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# The Use of the Developmental Assets Profile at a Residential Treatment Center

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The Use of the Developmental Assets Profile at a Residential Treatment Center

Ashlee D. Johnson

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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### Abstract

Strengths based approaches are at the forefront of developmental frameworks in the social sciences. The Developmental Assets Framework is an evidence-based practice that focuses on youths' internal strengths and external supports. This study uses the Developmental Assets Profile to identify which types of assets that thirty-five youth at a Residential Treatment Center are thriving in and which assets they are challenged in. The study looked at the mean overall, internal, and external developmental asset scores from the RTC sample to gain understanding of where the youth scored on a scale of Challenged, Vulnerable, Adequate, Thriving. The study also looked at mean scores for the eight categories of assets and mean scores for the five asset-building contexts. The purpose of this study is to identify strengths and needs of these adolescents and provide treatment and program recommendations for the Residential Treatment Center.

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### The Use of the Developmental Assets Profile at a Residential Treatment Center

Residential placement programs are where adolescents with behavioral and mental health disorders can live short term for purposes of rehabilitation. Specifically, Residential Treatment Centers (RTC's) house children who are 12 to 18 years old, like the one used in this study. Adolescents potentially come to the RTC because of involvement in family court, criminal court, and other mental health settings. Adolescents at the RTC have been involved in Person In Need of Supervision (PINS) behaviors such as drug abuse, not following curfew and/or running away, not attending school, disobedience, sexual, violent, and criminal activity. The RTC also accommodates and works with adolescents that have been mandated by the family courts, referred by the department of social services, or have willingly placed themselves there. Administrators, social workers, mental health counselors, recreational therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists, care-coordinators, residential counselors, nurses, teachers, and many more social service professionals support the youth who reside there. During their stay, adolescents receive individual, group, and family therapy. They receive recreation therapy such as arts and crafts and sports. The youth also attend school on a daily basis. The adolescents and their families are strongly involved in building treatment plans for themselves in collaboration with other staff members to work towards discharge to a permanent placement either with parents, group homes, or independent living.

In order to work towards discharge from the RTC, adolescents must participate fully in their treatment plans. A typical treatment plan for a youth in the RTC would consist of educational services, counseling services, and psychoeducation for things like emotional



management, social skills, and life skills. This RTC believes that being compliant and consistent with best practices is very important to helping children and their families to become successful.

The RTC has implemented the use of the Developmental Assets Framework in order to be more effective with the youth and families that they work with. Using this framework to assess children has forced the RTC to consider many different aspects of care. One of the questions being raised at the program evaluation level is, what kinds of programs can the RTC implement in order to help more of their clients to succeed while residing there and after they are discharged? The purpose of this research is to determine what types of programs can be more effective for the youth.

One of the many assessment instruments used at the RTC is the Developmental Assets Profile. This profile helps to identify where an adolescent falls, developmentally, while placed at the RTC. The developmental Assets Profile is administered to every adolescent that comes to stay at the RTC at intake, every 90 days, and before discharge. This instrument helps the RTC to build a more effective treatment plan for each individual child. For example, if an adolescent's assets are low in the category of Support, then their treatment plan could include family counseling. If adolescents have low number of assets in Constructive Use of Time, then they will have more structured recreational activities in their treatment plan.

Moreover, the profile also helps the RTC to put large programs into place like psychoeducational groups and specific clinical and recreational activities to help the young people there to flourish and be successful during their stay at the RTC and after their discharge. Since every youth is different, using the Developmental Assets Profile can help professionals to identify areas where the youth may need some guidance and build an individualized plan for positive youth development.

### **Review of the Literature**

Up until the early 1990's, the most frequently used approach to assess youth development was identifying problems among youth and then trying to prevent them (Scales, 2012). This was a problem focused approach. However, starting in 1989, Peter L. Benson introduced the framework for the 40 Developmental Assets. The Developmental Assets Profile was created by the Search Institute, where Benson completed a significant amount of research related to positive adolescent development, including the ideas of thriving and community psychology. Benson spent much of his life developing the 40 Developmental Assets Profile. The Developmental Assets framework has been the most cited approach in the world (Scales, 2012). The Search Institute offers 40 different developmental assets that are necessary for positive and successful development of youth (Edwards, Mumford, Shillingford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007).

The Developmental Assets Profile is an instrument that is used to assess an adolescent's development and identify strengths for the youth and caretaker to develop and/or weaknesses to work on with the youth. This likert-type scale is comprised of questions based on 40 developmental assets. The 40 developmental assets are made up of both internal and external components. The internal component is comprised of things that guide youth to make positive choices and promote confidence, passion, and purpose. Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, and Positive Identity are the assets that are specifically measured on this scale (Edwards et al, 2007). The external component is comprised of positive experiences that youth encounter in their lives like people and institutions. To be more specific, Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, and Constructive Use of Time are assets that are measured on the profile (Leffert, Benson, Scales, Sharma, Drake, & Blyth, 1998).

### **Internal Assets**

Edwards et al. (2007) suggested that when an adolescent has healthy developed internal assets, they are more likely to be successful in life. Internal assets that are measures on the Developmental Assets Profile are listed in great detail. For example, according to Leffert et al., (1998) first, within the Commitment to Learning asset there are a number of topics assessed such as achievement motivation, school engagement, homework, bonding to school, reading for pleasure. Under the Positive Values asset, caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and restraint are measured. Social competencies are listed as planning and decision making, interpersonal competence, cultural competence, resistance skills, and peaceful conflict resolution. An adolescent's Positive Identity asset is measured by personal power, self-esteem, sense of purpose, and positive view of personal future.

