

## Children First & the Asset Champions Network

*Revitalizing and expanding  
a Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth initiative  
in St. Louis Park, Minnesota.*

Compiled by Karen Mariska Atkinson

## ***History of Children First***

The seed for Children First was planted on March 16, 1992, when Carl Holmstrom, then superintendent of St. Louis Park Schools, made a presentation about the plight of young people to the St. Louis Park Rotary Club. Carl's speech was so inspiring that two entrepreneurs who were Rotarians pushed the community to dream of a way to make life better for its young people.

The question became: How does a city rally its citizens, schools, families and neighborhoods to help all children and teenagers thrive? Armed with

these questions, Dr. Holmstrom and two benefactors invited Search Institute to help St. Louis Park create a citywide effort. A year-long process of community forums, focus groups, surveys and interviews led to the creation of Children First, the nation's first community initiative organized to rally all its residents and



institutions to nurture the healthy development of children and teenagers based on Search Institute's pioneering research on developmental assets. Developmental assets are building blocks of successful development important for all youth, which research consistently shows are strongly related to positive outcomes for young people across race, socio-economic status, gender, age, family composition and type of community. (Developmental Assets, Attachment 1)

Children First is a partnership among the business, city, health, faith and educational communities in St. Louis Park. An 11-member Executive Committee comprised of representatives of the founding partners provided direction with the help of a staff of one. Executive Committee members includes leaders such as the police chief, city manager, bank president, public schools superintendent, private school principal and hospital executive. Linked by the shared vision of raising asset-rich youth, this collaborative has mobilized a significant number of citizens and organizations to promote developmental assets. Since Children First was launched in 1993, more than 600 communities across the United States and Canada (and, increasingly, around the world) have launched similar initiatives.

Children First works to inspire residents to determine their role in building assets in young people. When the initiative began, this was done through a Vision Team of 40 people, half adults and half youth, spreading the message of the 40 developmental assets throughout the community. The Vision Team was co-chaired by a member of the Executive Committee and a young person. Children First's approach for the first 13 years emphasized building awareness throughout the community encouraging every individual and organization to integrate this philosophy into their programs and build relationships with young people.

Children First measured the asset levels of young people through Search Institute's "Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors Survey." St. Louis Park partnered with Search Institute and conducted a longitudinal study of St. Louis Park students between 1997 and 2001. On average St. Louis Park teens had 20.4 assets and the overall level of assets rose over the course of the study. The survey addresses a young person's whole life including how they view their

families, friends, school, community and neighborhood. The summary of the study is available at [www.children-first.org/about/results](http://www.children-first.org/about/results)

The embryonic and formative steps in the process of establishing Children First are outlined in the book, *The Children First Story, How One Community Partnership is Learning to Put its Children & Families First* by Robert D. Ramsey, Ed.D.



### ***A Fresh Approach to Asset Building***

With broad awareness in the community, it became clear that Children First needed a fresh approach to move much more intentionally toward deepening and sustaining the capacity of the individuals and organizations of the community to engage in asset-building actions. Through this, they would create opportunities, environments, and community norms and networks that make asset-building a way of life across the community. While members of the Vision Team were committed to healthy youth development, they didn't have a clear direction as to how they fit into the Children First vision.

The approach needed to continue to evolve as Children First progressed and responded to changing dynamics in the community. In particular, Children First recognized the need to shift the emphasis from raising awareness toward capacity building with an intentional focus on developing a sustainable infrastructure within organizations themselves to support asset building across multiple years and decades.

 ***The goal is to “institutionalize” the initiative to achieve sustainability.***

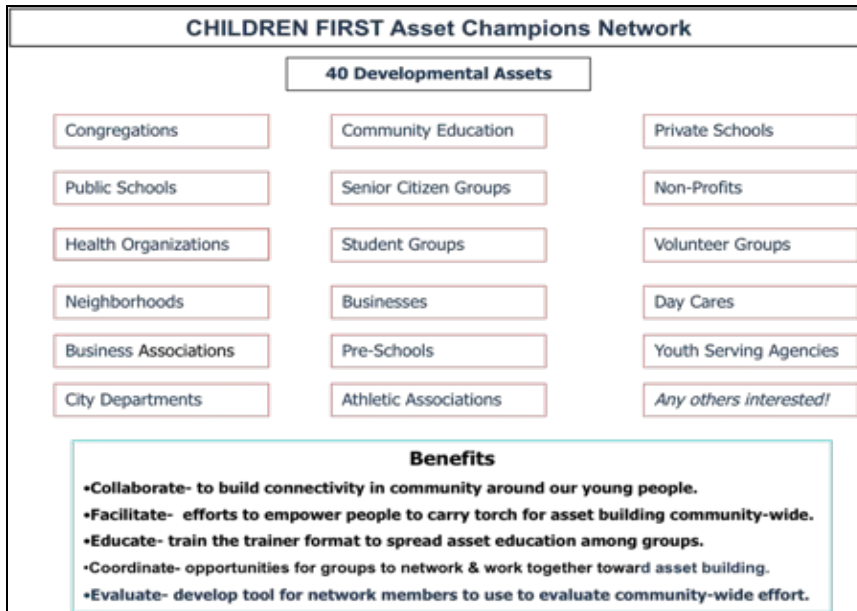
In addition, Children First needed to develop new funding streams to support asset building in the community. Since its inception the majority of Children First funding came from two entrepreneurs. These benefactors understood Children First was in the business of community change through spreading the asset building philosophy. In 2006, the initial benefactors were no longer in the picture due to death and failing health. Children First needed to expand its funding base. In addition, the community was ready for a new approach to refresh the effort, move toward deeper transformation of systems in the community and have a more sustainable economic infrastructure.

