a destination. Communities and schools need to be cautious about trying to have young people “accomplish” too many things. Rather, we want to ensure they are pointed in the right direction, making efforts to increase their internal assets. The community should focus its efforts to increase their external assets.

While our community continues to prosper and grow, no matter how successfully, our young people will always judge us on how well we provide them with the external assets they need and how much we nurture the development of their internal assets.

Please join us as we create communities where all our families, neighborhoods, public and private schools, organizations, the community as a whole, and all of our young people strive to make La Plata a place we are all proud to call home.

Appendix A: La Plata & National Comparisons Of Developmental Assets®

Percent of Youth Reporting Each of 20 EXTERNAL Assets

Asset Category	Asset Description	La Plata %	National %
Support	1. My family life provides high levels of love and support.	71	70
	2. My parents and I communicate positively and I seek my parents advice and counsel.	51	30
	3. I receive support from three or more non-parent adults.	42	45
	4. I experience caring neighbors.	40	40
	5. My school provides a caring, encouraging environment.	34	29
	6. My parent (s) is actively involved in helping me succeed in school.	43	34
Empowerment	7. I perceive that the adults in this community value youth.	25	25
	8. Young people are given useful roles in this community.	32	28
	9. I do 1 hour or more of service in my community a week.	43	51
	10. I feel safe at home, school, and in my neighborhood.	52	51
Boundaries & Expectations	11. My family has clear rules and consequences and monitors my whereabouts.	42	48
	12. My school provides clear rules and consequences.	60	53
	13. My neighbors take responsibility for monitoring my behavior.	46	49
	14. My parents and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.	28	30
	15. My best friends model responsible behavior.	61	65
	16. My parents and teachers encourage me to do well.	55	49
Constructive Use of Time	17. I spend three or more hours a week in lessons or practice in music, theater or the arts.	14	20
	18. I spend three or more hours a week in sports, clubs or organizations at school or in community organizations.	57	58
	19. I spend one or more hours a week in activities in a religious institution.	46	63
	20. I am out with friends “with nothing special to do” two or fewer nights per week.	60	52

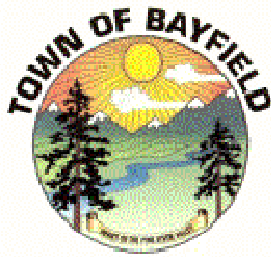
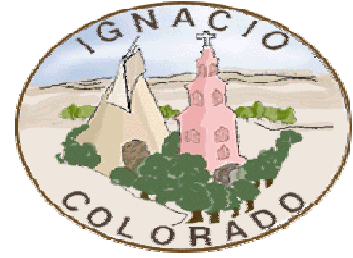
Nationally over 2 million students since 1989 have taken this survey. This naturally invites comparisons of local results with national norms. Caution is advised in comparing La Plata data with other communities when the profiles of those communities' young people are not known.

Percent of Youth Reporting Each of 20 INTERNAL Assets

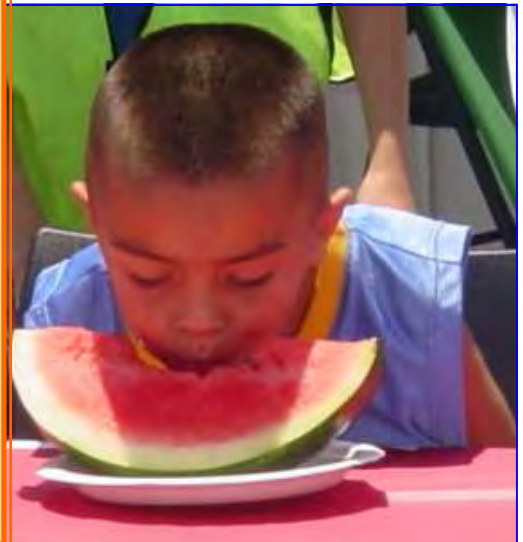
Asset Category	Asset Description	La Plata %	National %
Commitment to Learning	21. I am motivated to do well in school.	67	67
	22. I am actively engaged in learning.	46	61
	23. I do at least 1 hour of homework every school day.	44	53
	24. I care about my school.	66	54
	25. I read for pleasure three or more hours a week.	25	23
Positive Values	26. I place a high value on helping other people.	43	50
	27. I place a high value on promoting equality and reducing issues such as hunger and poverty.	46	52
	28. I act on my convictions and stand up for my beliefs.	60	68
	29. I tell the truth even when it is not easy.	60	67
	30. I accept and take personal responsibility.	57	63
	31. I believe it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.	46	47
Social Competencies	32. I know how to plan ahead and make choices.	32	30
	33. I have empathy, sensitivity and friendship skills.	47	47
	34. I have knowledge of, and comfort with, people of different cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds.	50	42
	35. I can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.	48	42
	36. I seek to resolve conflict non-violently.	37	45
Positive Identity	37. I feel I have control over “things that happen to me.”	37	41
	38. I have a high self esteem.	54	52
	39. I believe my life has purpose.	62	59
	40. I am optimistic about my personal future.	72	74

Who was surveyed? (Numbers/Percentages)

Total Students	972 / 100 %	
Male	496 / 51 %	Grade
Female	468 / 49 %	
		6
		7
		8
		9
		10
American Indian	109 / 11 %	11
Asian/Pacific Islander	11 / 1 %	12
Black/African American	16 / 2 %	
Hispanic	109 / 11 %	
White	591 / 62 %	
Multi-racial	122 / 13 %	



**La Plata
County, where
all children,
youth and
families thrive!**



For more information about Developmental Assets, the Children Youth and Family Master Plan or to get involved please contact:
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