### **External Assets**

External structures, relationships, and activities also seem to create positive environments for youth (Search Institute, 2002). Leffert et al. (1998) named the developmental assets as Support, which is measured by family support, positive family communication, other adult relationships, caring neighborhoods, caring school climates and parental involvement in education, the Empowerment asset is assessed by the community valuing the youth, a youth's resources in the community, and the youth's feeling of safety, and Boundaries and Expectations are also an asset on the scale that are measured by family boundaries, school boundaries, neighborhood boundaries, adult role models, positive peer influence, and parents and teachers high expectations of the youth. Finally, Constructive Use of Time is assessed by a youth's creative activities, youth programs, religious communities, and time spent at home.

### **Appropriate Use of the Developmental Assets Profile**

A great deal of literature supports the use of the 40 Developmental Assets Profile (Burrow, O'Dell & Hill, 2010; Chew, Osseck, Raygor, Eldridge-Houser, & Cox, 2010; Dobmeier, 2011; Edwards et al., 2007; Leffert et al., 1998; Scales, 2005; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000; Scales, Benson, Mannes, 2006). Scales (1999) claimed the developmental asset framework is supported by the research. The Search Institute completed a comprehensive synthesis of the literature on adolescent development. They examined more than 800 studies and from those studies they determined that there are a very low number of youth reporting to have a high number of developmental assets (Mannes, Roehikepartain, & Benson, 2005)

### **Risk**

The Developmental Assets Framework assumes that the more positive, internal and external developmental assets that an adolescents has, the less chance they will have of becoming involved in risky behaviors. Another tenet of the framework is that the more risk factors that the child has and develops, the less chance they have to be successful and healthy in the future (Chew et al.,2010). There are many things that would put an adolescent at risk of being unsuccessful in life. Risk factors include poverty, family disorganization, parenting deficiencies, parental impairment, and life stress (Prevatt, 2003). Growing up in unsafe neighborhoods, having family members incarcerated, unsupportive and/or disabled parents, and other stresses such as moving frequently can also be risk factors for children. Prevatt (2003) showed that negative and positive parenting had a direct effect on a child being at-risk. Moreover, negative life events like moving or experiencing a family member being incarcerated can also have an impact on an adolescent's chance at success in life. Things like loss of a family member or friend, witnessing or being a victim of violence, natural disasters, and contact with

the Criminal Justice System can also have a negative effect on a young person. Copeland, Shanahan, Costello, and Angold (2009) stated that commonly, children face multiple risk factors at any time during their upbringing. For example, poverty is related to parental unemployment and single parent households. Moreover, poverty can also be linked to parental drug addiction and other mental illness.

### **Protective Factors**

Although many children are raised in circumstances that might make them less likely to be successful in life, there are also factors that can contribute to the youth growing up to become successful. These aspects are named protective factors. According to Pollard (1999) protective factors mediate the exposure and effect to risk factors. For example, the more protective factors a youth has, the more prepared they are to overcome adverse life events and negative influences in their life. This mediation is likely decrease the frequency of risk behaviors in adolescents. Protective factors can be listed as social support, a supportive family, positive school experiences, and religious involvement (Prevatt, 2003). Utilizing a child's strengths and protective factors to intervene on negative life direction could increase the chance they will become successful.

Protective factors for children are placed into three categories. The first category is individual characteristics. In this category, attributes such as a positive social orientation, high intelligence, and a resilient temperament are considered to be positive. In the social bonding category having warm, affective relationships and commitment to conventional lines of action are also seen as helpful assets. Finally, healthy beliefs and clear standards for behavior can be effective strengths that can lead a young person to success (Pollard & Hawkins, 1999).

Moreover, the assets that are listed on the 40 Developmental Assets Profile also serves as protective factors for youth.

### **Asset Gaps**

Adolescent care workers have the opportunity to bring positive experiences and qualities to young people. Being able to identify positive influences and assets in a youth's life is crucial to assisting them in becoming successful in life (Chew et al., 2010). The Search Institute (2002) showed that most youth, 76 percent, report having fewer than 30 assets. Forty one percent of youth hold only 11-20 assets out of 40. More importantly, as adolescent's transition from middle school age and into high school age their developmental assets drop. Interestingly, geographic location is not correlated with an adolescent's number of assets. In urban, suburban, and rural areas, adolescents only held a difference of .2 assets, meaning less than 1. Since 1996, the Search Institute has collected data from over 2 million people, over 33 states, and 318 different communities. They found that, of these people, 15% had between 0 and 10 assets, 41% had 11 to 20 assets, and 8% had 31 to 40 assets (Chew et al., 2010). The average number of developmental assets that the 2 million people in this study possessed was 18, and that is below half of the overall assets. The majority of the people in the study, which was 56%, held below half of the developmental assets that are needed for healthy development and success later in life.

### **Positive Youth Development**

According to Scales (1997) early adolescence is a crucial period where many factors, listed earlier as risk and protective factors, have an impact on the healthy development of an adolescent. In order to ensure positive development, adolescents must build positive assets and resist negative influences. Positive psychology has been a staple in adolescent development in recent years.

Positive psychology and student wellness are a focus in schools today (Morrison, Brown, D'Incau, O'Farrell, & Furlong, 2006) Morrison et al. (2006) identified that research on risk and resilience has recognized that there are specific student traits and family, social, and environmental circumstances that can prevent a child's exposure to risk. These specific student traits can be used as targets for strengths-based interventions. Moreover, they offer that school psychologists should expand their assessments beyond the school arena. For example, they should take into account students' family, neighborhood, and community contexts as well. Pollard and Hawkins (1999) also agreed that preventive interventions should be focused on protective factors that adolescents possess. They go on to say that promoting resilience will produce more positive outcomes for youth.