In 2007, the Asset Champions Network became the vehicle to facilitate this new approach.

### ***What is the Asset Champions Network?***

The Asset Champions Network is comprised of individuals from all types of St. Louis Park organizations responsible for championing asset building in whatever way makes sense in their organization. Asset Champions tie into systems, ignite asset-building capacity among others in their organizations and uncover productive partnerships. The Network gives Asset Champions in all of another when appropriate.

The Asset Champions Network systematically deepens asset building in sectors/organizations across St. Louis Park so that more citizens are aware of the importance of the assets, they act on that awareness and, as a result, St. Louis Park young people are happier and more successful as the number of assets they possess increases.



The Asset Champions Network:

- Builds connectivity in the community around young people.
- Increases the level of assets in all of our young people in St. Louis Park.
- Deepens asset-building efforts.
- Broadens asset-building efforts, reaching new audiences.
- Empowers more people to carry the torch for asset building.
- Includes people from under-represented communities.
- Sustains the Children First philosophy in St. Louis Park by building capacity so many people in St. Louis Park are “the face” of Children First.
- Provides networking opportunities for Asset Champions to share ideas and resources with each other.

Members of the Network are individuals from all types of organizations in St. Louis Park who are committed to making life better for young people by increasing their developmental assets. Network members are all ages, including youth themselves, from a broad spectrum of organizations. All infants, children and young people in St. Louis Park benefit from this web of asset support spanning the entire community.

## ***Launching an Asset Champions Network - 2006***

### **Hatching an Idea**

In the spring, Children First had informal input meetings with a variety of people in the community. Children First leaders had the idea of an Asset Champions Network, but about 15 people helped massage the concept and provided input as to who should be included.

### **Opinion Leaders Weigh In**

Late June, a “knowledge & influence” meeting was held with opinion leaders. It was hosted at the local hospital. With personalized letters a group of community leaders were invited to attend. The invitees included elected officials, representatives from youth serving agencies, civic clubs like Rotary, business people, community activists, city and school representatives and young people. All of these people knew about Children First to one degree or another. The purpose of the meeting was to get “buy in” and input from St. Louis Park leaders. The expectation was not that they all would be trained as Asset Champions, but Children First wanted them to be part of the buzz as this idea spread into the community. If someone asked them about the Asset Champions Network, these leaders could share ground floor information and their endorsement of the concept.

The meeting started with a welcome, self-introductions and a discussion about “What is Children First to you?” Children First’s youth co-chair facilitated the discussion. The coordinator then explained the Asset Champions Network format and why we were headed in this direction. The adult co-chair, St. Louis Park’s city manager, asked for feedback.

The meeting closed with a questionnaire for participants to complete asking them to identify those who should be involved, groups that should be contacted, if they or someone from their organization would be an Asset Champion and if they had resources to help with training, technology, publicity or funding.



***Thirty-one people attended the session and their feedback was a ringing endorsement for where Children First was headed.***

### **Taking it to the streets**

The intention was to take three months to recruit people to be part of the Asset Champions Network. As the first couple months moved on, it was evident that more time was needed. It was important to reach as broadly as possible so that people from a wide range of organizations could be part of the ground floor of the Network. Representatives of Children First spoke at established meetings (senior citizens advisory, school groups, Rotary, Kiwanis, city department heads, principals, chamber of commerce, student groups), went to National Night Out parties and neighborhood meetings. An announcement appeared in the local paper and invited citizens to meetings where the concept was explained. The police chief sent a letter inviting neighborhood leaders to become involved.

During this time, the Children First coordinator was making contacts with everyone and all types of organizations in the community to invite them to be part of it. Sometimes Executive

Committee members tag-teamed with the coordinator at these meetings. Whether or not the coordinator went with another person, she had the support of the community's top leaders as she went to organizations asking for their involvement. For the one-on-one meetings, sessions were held with decision makers in organizations, like the head rabbi or executive director. The concept was shared and the organization was invited to be part of the network. It was also explained that these top leaders weren't expected to be the Asset Champions. These people have many things pulling at them and so they were encouraged to invite a staff member or volunteer to represent their organizations. These meetings were important because they educated community leaders about the Network before it was launched, gaining their endorsement and it was demonstrated that their involvement was valued. In addition, the person they selected to participate felt honored in being named as the representative for his/her organization.

 ***The most effective route to secure involvement was face-to-face meetings with a personal invitation to be involved.***

Special attention was paid to drawing out our Orthodox Jewish community, communities of color and immigrants. St. Louis Park has long been known as a welcoming community and has a large Jewish population served by several synagogues in the city's nearly 11 square mile footprint. While the community had 10 percent residents of color, a third of public schools students represented communities of color. The launch was to represent Children First's best effort in drawing the whole community in to this important initiative. For that reason, the recruitment period was extended. A total of six months was allotted to educate, communicate and recruit for the Asset Champions Network.

Simultaneously work was being done on fundraising and branding.

### **Fundraising**

As described earlier, one of the reasons Children First moved to this format was to enliven Children First and find new ways to fund the initiative. A committee worked on figuring out the best way to contact funders.

The first group who was educated on this need was the city council. (Several members were at the knowledge and influence meeting.) At this point in time, there were three local nonprofits with unprecedented financial needs. The city council stepped up and offered each a \$20,000 matching grant. The grant would match new funds acquired, not those from current funders. This grant provided Children First a tool with which to call others in the community to provide financial stewardship.

