

THE AMERICAN
Family Assets
STUDY

Building Family Assets in Your Community:

IDEAS FOR CITY LEADERS AND COMMUNITY COALITIONS

THE FAMILY ASSETS OFFER A NEW LENS ON HOW COMMUNITIES CAN JOIN TOGETHER AROUND A SHARED VISION FOR SUPPORTING ALL FAMILIES, RECOGNIZING THE FOUNDATIONAL ROLE THAT STRONG FAMILIES PLAY IN CREATING STRONG COMMUNITIES. HERE ARE SOME STARTING POINTS FOR HOW CITY LEADERS AND COMMUNITY COALITIONS CAN USE THE FAMILY ASSETS FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH TO MAKE STRENGTHENING FAMILIES CENTRAL TO YOUR VISION FOR A STRONG COMMUNITY.

- **Reframe messages about families.** Most of the time when families are discussed in public settings, they are either being blamed for being dysfunctional, broken, or inattentive, or they are put on a pedestal as being the solution to all problems. In reality, neither perspective is accurate, complete, or helpful. The Family Assets framework invites city leaders and community coalitions to reframe how we think and talk about families to recognize that all families have both strengths and challenges. In addition, it is important that we acknowledge (and believe) that all families can build Family Assets, which, in the long run, can make a big difference both for the family and for the community.

For information on the research behind the family assets, visit www.search-institute.org/familyassets

For practical ways to build assets in your family, visit www.ParentFurther.com/familyassets

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- **Shift the focus from debates about family structure to dialogue about Family Assets.** Much of the conversation about families today becomes mired in debates about family structure. The Family Assets research suggests that the ways families interact with each other matters more to positive outcomes than the demographics or structure of the family. Instead of asking, *Which families are strong?* ask: *What assets are present in each family, including those who are struggling? How can those assets be tapped to help families be resilient in the face of challenges?*
- **Invite families to articulate their own strengths, challenges, and hopes.** Some of the most animated and energetic conversations you can have with children, teens, and parenting adults happens when you ask them questions like, *What qualities make your family strong and healthy? What about your family helps you make it through tough times? If you could name just one thing you hope for in your family, what would it be?* Families' answers to those questions can open up new possibilities for networking, support, and action.
- **Tell stories about strong families and creative supports for families.** An important way to change the conversation about families is to tell stories of their strengths or assets—particularly when they challenge stereotypes. Families can tell these stories to each other, and the media can be encouraged to highlight these stories as well. Rebalancing the mix of stories can have a significant impact on how families are viewed and supported.
- **Recognize families as resources for community action.** A focus on Family Assets recognizes families as resources for the community, not just recipients or consumers of services. How can they be engaged and unleashed to work together to tackle issues and work toward their hopes and dreams?

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- **Meet families in their comfort zone.** Engage families through the communities, institutions, programs, and networks in which they already participate and feel at home. These may include faith communities, cultural or ethnic groups, programs that serve families in different life stages (such as early childhood or families with teenagers), family composition (such as LGBT families or single-parent families), or life circumstances (such as military families, or immigrant families).
- **Pay attention to young people’s voices and their roles in families.** Often we use “parents” and “families” interchangeably, overlooking the roles that young people and other family members play in strengthening families. Include young people in dialogues and planning about Family Assets, and create opportunities that help them understand how they can build assets in their own families.
- **Identify existing supports and opportunities for families, including both formal systems and informal networks across sectors,** including public services, education, faith-based organizations, other nonprofits, employers, and others. What is already happening in your community that builds or supports some of these Family Assets? How might these existing efforts be linked, celebrated, and promoted through a shared understanding of Family Assets?
- **Connect networks for mutual learning.** Encourage collaboration, alignment, and sharing of best practices among organizations that serve and support families, including both public institutions and private organizations and networks. Though they may have different goals and priorities, they may each reach, support, and engage different subgroups of families across your community. Furthermore, they can each share their practices in ways that strengthen supports for all families.

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- **Explore innovative ways to address gaps in Family Assets.** Two areas that surfaced as gaps in the national study were around family adaptability and family connections to their communities. Each of these categories of Family Assets offers opportunities for new supports and services for families. For example:
 - Developing informal, but intentional, supports for families in times of transition or crisis (particularly those who are not associated with institutions such as faith communities or social services).
 - Developing creative campaigns or outreach efforts that offer families low-risk opportunities to build connections to community resources and relationships.
- **Build capacity of organizations and networks to focus on and build Family Assets.** Search Institute's Family Assets research addresses the negative perceptions that some (though certainly not all) professionals may have about families, which may grow out of their singular focus on family fragility, stresses, and vulnerabilities. The Family Assets framework invites these leaders to move beyond negative perceptions and to reflect on the strengths and resources that families have, and how those can be tapped to help families be resilient and strong, even when facing challenges.
- **Develop a shared vision of Family Assets across your community.** Bring together key stakeholders across your town, city, or rural area to articulate a shared commitment to building Family Assets (easily complementing other shared commitments to Developmental Assets or other related uniting frameworks). Use this shared vision to develop strategies and alliances aimed at strengthening all kinds of families across your community.

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