### **Resilience**

In recent years, the helping profession has shifted its beliefs and best practices from the medical model of being problem oriented, to a strengths-based approach (Richardson, 2002). Resilience is described as "the construct that helps children who are considered at risk respond adaptively to adversity, cope with and manage major problems and negative life events, and succeed despite what are seemingly intractable disadvantages." (Edwards et al., 2007, pg.147). Miller, (2003) stated that there are many ways to define resiliency in adolescents. First, he offered that resiliency can be measured by the amount of success in life that a person has demonstrated. Second, he pondered the question; does a person need to report overall happiness in life to be considered resilient? Third, he asked, is resiliency an ongoing process that is focused on typical development and personal growth?

Many children in America experience adverse life circumstances and events that have the capability to place them at-risk. Some of these life circumstances and events might be poverty,

death in the family, dysfunctional families, disadvantaged communities, and inadequate schooling. Moreover, some resiliency factors that could combat at-risk situations for an adolescent include personal and background characteristics or circumstances of students and their families, social and academic organization of the school, contexts in which the students, families, and schools exist, and the relationship of each of these factors to one another. Prevatt, (2003) stated that risk and resiliency studies have repeatedly found, that a large portion of children can prevail through unpleasant circumstances in their lives.

Morrison et al. (2006) named resiliency factors as “Keystone” behaviors. Keystone behaviors are areas of competence that help to protect children from negative influences in the community, home, and school environments. The Developmental Assets Profile helps to identify areas that an adolescent may be struggling with. Pollard and Hawkins (1999) indicated that recently, authors have moved from a prevention model of healthy development to an assets based approach. However, their study showed that the assets based approach should be used in conjunction with addressing risk factors, which would be the most effective way to shape the healthy development of an adolescent. Focusing on a child’s resiliency can have the impact of healing on a deeper level compared to problem oriented approaches that have traditionally been used in the helping professions. Richardson (2002) stated that when a clinician embraces resiliency theory, they will be more capable to help their adolescent client to identify and build upon their own personal strengths.

### **Community Involvement**

Scales, Benson, Roehlkepartain, Hintz, Sullivan, and Mannes (2001) offered that common sense and social research indicate that children cannot foster healthy development on their own. Children must have positive and supportive role models in their lives in order to help



teach them how to be productive and successful members of society. Adults from a child's family, neighborhood, school, and organizations they are involved in are just a few examples of who can be a supportive role in a child's life. In fact, many authors claim that communities must be deeply involved in an adolescent's upbringing to help ensure positive, healthy development (Scales et al., 1998). Scales et al. (2001) offered that more than 800 research studies have concluded that child and adult attachments and relationships are consistently correlated with positive youth outcomes like better academic performance and achievement, decrease in substance abuse and delinquency, better mental hygiene and better social competence. Scales et al. (1998) reported that children who grow up in chronic adversity can achieve better lifestyle outcomes if they have positive relationships with caring and prosocial adults. Mannes, Roehikepartain, and Benson (2005) also went on to note that it is helpful to align family-centered approaches, strengths-based approaches, and supportive community agencies in order to prepare adolescents for successful adult lives. Relationships between community residents, education systems, health systems, and social services are key ingredients to building a recipe for success in neighborhoods. When a community is able to commit to raising healthy, caring, and responsible young people, children have a more promising chance to become productive members of society themselves. Edwards et al. (2007) have stated that the ecological perspective takes the communities' roles in adolescents' development into consideration as well. They state that a student and their home, school, and community all must engage in joint efforts to support healthy, positive development of the child. Together, students, homes, schools, and communities can identify high-risk behaviors and determine effective intervention services.

In addition to partaking in joint efforts to identify high-risk behaviors and interventions for adolescents, caring gestures also are a need in communities. For instance, parents, teachers,

and other adult community members should show children that they are valued and loved. In the school arena, Dobmeier (2011) recommended that per the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), school counselors are change agents and they must help to build learning communities by displaying caring, acceptance, and compassion toward children. Bruyere (2010) also mentioned a program called “Strong Communities” where the goal is to help every family and child to believe they are seen, valued, and cared for. Edwards et al. (2007) went on to state that community members in a place of role model figure should admit to children that they want the child to succeed. Encouraging parents to respect their own children and that letting them take part in decision making can empower adolescents to advocate for themselves and to work collectively with others. Adult figures giving adolescents support in the academic arena, like helping with homework and volunteering on field trips can also lead to positive growth in an adolescent.

Chew et al. (2010) have mentioned that when youth have positive relationships, they are more apt to avoid risks. Access to positive peer mentor and adult mentor support is advised for positive educational experiences. In the community setting, Bruyere (2010) has stated that research shows that taking part in mentoring programs will build an adolescent’s self-worth, future aspirations, educational attainment, and will buffer them from depression. Most importantly, communicating with the child about struggles in life can make a difference in a child’s own insights.