The Park Nicollet Foundation, connected to a local hospital and large multi-specialty clinic, is Children First's fiscal agent and has been active in Children First since the beginning. As fiscal agent, the Foundation is not Children First's sole funder, but all funds raised are held in an account at the Foundation and donors are able to take a tax deduction. The Park Nicollet Foundation is well respected in the community, provides its services for free as a Children First

partner and provides financial work that otherwise would be added to the workload of Children First's staff of one.

In August, a meeting was held with other foundations in the community and civic groups that provide grants to nonprofit endeavors. Two leaders, a former state legislator well known in the community and the city manager who was the co-chair of Children First, hosted the meeting. The goal: to get each organization to make a three-year commitment of \$5,000 each year. Seven service clubs and two local foundations were invited.

 ***The City Manager explained Children First is an economic development tool. If St. Louis Park isn't a good city for children to live in, it's not a good city for anyone.***

The meeting was run by the two hosts along with two members of the Children First Executive Committee. The coordinator was present in a support role. The meeting's content was a reminder of past accomplishments and gratitude for attendees' support (financial and/or involvement) and frank discussion was held about Children First's need for funds to take the initiative to the next level. A description of the Asset Champions Network ensued. The former legislator provided a testimonial as to why Children First was important to him and the community.

The closing message was:

1. We are looking for three-year commitments.
2. We are, and want to continue to be, the premier asset-building initiative in America.
3. We need help to fund this new format.
5. Have a matching grant from the city and a grant from the hospital foundation.
4. We need this local commitment when we go out to corporate foundations.
5. We would like your commitment by November 1.

As the meeting was closing, one organization made a three-year commitment. The meeting ultimately resulted in a total of four organizations making \$5,000 three-year commitments. In addition, through one-on-one meetings, two individuals made similar donations. With this local commitment, we started seeking regional foundation support for the additional funds needed.

While searching on line, the coordinator discovered "civic engagement" grants available from The Otto Bremer Foundation. The description of the grant's focus described what Children First was trying to accomplish. Many people provided input in writing the grant. Fortunately, the Bremer Foundation understood the vision and awarded Children First a three-year grant. The initiative had financial stability thanks to the generosity of the Bremer Foundation and other local funders.

### **Branding**

A local advertising agency offered to help create a brand about the Asset Champions Network. The agency was involved starting in August, continuing until the document was approved by the Children First Executive Committee in November. This process included a series of meetings with the ad agency working on a brand promise statement, vision and mission.

 **Children First is an initiative not a program.**

The group that worked on this included more young people than adults. The young people were able to articulate the need for the promise statement to reflect Children First's status as an initiative and not a program. The group came up with a tag line that was formatted into the existing the logo.

- **Brand Promise Statement:** We are committed to supporting and bringing out the best in our youth by championing their positive development in a thriving, kid-centered community.
- **Vision** (Big Ultimate Goal): All kids in St. Louis Park get the care and support they need to grow up happy, healthy and successful in a thriving community.
- **Mission:** We accomplish this by enlisting the support of the community to create a network that champions Search Institute's 40 developmental assets through individuals, families, and all types of organizations in St. Louis Park.



## Marketing

Typical marketing strategies were employed including use of the Children First online newsletter and newsletters and publications of Children First partners such as the school district, city, hospital, and businesses. Press releases were sent to local and regional media.

In November, a parent who had heard about Children First through his daughter's school offered pro bono graphic services. While he created graphics for businesses, he shared his interest in comic books and drawing super heroes. The coordinator thought, when would we ever need something like that? She soon found out.

## Launch of the Network - 2007

An intergenerational group planned the launch of the Asset Champions Network at a special meeting in late January held at the Jewish Community Center. As the group met, one of the young people shared her vision of an Asset Champion as a super hero. She envisioned a skit with an adult and young person dressed up as super heroes describing the role of an Asset Champion. Who could we get to do this? The city manager and coordinator knew immediately, and before getting home after the meeting, the mayor was confirmed to fill this role.

The meeting drew more than 100 people and was hosted by Children First's adult and youth co-chairs. The purpose was to launch the Network in a fun, informative, community building way.

To set the tone, the session opened with the clip from the movie Lion King to set the tone, (the song Circle of Life where the new-born lion Simba is presented to the community). The co-chairs introduced the new logo and branding statement. To ensure community building, people were asked to switch tables twice during the meeting for roundtable discussions about their impressions of Children First and what they were going to do this week to build assets.




A major component of the evening was to educate and encourage people to participate in the new Asset Champions structure. This was done through a skit. (Skit script, Attachment 2) The mayor and a high school student dressed in red capes explained the role of an Asset Champion. Two young people shared stories about how asset building impacted their lives. The program concluded with the opportunity of a next step, to be trained as an Asset Champion and people had the opportunity to sign up for training on one of three dates. The event concluded with a slide show of the Circle of Life playing with images of St. Louis Park youth.

### **Training**

To officially become an Asset Champion, a person needs to participate in a 2.5 hour training. (Training agenda, Attachment 3)

After the launch of the Asset Champions Network, three trainings were offered, one in the morning, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. Many Asset Champions include this role as part of their jobs so they prefer to meet during the day. Others, such as students and residents, need the option of attending evening sessions. In March Of 2007, we trained 83 Asset Champions. The purpose of the training is:

To educate Asset Champions about Children First and the 40 developmental assets while equipping them with tools and formats necessary for them to feel comfortable in the next steps of sharing the message with those with whom they work, volunteer or go to school. The training will be accomplished in a fun, relaxed environment that will also afford the asset champions the opportunity to become acquainted with one another.

