

18. Youth Programs

After-school activities: They may be extra but they're also essential

It's appropriate that the word extracurricular starts with the letter "E." But the word should really be essential-curricular. In fact, they're so important many schools are now calling them co-curricular activities. For many young people, youth programs at school and in the community are the highlight of their day. They meet new people who share their interests or introduce them to new pursuits. They spend time with adults who also enjoy the activity. And they boost their skills. **Youth Programs** is Asset 18 of Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets, the qualities, experiences, and relationships that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

Here are the facts

Research shows that young people who regularly spend time in sports, clubs, or other youth programs have higher self-esteem and better leadership skills, and are less likely to feel lonely. About 57 percent of young people, ages 11–18, spend three or more hours a week in youth programs, according to Search Institute. Young people involved in interesting activities helps bring out their best.

Tips for building this asset

Encourage young people to join a school or community activity that matches their interests, or try one they have never considered before. People can learn a lot about themselves by taking a chance on something new. Clubs and programs can also help young people make new friends of all ages, give them leadership opportunities, and make school more fun. Many groups also let them choose how much time and energy to commit.

Also try this

In your home and family: With your child, make a list of activities he or she wants to learn about. Rank the ideas according to her or his level of interest. Together, research ways to try out the top two choices.

In your neighborhood and community: Check your newspaper for upcoming community activities such as charity lunches, art openings, or athletic events. How many are youth-centered or allow youth participation? If you don't see many, consider starting an activity for young people with your neighbors.

In your school or youth program: Discuss the following with the young people in your class or program: If you could start a club of your own, what would it be? How would you get it started? What materials would you need?