The Developmental Assets Profile measures both internal and external assets that a child should have in order for healthy development. Many assets that are measured on the profile are connected with the child’s neighborhood and community. The Search Institute has included in their Developmental Asset Profile many questions related community involvement in identifying

adolescents' developmental assets they should improve upon. Scales et al. (2001) have suggested that many young people do not receive crucial adult relationships and support as they mature. For instance, two-thirds of children report that they experience enough love and support from their parents and other role models in their lives. Moreover, two-thirds of adolescents state that they have do not have enough religious affiliation, which is also an asset listed on the Developmental Assets Profile. Only half of adolescents in the Scales et al. (2001) study claimed that they felt connected to their schools and communities. Approximately 50% of these adolescents also report knowing clear rules and expectations of their homes, neighborhoods, and schools. One quarter of children in the study claimed to have a positive adult role model in their life and only one-fifth report being valued by their community. The current studies examining childrens' developmental assets related to their communities show that communities must increase their positive influences on children in order to increase their assets to become more productive and successful members of society (Benson, 2012; Bruyere, 2010; Chew at al., 2010; Dobmeier, 2011; Edwards et al., 2007; Marines, Mannes, Roehikepartain, & Benson, 2005; Prevatt, 2003; Roehlkepartain & Benson, 2005; Scales, Benson, & Mannes, 2006; Scales et al., 2001).

### **The Use of the Developmental Assets Profile at the RTC**

The RTC has been implementing the use of the Developmental Assets Profile over the last year. All of the clients that reside at the RTC are administered the Developmental Assets Profile upon intake, every 90 days, and before they are discharged. The use of this instrument is intended to help mental health professionals to be able to help adolescents to become more successful during their stay at the RTC and after their discharge to their permanency placement goal.

Since the Developmental Assets Profile is fairly new to the RTC, research has not been done on how the programs set into place in the residential treatment center are affecting the youths' asset scores. Although the research shows that the Developmental Assets approach is effective in working with adolescents, it is unknown how the Developmental Assets Profile can help the clients at this particular RTC, specifically. The purpose of this study is to determine what types of programs the RTC can implement to build adolescents' healthy development. In order to measure children's healthy development at the RTC, assets scores will be assessed and reassessed for changes. It will be determined if the current programs being used at the RTC such as recreational activities and individual and group therapy are successful at increasing adolescents' asset scores. Finally, programming suggestions will be made in response to the most substantial asset deficits that clients have at the RTC.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Adolescents at the RTC range between the ages twelve and eighteen. Many of them have been involved in the Juvenile Justice System for truancy, drug use, gang affiliation, or crimes involving violence and theft. The youth are from the county where the RTC is placed and from the neighboring counties. The county where the RTC is located is a suburban area with urban and rural areas less than 30 minutes away in any direction. Many of the RTC youth come from poor, urban neighborhoods. Their families are of low socioeconomic status as well. The majority of clients at the RTC are black or Hispanic. Specifically for this study, only the clients who were remanded to the RTC were evaluated, including cottages of both males and females. In these cottages, approximately 40 beds are available at a time. Social workers at the RTC administer the Developmental Assets Profile to every client upon intake, every 90 days, and upon discharge. In

this study, 35 adolescents were given the Developmental Assets Profile during a 5 month period of stay at the RTC. The DAP is part of every client's treatment plan, so no compensation was given to the youth who participated. For the purposes of this study, all DAP's in the 5 month period were included.

### **Materials**

The 40 Developmental Assets framework identifies sets of skills, experiences, relationships, and behaviors that contribute to young people developing into successful adults. The Developmental Assets Profile is the assessment tool used to measure an adolescent's number of assets in specific areas of life. Specifically, the tool measures internal strengths and external supports in a young person's life. The profile asks 58 questions relating to 40 developmental assets then groups the assets into 8 internal and external clusters. The clusters are named as Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, and Constructive Use of Time for external assets and Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, and Positive Identity for internal assets. The specific questions are then broken into these clusters in order to measure the adolescent's strengths and weaknesses (Figure 1). The test is scored on a score of 0-3 for every answer the adolescent gives. Then, the scores are added up by cluster and divided by the number of questions in the cluster and multiplied by 10 to ultimately get the specific asset score. Then, internal scores are added individually by cluster and divided by the amount of clusters to identify the internal asset score. The same procedure is followed to achieve the external scores. In order to determine the adolescent's overall asset score internal and external asset scores are simply combined.

**Figure 1** *40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents*

### **EXTERNAL ASSETS**



### SUPPORT

1. **Family Support** | Family life provides high levels of love and support.
2. **Positive Family Communication** | Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.
3. **Other Adult Relationships** | Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
4. **Caring Neighborhood** | Young person experiences caring neighbors.
5. **Caring School Climate** | School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
6. **Parent Involvement in Schooling** | Parent(s) are actively involved in helping the child succeed in school.



### EMPOWERMENT

7. **Community Values Youth** | Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
8. **Youth as Resources** | Young people are given useful roles in the community.
9. **Service to Others** | Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
10. **Safety** | Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.



### BOUNDARIES AND EXPECTATIONS

11. **Family Boundaries** | Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
12. **School Boundaries** | School provides clear rules and consequences.
13. **Neighborhood Boundaries** | Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.
14. **Adult Role Models** | Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.

15. **Positive Peer Influence** | Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
16. **High Expectations** | Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.



### CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME

17. **Creative Activities** | Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
18. **Youth Programs** | Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.
19. **Religious Community** | Young person spends one hour or more per week in activities in a religious institution.
20. **Time at Home** | Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.

### INTERNAL ASSETS



### COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

21. **Achievement Motivation** | Young person is motivated to do well in school.
22. **School Engagement** | Young person is actively engaged in learning.
23. **Homework** | Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.
24. **Bonding to School** | Young person cares about her or his school.
25. **Reading for Pleasure** | Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.