 ***Lots of good things were already happening for kids. The importance of the network is the common language of Developmental Assets, which makes actions intentional.***

Documents from the training are attached. (Asset Trivia, Attachment 4; Ice Breaker from training manual, Attachment 5; Commitment form, Attachment 6)

## **After the Training**

Asset Champions are trained, and, now what? Children First has several tools in place to help keep them inspired. The most important of which is gatherings that enable Asset Champions to connect with one another. Champion Charges are held monthly. While there is a format, they are relatively informal with the objectives of: 1) connecting Asset Champions so they become acquainted with one another; 2) giving them a forum to share what they are doing to build assets; 3) offering a place to get input and advice as to how to further their efforts, which in some cases requires connecting with others.

Champion Charges are held monthly, alternating between evening and day time meetings. Once a year, the Children First Annual Meeting is a place where a large contingency gathers. The annual meeting has a set program, offers a time to celebrate, but again has a focus on networking. One year Dr. Peter Benson, president of Search Institute shared information on his Sparks research. The next year an intergenerational panel led by Children First's youth co-chair, shared their insights into Sparks followed by roundtable discussions led by high school students.

Asset Champions receive a monthly online newsletter, which highlights what they are doing as well as general Children First information. Asset Champions have a place to connect on facebook and are emailed updated rosters listing all members of the Network.

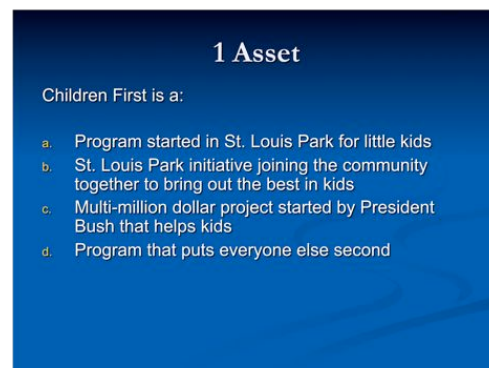
Asset Champions also have opportunities to be part of committees that provide planning, fundraising and marketing expertise to the overall initiative.

## ***Low-cost, high-impact marketing***

This is serious work, but being a community initiative for youth, offers a lot of leeway in marketing. Children First does not have a dedicated marketing budget, but several low-cost, fun, innovative ways to share the message have been developed. All of these marketing ideas have the handprint of youth on them. The items become tools for Asset Champions to share their message and vehicles to educate the wider community on the importance of the 40 Developmental Assets. They have the additional benefit of being recruitment tools for the Asset Champions Network.

## **Who Wants to be an Asset Builder?**

The well-known t.v. show, Who Wants to be Millionaire, was tweaked with a power point presentation and young people as host and contestants are pulled from the audience. The questions focus on Children First and the 40 Developmental Assets. The winner accumulated 40 assets (in 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 40 increments). Life lines are offered, but most answers are obvious with potential responses including humor as well as information.



## Postcards

As a way to spread the word about Developmental Assets and reinforce the actions of people who build those assets in young people, either naturally or intentionally, a postcard was created. The idea was to have young people send a thank you note to important people in their

lives. The postcard includes information about the assets. Several adults have confessed that they use the postcards themselves, to thank adults who are important in their children's lives. Asset Champions have used the postcards in church groups and after school programs for young people to write notes. How do people feel when they receive such a tribute? Win, win.



book with a brief description of which asset they help build and how. Super heroes included high school students, a police officer, bank teller and Holocaust survivor. The coloring book was bilingual, with Spanish translation by teachers from the Park Spanish Immersion School.

During Children First's 15<sup>th</sup> annual Ice Cream Social, the super heroes dressed in red capes were introduced to the crowd. The coloring book premiered and the super heroes became instant celebrities when children asked for autographs in their coloring books. A local bank held a coloring contest during the summer and the young winner was more excited about meeting the bank teller super hero than she was to receive her prize.



The project lived on when two high school students developed a project inviting each super hero to have a child color his or her page. The colored pages were framed with the artists' photos and bios and were displayed at a local coffee shop for the summer.



#### **40 Asset Canvases**

Four Girl Scouts working toward their Silver Award, teamed up with Children First to educate the community on the 40 assets. Modeled after a project done in Monroe County, NY, the girls contacted 40 organizations and asked each to have someone depict one of the 40 assets on a canvas. The girls were thoughtful about what organizations they invited, ensuring collectively they represented a wide swath of the St. Louis Park community. Artists included a bus driver, second graders, grocery store employees and a doctor. The assets were deliberately pre-assigned, i.e., the library was assigned asset #25, Reading for Pleasure.

The 40 paintings depicted a beautiful tapestry that was reproduced into a poster that made its debut at the 16<sup>th</sup> annual Children First Ice Cream Social. A gallery show was held at the event and artists were invited to come and wear special name tags displaying a photo of their paintings. In addition to posters, note cards were created and are now on sale through [www.children-first.org](http://www.children-first.org) The paintings are much beloved in St. Louise Park for two years were



a traveling art exhibit. “Galleries” included city hall, Starbucks, a movie theater lobby, senior citizens apartment, bank and clinic. The art also was featured in the 2009-10 St. Louis Park City/School calendar, a budgeted item created by those two entities each year. The calendar, which is mailed to all the city’s households, included information about the Children First and the Girl Scouts’ project. This whole project was funded through a \$4,500 local arts grant.