### POSITIVE VALUES

26. **Caring** | Young Person places high value on helping other people.
27. **Equality and Social Justice** | Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.
28. **Integrity** | Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
29. **Honesty** | Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."
30. **Responsibility** | Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
31. **Restraint** | Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.



### SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

32. **Planning and Decision Making** | Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
33. **Interpersonal Competence** | Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
34. **Cultural Competence** | Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
35. **Resistance Skills** | Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
36. **Peaceful Conflict Resolution** | Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.



### POSITIVE IDENTITY

37. **Personal Power** | Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."
38. **Self-Esteem** | Young person reports having a high self-esteem.
39. **Sense of Purpose** | Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."
40. **Positive View of Personal Future** | Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.



The 40 Developmental Assets framework has been consistently shown as a valuable assessment instrument. First, the internal consistency of the test is high and averages .81 for the 8 asset categories. The concurrent validity scores of the Developmental Assets Profile when compared with the Attitudes and Behaviors Survey, which also measure the 40 developmental assets yielded  $r = .82$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating very strong linear relationship. Finally, the test-retest reliability of the Developmental Assets Profile is  $r = .87$ .

### **Design and Procedure**

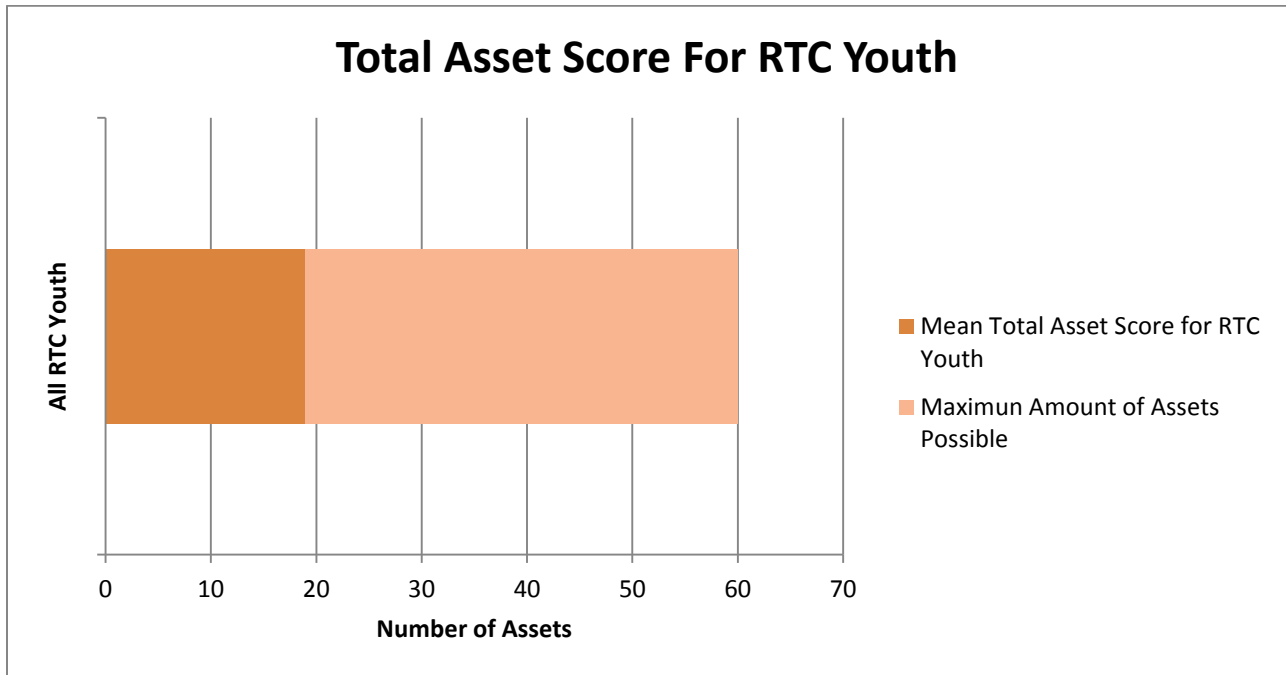
Basic inferential statistics were used in this study to discover which developmental assets adolescents at the RTC were lacking in the most. Based on the clusters of Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, and Positive identity that were measure for every client, the researcher was able to identify which assets adolescents needed to increase and which assets were most evident in the clients. After this determination was made, program suggestions were researched and made to the RTC.

### **Results**

The mean score of total Developmental Assets for the entire RTC sample that was taken was  $m=19$ . This figure is out of a total score of 60 for all assets including internal assets and external assets (figure 2). It should be noted that the Search Institute presents data in 4 ways. A youth with an asset score between 0-29 out of 60 shows that the youth is challenged in that area. A youth having scores that fall between 30-41 out of 60 shows that they are vulnerable. Youth with scores ranging from 42-51 out of 60 means they are adequate in Developmental Assets. If a

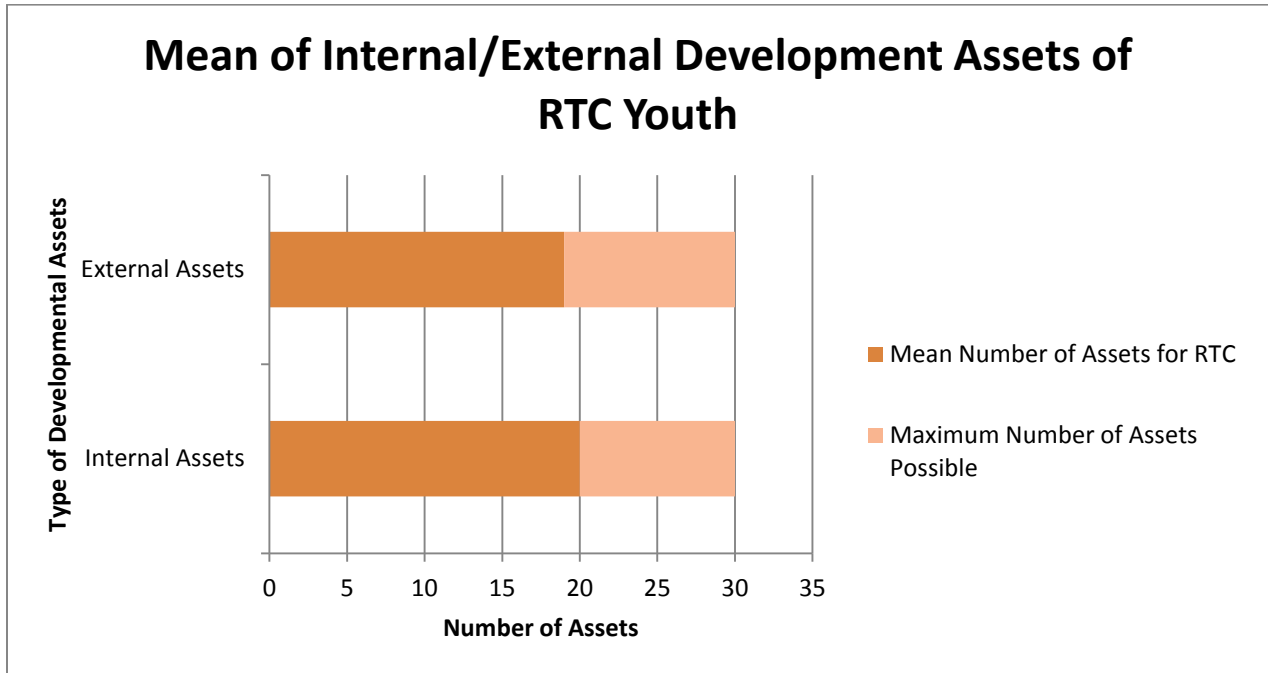
score is between 52-60 out of 60 this indicates that a youth is thriving. These breakdowns are when looking at only the youths' total asset scores.

**Figure 2 Total Asset Score for RTC Youth**



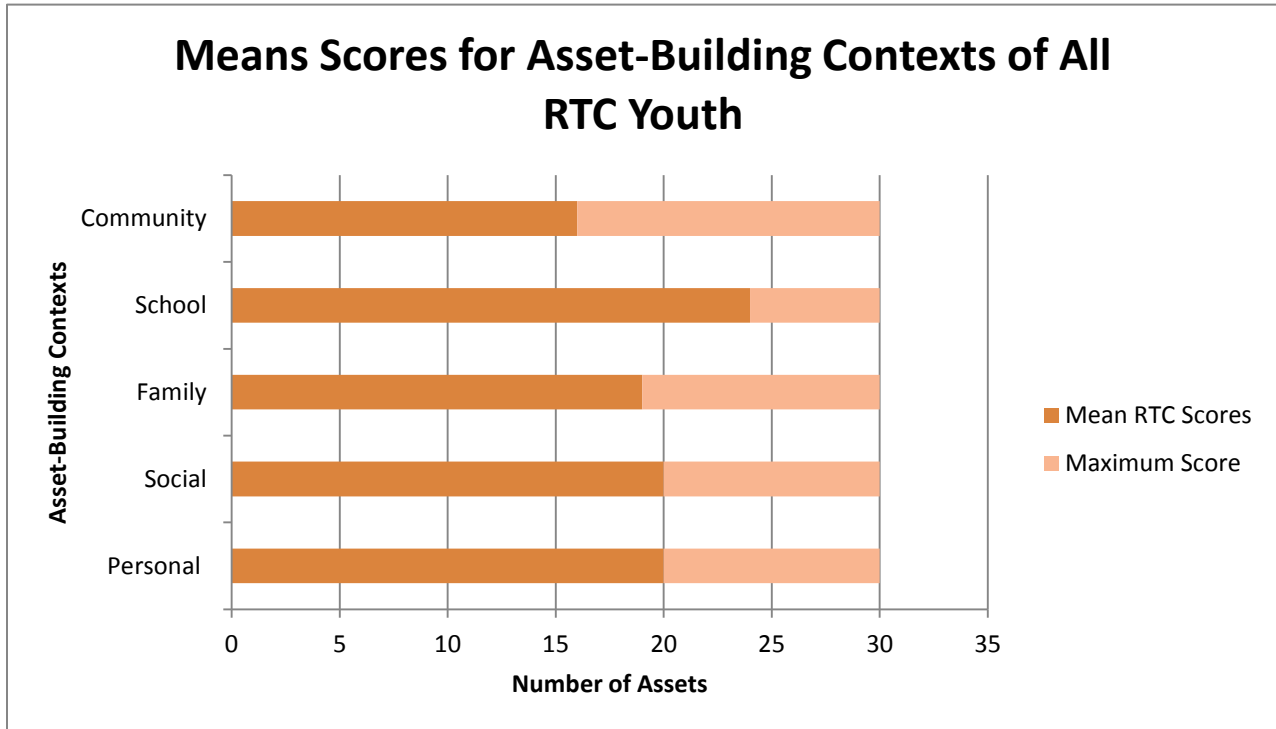
More specifically, the RTC sample's mean score for Internal Assets is  $m=20$  on a scale of 0-30. The mean for Internal Asset scores on youth at the RTC was  $m=19$  on a scale of 0-30 (Figure 3). In looking at the 4 levels of Challenged, Vulnerable, Adequate, and Thriving, these scores are out of 30 and are broken down as follows. The score is defined as Challenged with a score between 0 and 14. The score is identified as Vulnerable when it is between 15 and 20. The score is considered Adequate when it is between 21 and 25. If the score is considered Thriving it is between 26 and 30. The sample of RTC youth are Vulnerable in External Assets area. The sample of RTC youth are Vulnerable as well in the area of Internal Assets.