### Sparks Flash Mob

During their annual fall retreat, the Youth Development Committee (YDC) members were trained as Asset Champions. The YDC is comprised of fourth through twelfth grade students committed to leadership and community service. During the training they learned about Search Institute’s research on Sparks. A Spark is a special quality, skill or interest that lights us up. When young people (or adults) know and nurture their

Sparks they experience joy and energy. As Asset Champions, the YDC determined their role to be educating the wider community on Sparks. They decided to create a flash mob, a seemingly spontaneous performance that occurs in a public place. The public place was the 17<sup>th</sup> annual Children First Ice Cream Social. Eight high school YDC members worked with a consultant to develop a “boom wacker” performance and chant. They in turn taught this to 50 other YDC members and their friends. Flash mobs and boom wackers? It’s not easy to describe, so check it out on YouTube at



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUYrKd7j0-4>

In addition, it was performed at the St. Louis Park summer festival’s parade where the group won the Spirit of the Community award.

While the YDC was flash mobbing, another group of enterprising students created a “There’s a Spark for That!” fair. The students invited people with a variety of Sparks to have a table at the event to talk about how they developed their Spark and demonstrate it. Fair participants included a high school pole vaulter, a well-known chef and a naturalist.

## ***What's this Ice Cream Social?***



The Children First Ice Cream Social is a historic event that is the pinnacle of the year for Children First. Held on a Sunday afternoon in May, it is a day of family fun where 4,000 free ice cream cones (a local freshly blended brand and a kosher brand) are served. During the 17<sup>th</sup> annual event, ice cream provider, Sebastian Joe's, created a signature blend for Children First called DreamSPARKSicle. There is entertainment organized by St. Louis Park Friends of the Arts and local organizations have booths where they

feature activities like face painting and crafts. The Parks & Recreation Department hosts a kid's garage sale, where young people sell gently used toys and clothes. AAA Minneapolis is a major sponsor. Many local organizations partner with Children First to make this event a reality.

## ***Connections for Asset Champions***

When trained, Asset Champions are told they can go back and focus internally on asset building within their organizations, or they can connect with other Asset Champions to collaborate on asset building activities. Anything counts!



Being part of the Network is powerful. During the training it is obvious how much people enjoy being part of this multi-sector group. At one table, a pastor sat next to a police officer, who sat next to a bank employee, who sat next to a young person. The energy in the room is palpable. All of them see these connections as an added perk that can support their asset building endeavors as well as other community activities.

Examples of connections include:

- The volunteer director of the local food shelf connected with a youth leadership group coordinator. The two worked together to bring the youth leaders to volunteer at the food shelf.
- A school counselor met a teen life coach. The two developed a support group for students with ADHD focusing on important assets such as planning and decision making.
- A neighbor became more aware of the needs in the city and starting working with young people at a local community center.

- Another neighbor connected with the city to create a community garden. Neighbors planted vegetables with the help of young people. Pumpkins were planted so that each neighborhood child would receive one for Halloween.

The power of the Network is that it instantly multiplies efforts in the community for young people. Community members know best what needs to be done and the Asset Champions Network gives them permission to go out and do it.

### **Goals & Results**

Measuring the Asset Champions Network really comes down to measuring how organizations and the champions (who are mostly adults) have changed. St. Louis Park has conducted Search Institute’s Attitudes & Behaviors survey many times, but with this project Children First looked for ways to measure the impact of the Network. The following goals were set.

**Goal # 1: 50 organizations will commit to involvement in the Network ensuring that this new innovation strengthens and sustains the Children First philosophy, deepening the asset building philosophy in St. Louis Park.**

**Immediate Success:** Representatives will be trained in the asset philosophy, share it with others in their organization, and utilize the approach to transform and strengthen their relationships, climate, programs and practices, and partnerships on behalf of young people. Each will have the opportunity to work with at least five new people as they build this web of support for children and youth. Each champion will identify and commit to a specific asset-building strategy that fits their group.

**Long-Term effects:** New efforts and systematic changes occur in the community to support our young people because Asset Champions intentionally transform their organizations through an asset-building approach. Youth will experience more of the external assets in the categories of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations and constructive use of time.



**👉 During the launch of the Network in the Spring of 2007, 86 Asset Champions were trained from 54 organizations. Four years later there are 178 Asset Champions from 69 organizations.**

Examples of how Asset Champions instilled the philosophy within in their organizations include:

- The school district’s community education department was the first organization in the community to have all its managers and coordinators trained as Asset Champions. Other organizations have followed suit.
- A church youth leader put together a committee to look at how the congregation builds assets. The process intentionally got people talking the asset language. One result was that the Sunday School program was restructured so that children had contact with several caring adults each week instead of a single Sunday School teacher.
- Parents identified which of the assets they addressed through projects sponsored by the Parent Teacher Organizations at their school. Building a common language among themselves, and the school community, they cite the specific assets promoted through each program.
- Staff at the nature center reviews the list of assets prior to summer programming so they keep these front and center as they work with young people.

**Goal #2: 10% of Asset Champions will be from racially, ethnically or culturally diverse backgrounds.**

**Immediate Success:** The asset message will be shared in under-represented communities. Asset champions will interact with community neighbors they have not yet met.

**Long-Term Effects:** Supporting Vision St. Louis Park’s Diversity focus: “St. Louis Park is a city where everyone feels and experiences a sense of belonging. People of all ethnic backgrounds and religious faiths feel free to live, work and play according to their beliefs.” The Asset Champions Network will provide greater community connectivity among all populations around our young people. Youth of all backgrounds will have a variety of asset-rich experiences communitywide.