**Figure 3 Mean of Internal/External Developmental Assets of RTC Youth**



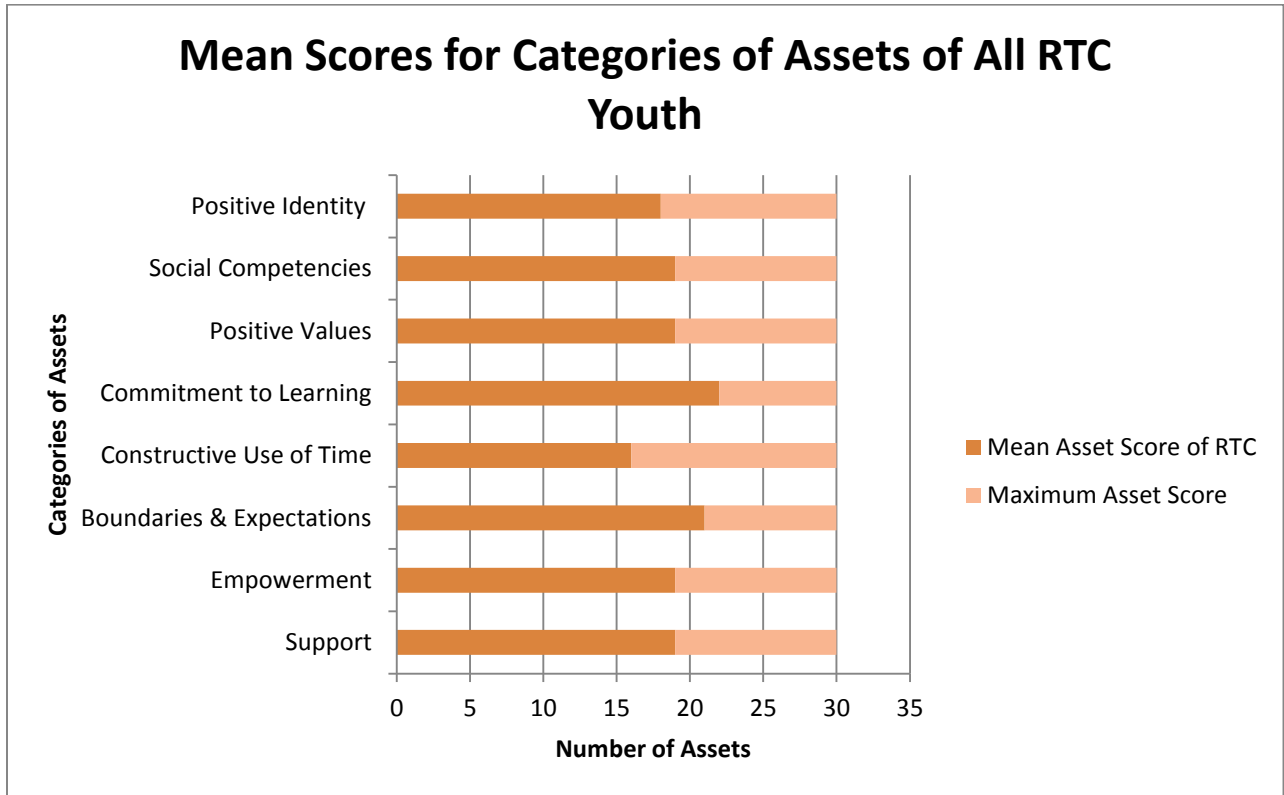
Asset-Building Contexts are Personal, Social, Family, School, and Community. Highest and lowest mean scores for Asset-Building Contexts are as follows. Out of the entire sample population at the Residential Treatment Center, the highest Asset-Building Context score was m=24 out of 30 in the Context of School. The lowest Asset-Building Context score was in the Context of Community with m=16 out of 30 (Figure 4).

**Figure 4 Mean Scores for Asset-Building Contexts of All RTC Youth**



Categories of Assets include Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, and Positive Identity highest and lowest mean scores are as follows. The highest mean score for the entire Residential Treatment Center sample was  $m=22$  in the Category of Commitment to learning. The lowest mean score for the entire RTC sample was  $m=16$  in the Category area of Constructive Use of Time. These mean scores are on a scale of 0-30 (Figure 5).

**Figure 5 Mean Scores for Categories of Assets of All RTC Youth**



**Discussion**

As stated previously, the Residential Treatment Center observed in this study was reviewing what types of programs could best serve their youth based on their Developmental Asset scores. This study took a sample of RTC youths’ DAP scores and determined which scores were lowest and highest. The mean sample scores from overall DAP scores of the youth, mean Internal Asset scores of the youth, mean External Asset scores of the youth, mean Asset-Building Contexts of the youth, and mean Categories of Assets scores for all RTC youth were examined. After the lowest developmental asset scores were identified, program recommendations were researched. According to Search Institute, these mean developmental asset area scores identify the youth as Challenged, Vulnerable, Adequate, or Thriving in those specific areas.

The results of this study show that youth at the RTC program who were given the DAP upon intake, every 90 days, and upon discharge are lacking in the Developmental Assets that they need to be successful in life. The literature also supports this conclusion. As mentioned before, 2 million people that have been given the DAP have a mean score of 18 Developmental Assets. The Search Institute had discovered that over 3 quarters of youth had less than 30 assets through their research. Youth at the RTC in this study are vulnerable in overall developmental assets.

The literature also suggests that the social sciences has taken on a strengths-based approach to working with youth as of recently, instead of focusing on problems that youth have. This study shows that the youth have low scores in the Category of Constructive Use of Time and the Context of Community. Pollard and Hawking (1999) advised that strengths-based models and assets-based models of care should be utilized when working with at-risk youth. The recommendations made in the next section have taken both of these models into account in order to potentially help youth the most.

### **Implications/Recommendations**

The overall DAP score for the sample of RTC youth was  $m=19$  out of 60. According to the Search Institute, the score of  $m=19$  defines the sample of RTC youth as Challenged in Developmental Assets. Although this mean score reiterates the fact that the youth have been accurately placed in a residential treatment center, the scores can be broken down even more to make recommendations for programs to be implemented into this center in order to build the youths' DAP scores so they have a better chance for success in their futures.

The area of Internal Assets consists of specific categories within the Developmental Assets framework. These categories are Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social

Competencies, and Positive Identity. Moreover, the External Assets also consist of specific categories. These categories are Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, and Constructive Use of Time. This study showed that youth from the RTC scored at the Vulnerable level in both Internal and External Assets. However, the youth's lowest mean score was in the category of Constructive Use of Time. Although the RTC runs a specifically structured program with morning, afternoon, evening, and bedtime routine, this low score means that the RTC youth could benefit from even more structure in their programs. Hodgdon, Kinniburgh, Gabowitz, Blaustein, and Spinnazola (2013) addressed the importance of clearly defined structure in the RTC environment. This includes well-defined and observable rules and expectations to be posted throughout the milieu. Posting signs and pictures throughout the campus of what programs the youth should be participating in could serve as a reminder of how they should be using their time. The Search Institute (2002) also gives recommendations on how to determine appropriate activities for youth to use their time more constructively. For example, staff should be asking the youth what activities they are interested in and would like to participate in. Moreover, inquiring about why the youth may not be participating in programs that are already set in place at the RTC. The Search Institute (2014) also provided instruction to staff, volunteers, and caregivers of youth to determine what barriers they are faced with when attempting to offer programs to youth. Also of importance, which programs are being unnecessarily duplicated in the RTC, where time could be spent on alternative activities? It is important to note that specific questions on the DAP pertaining to Constructive Use of Time are geared toward creative activities such as music, theater, and arts, youth programs, including sports, clubs, and school and community organizations, religious community, like church activities, and time at home with special activities involving family like game nights and movie nights.

The lowest mean score for all RTC youth in the Asset-Building Context is Community. The youths' supports in the context of Community is  $m=16$  and is scored as Vulnerable. According to the Search Institute (2014), the Context of Community aligns with questions on the DAP pertaining to being involved in community activities like religious groups, volunteering, sports. Mcneil, Herschberger, and Nedela (2013) suggested that getting youth and their families involved in giving back to their communities by taking part in activism for systemic change can have a positive impact. The goal of having youth work toward systemic change in their communities creates a sense of hope for the future and a sense of connectedness with the people in the communities they live in when returning from residential care. Most importantly, community involvement will empower youth to fight against and resist negative influences in their communities like gangs. It is important to note that the DAP items pertaining to the Context-Building Asset of Community do not refer to school systems as there is another context devoted to schools which RTC youth have the highest mean DAP score.

### **Limitations**

The number of youth in the mean sample for this research is  $n=35$ . However, the number was broken down into 23 females and only 12 male participants. In order to gain a more thorough understanding of what Developmental Assets youth at the RTC program are struggling with, it would be beneficial to separate males and females since their programs are different. For example, in the Category of Constructive Use of Time it is reasonable to assume that males and females would have different preferences for activities. Furthermore, not every client in the RTC attends the same recreational and clinical programs, as these things are determined by the youths' individualized treatment plans.



The fact that DAP's were given to youth at different times during their stay also poses a limitation to this study. For example, some of the DAP scores in this study were the result of a youth's first, second, or even third time taking the DAP. In order to get more accurate scores on a youth's developmental assets this study could have been a longitudinal study. However, the time frame in which the samples were collected was constricted since the youth usually stay at the RTC for a period of 12 months and this research was collected during a period of only 5 months.

Lastly, the youths' DAP scores have the possibility of being skewed in either direction. There is the possibility that some youth may not be truthful when taking the DAP because this is a tool that is a self-reporting instrument. Youth may choose to report on the positive end of the scale in order to avoid types of treatment like chemical dependency treatment or to avoid ridicule of their families and communities. Also, some RTC youth are simply not willing to admit to themselves or clinical staff that they are struggling in specific areas like the Family, Personal, or Social Contexts that the DAP addresses.

Today, the social science arena has stepped away from problem oriented frameworks and adopted strengths based frameworks. Positive youth development, resiliency, and protective factors are at the forefront of many best practices today. The Developmental Assets framework created by the Search Institute is an evidence-based practice. The findings of this study reinforce the need for strengths based approaches in residential programs working with adolescents. Using the Developmental Assets Profile, people who work in adolescent care can assess their clients for strengths and areas needing improvement in order to build more effective and specific treatment plans and programs. It is clinically significant to note that focusing on building a youth's

developmental assets is an effective way to treat youth who are at-risk or already have been remanded to residential placements.

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