<b>Demographics of Asset Champions:</b>	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2009-10</b>	<b>2010-11</b>
African American	5	3	12
Multi-racial	1	1	3
Immigrants	5	4	3
Latina/Latino/Hispanic	1	0	2
Total percentage of the Network	10%	8%	12.5%
Christian	91%	91%	95%
Jewish	9%	9%	4%
Other			1%
# under the age of 18	9	4	30

<b>Demographics of people Asset Champions have an impact upon:</b>			
African American	52%	40%	37%
Asian	34%	24%	18%
American Indian	13%	20%	14%
Caucasian or White	92%	78%	55%
Latino/Latina/Hispanic	42%	29%	28%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	9%	9%	10%
Multi-racial	49%	40%	33%
Percent that work with immigrants	26%	20%	24%

**Goal #3: 10 organizations will engage in deep transformation work as an outgrowth of their Asset Champion Network participation.**

**Long-Term Effects:** This could not be measured intermediately and Children First didn't know exactly what this would look like in the long term.

How long does deep transformation take? Children First is still trying to determine this. The best example is what St. Louis Park High School has done through its Building Assets Reducing Risks (BARR) program aimed at successful high school transition. The BARR program was established more than a decade ago focused on increasing the number of assets of all 9<sup>th</sup> grade students with short-term outcomes of reducing chemical use, academic failure, discipline referrals and improving attendance. Strategies include restructuring 9<sup>th</sup> grade into blocks to reduce class size and have a team of core subject teachers that teach the same 80 students; establishing I-time, a weekly class period focusing on social competencies; starting a 9<sup>th</sup> grade Respect Retreat; hold a weekly meeting of the block teachers and a social worker to review each student and intervene as necessary. When the BARR program began, 44 percent of freshmen were failing one or more class. Since its implementation, the failure rate is below 20 percent.



In 2011, a federal "Ideas in Innovation" (i3) grant was secured to further expand the philosophy of the BARR program to upper classmen. Staff is putting groundwork in place for strategies to be implemented throughout the school.

## **Measurement**

Tools that are used to measure the success of the Asset Champions Network are focused on what Asset Champions, mainly adults, are doing to change the way they go about their business with young people.

### **Online Survey**

To measure Asset Champions commitment and learn more about what they have done to incorporate asset building into their organizations, an online survey is sent annually to all Asset Champions.


What Asset Champions say through the survey

- Being an Asset Champion has made me more intentional about how I relate to youth on a daily basis.
- I truly believe I have a responsibility to kids.
- My father was not there in my teenage years, but positive adults in my life helped me to make it, so I like to support children in similar situations.
- I now better understand young people's perspectives and have learned to embrace it because they will one day be us.
- I believe in the assets and find being a champion enjoyable and rewarding. Plus I've gotten to meet other St. Louis Park folks that I would not have met other wise.
- I'm an Asset Champion because I believe in it philosophically, it's celebrated community-wide, and known for its strong leadership.
- This philosophy has captivated and inspired me since it first began. I believe in it to the very core of my being.

### **Walk-Through Observation**

A tool was developed to observe how the assets are integrated into programs and activities for youth. Recently piloted, the tool names which assets are addressed citing specific examples. The walk through observation was conducted by the coordinator and a volunteer, but the goal is to have organizations conduct their own observations to increase the intentionality of asset building. During an hour-long observation, the Asset Champion can select one or two areas to be assessed: positive adult-youth relations, peer support, clarity of presentation, behavior management, opportunities for decision-making and leadership, youth engagement and space/location quality. Asset Champions are encouraged to "pay it forward." After an observation is conducted of their program, they are invited to conduct one for another Asset Champion.

The process is a valuable one. Asset Champions whose programs have participated in the observation process like its focus. Since it reports back to staff specific examples of how assets are being built with components of the program, it focuses again on the importance of intentionally building assets.

 ***Being involved in the observation was reaffirming said one Asset Champion. It provided great feedback. Our program is focused on asset building and the observer saw that intentional focus.***



## **Recognition**

America's Promise Alliance was founded in 1997 with Chairman General Colin Powell and chaired today by Alma Powell. America's Promise has recognized St. Louis Park for its commitment to young people. Four consecutive times, St. Louis Park has been named one of the 100 Best Communities in America for Young People.

In 2010, the trophy for this award was a giant orange pushpin. Two high school students brought the trophy to life, naming it Perrie P. Push Pin and launching a facebook page. Perrie moves about the community discovering all the places that make it such a great locale for young people. Perrie's profile photo shows where the trophy has visited. Perrie's followers have the chance to guess where the photo was taken and the first correct answer wins a prize.



## **The involvement of young people**

Young people are involved in Children First bringing vitality and innovation to the initiative. The Champions Coloring Book, Who Wants to be An Asset Builder game show, the 40 asset canvas project, Perrie P. Push Pin--- they were all projects led by young people. Some young people volunteer for special projects, others tie assets into what they are involved in like the Youth Development Committee. Still others hold a top leadership role in the initiative.



Children First has an adult community leader who co-chairs Children First with one or two young people. The youth co-chair puts her or his imprint on their leadership role. They work with their adult counterpart (such as the police chief, bank president, city manager, school superintendent) in setting direction for Children First and planning gatherings for the Asset Champions. The co-chairs are equal partners and many times, the young person is out in front facilitating meetings. Some youth co-chairs have written about the importance of the 40 assets, (Kelsey's article, Attachment 7) others have taken photos. Similar to the adult leaders, they bring and share their own unique assets. The rich tradition of having adult and youth co-chairs has kept Children First invigorated in its approach.

## **Where are we now?**

The Asset Champions Network is an effective tool to spawn the spirit of Children First and have it adopted by individuals and organizations in the community. Two hundred people have been trained and currently there are 178 Asset Champions. Several have moved on due to new jobs or high school graduation. Children First continues to train new Asset Champions and expand the reach of the assets to young people in the

community. In fact, the biggest source for identifying potential Asset Champions, is current Asset Champions.

As with any effort, Children First continues to change things up to keep the message fresh. The goals have not changed, but we constantly look for ways that to attract the involvement of new people and organizations, including;

- An annual summer lunch-time barbeque at a local park was added in August as an informal connection point before the flurry of a new school year.
- Champion Charges were more deliberately formatted giving people a means to share experiences and to connect around activities of importance to them.
- Each of the community art projects was fabulous, and given Children First the impetus to try another one. The wonder and excitement of each project draws in new people.
- Asset Champions have, with the help of the coordinator, pulled together in sub-groups, generally by industry type.
- The annual meeting and ice cream social continue to be pinnacle events, but even they have twists and turns each year to make and keep them fresh.



Children First has been around for nearly two decades. The Asset Champions Network was created in 2007 as a way to make many community members the face of Children First and is committed to this formula because it is sensible, manageable and sustainable. By most standards this is a mature initiative, but the world of community engagement is a messy, crooked road. No one in St. Louis Park would say, “we have arrived, we have the answer.” Community members continue to be engaged and strive to make this the best city in America for all its children.





**Attachment 1**

**40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS**

<b>ASSET TYPE</b>	<b>ASSET NAME</b>	<b>ASSET DEFINITION</b>
<b>SUPPORT</b>	1. Family support 2. Positive family communication 3. Other adult relationships 4. Caring neighborhood 5. Caring school climate 6. Parent involvement in schooling	Family life provides high levels of love and support Young person and his /her parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek parent (s) advice & counsel. Young person receives support from three or more non-parent adults. Young person experiences caring neighbors. School provides caring, encouraging environment Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school
<b>EMPOWERMENT</b>	7. Community values youth 8. Youth as resources 9. Service to others 10. Safety	Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth. Young people are given useful roles in the community. Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week. Young person feels safe at home, school and in the neighborhood.
<b>BOUNDARIES &amp; EXPECTATIONS</b>	11. Family boundaries 12. School boundaries 13. Neighborhood boundaries 14. Adult role models 15. Positive peer influence 16. High Expectations	Family has clear rules and consequences, and monitors the young person's whereabouts. School provides clear rules and consequences. Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior. Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior. Young person's best friends model responsible behavior. Both parent(s) and teachers encourage young person to do well.
<b>CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME</b>	17. Creative activities 18. Youth programs 19. Religious community 20. Time at home	Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts. Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs/organizations at school and/or in community organizations. Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution. Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.
<b>COMMITMENT TO LEARNING</b>	21. Achievement motivation 22. School engagement 23. Homework 24. Bonding to school 25. Reading for pleasure	Young person is motivated to do well in school. Young person is actively engaged in learning. Young person reports doing at least 1 hr. of homework every school day. Young person cares about his or her school. Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
<b>POSTIVE VALUES</b>	26. Caring 27. Equality & social justice 28. Integrity 29. Honesty 30. Responsibility 31. Restraint	Young person places high values on helping other people. Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty. Young person acts on convictions and stands up for his or her beliefs. Young person tells the truth even when it is not easy. Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility. Young person believes that it is important to not be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.
<b>SOCIAL COMPETENCIES</b>	32. Planning & decision making 33. Interpersonal competence 34. Cultural competence 35. Resistance skills 36. Peaceful conflict resolution	Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices. Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills. Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds. Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations. Young person seeks to resolve conflict non-violently.
<b>POSITIVE IDENTITY</b>	37. Personal power 38. Self-esteem 39. Sense of purpose 40. Positive view of personal future	Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me." Young person reports having a high self-esteem. Young person reports, "my life has purpose." Young person is optimistic about his or her personal future.

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## **Attachment 2**



### **Asset Champion & Trainee Skit for launch of Asset Champions Network Script**

**Asset Champion:** *(Lifting weights and can do it easily.)*

**Trainee:** *(Tries to lift weights but can't.)*

Wow, Asset Champion you are so powerful. I am motivated to achieve and become an Asset Champion too. Do Asset Champions need Super Powers to help people get assets?

**Asset Champion:** No, anyone can be an asset champion. In fact, we need asset champions everywhere. And the more you practice asset building, the easier it gets.

**Trainee:** Do you need special knowledge to be an Asset Champion?

**Asset Champion:** In fact you do need special training and an understanding of the 40 developmental assets. But asset building is common sense and Children First will make sure you get all the training you need.

**Trainee:** If I'm going to be an Asset Champion for a group I'm involved with, what do I need to do?

**Asset Champion:** First and foremost, use your powers for good instead of evil. You should talk among your group about what you already do. All of us are building assets in young people; we just may not call it that. Be intentional. Start using the asset lingo among your group. Then add simple things that fit into the mission of your group or tweak things to make them more youth friendly. As you make decisions, keep the welfare of our young people in mind. You don't need to add big, new programs to be effective asset builders.

**Trainee:** This must take a lot of time.

**Asset Champion:** It doesn't. It takes a way of thinking and including that thinking into what you are already doing.

**Trainee:** Asset Champion, what are your worst enemies?

**Asset Champion:** That's a very insightful question my protégée. The four worst enemies are: Apathy, Procrastination, Fear...And thinking someone else will do it.

**Trainee:** What trumps it all?

**Asset Champion:** True good: putting asset-building ideas into action.

**Trainee:** You must need to be really old and have a lot of wisdom to be an asset champion.

**Asset Champion:** That’s where you are wrong my friend. We need asset champions of all ages. Young people have practical expertise that, some of us more experienced folks may lack. *(Rub your chin, thinking back)* While, just last week I was working on asset #25, reading for pleasure. My son was reading with his younger brother...and my Rotary Club listens to children read at Aquila school...then there’s Bookmark in the Park, where everyone’s encouraged to read the same book.

**Trainee** jumps in: *(during this section you can brainstorm back & forth)*  
I’m in a mother daughter book club that meets once a month.... and in grade school we had super silent reading.... My friends & I exchange books we’ve enjoyed during a gift giving exchange....

**Asset Champion:** You’ve got the idea.  
My favorite asset is #7 – Community values youth.  
St. Louis Park was recognized for this, again this week by being named one of the 100 Best Communities for Young People. I think it’s due to many efforts, Day One, the back to school celebration, and the creation of the Rec Center, which is built on Children First principles, and many other things. Even greeting young people when you see them. Imagine how this will change with all these people focusing on asset building in our community. The mayor would think this is a good idea.

**Trainee:** Wow, Asset Champion. You have a lot of enthusiasm for this. How do you recharge your asset building powers?

**Asset Champion:** You need a lot of vitamin AB: asset building. You can get that:

1. Through training that will be held several times during the month of March.
2. Then, Quarterly Asset Champions gatherings. There’s nothing like seeing asset builders face-to-face and hearing about their super powers.
3. There’s also the virtual community that has been created just for asset builders. We will meet in cyberspace and share our best practices and look for insights from others.
4. Lastly, I have to tell you it’s addictive. Once you intentionally build assets in young people, you will be looking for more ways to do it.

Now you are ready to be a real asset champion...(Trainee takes off “trainee” shirt to show “Asset Champion” shirt.)

**New Asset Champion (Formerly Trainee):** All those people in the crowd will help because it’s as easy ABC...ASSET BUILDING CHAMPIONS.

**Asset Champion & New Asset Champion:** To asset building... and beyond!



### **Attachment 3**

#### **Asset Champions Training Agenda 2:30 – 5:00 p.m.**

- 2:30 Refreshments & registration -- Name tags, training binders, paper and pens
  
- 2:40 Welcome: Thank, Overview purpose on agenda,  
Introductions (Tell something about self or ice breaker)
  
- 3:00 Background of Children First & how Asset Champions came to be  
Show video
  
- 3:15 The 40 developmental assets  
Asset Trivia, small & large group discussion
  
- 3:45 Break
  
- 4:00 The Role of the Asset Champion  
Commitment form  
Training manual review  
Next meeting  
Sign up for facebook
  
- 4:10 Training Tips & techniques  
Logistics of training worksheet
  
- 4:40 Personal Commitment – Little things form
  
- 4:50 Sharing: Stating aloud-one sentence each  
Sign commitment form
  
- 5:00 Thank you & Adjourn

#### **Attachment 4**

### **Assets Trivia**

In 2003, St. Louis Park students in 6th through 12th grade took a survey where they reported on aspects of their lives...if they found caring people in their schools and neighborhoods, what types of activities they were involved in and how they view their future, among other things. Make your best guesses to the following questions. Responses from St. Louis Park students are similar to those of students throughout the country who have been surveyed.

1. What percentage of students reported that they live in a neighborhood where neighbors care about them?  
a. 22% b. 40% c. 54% d. 73%
2. What percentage of students feel safe in their homes, neighborhoods and schools?  
a. 25% b. 35% c. 53% d. 65%
3. What percentage of the students feel that adults in the community value them?  
a. 28% b. 33% c. 44% d. 55%
4. What percentage of kids spend at least three hours a week in school or community-sponsored sports, activities, clubs and organizations?  
a. 23% b. 45% c. 56% d. 64%
5. What percentage of kids in St. Louis Park feel their parents and other adults model positive, responsible behavior?  
a. 36% b. 48% c. 71% d. 85%
6. What percentage of students feel their best friends model positive, responsible behavior?  
a. 28% b. 48% c. 72% d. 85%
7. What percentage of students are optimistic about their personal futures?  
a. 31% b. 47% c. 64% d. 70%
8. What percentage of students said that "on the whole I like myself"?  
a. 12% b. 21% c. 44% d. 81%
9. What percentage of students said that helping other people is a priority in their lives?  
a. 50% b. 65% c. 75% d. 85%
10. What percentage of students said they have at least three adults (other than parents or relatives) that they talk with at least once a month?  
a. 17% b. 46% c. 55% d. 89%

Looking Forward

# Simple Things Mean a Lot

**Sometimes** we feel like we have to make huge commitments or changes to be supportive of children and teenagers. And while major personal commitments---such as one-to-one mentoring---can have a tremendous impact, you don't need to start there. Start small. Focus on supporting young people in two ways. First chose one simple thing to show every child or teenager you meet that you care. Then, think of one young person you will -or do- support in many ways over a long period of time.

<b>One Simple Idea</b>	<b>One Young Person</b>
Commit to one easy way you can start supporting many young people now.	Choose one young person (a relative, neighbor, family friend, etc.) to make a long-time commitment to.



Once a month support in a new way:

- ☼ Call on the telephone
- ☼ Text message
- ☼ Send an email card.
- ☼ Go out for ice cream.
- ☼ Stop and visit.

**Attachment 6**

**Asset Champions Network  
Participation Commitment Form**

To ensure the success of the Asset Champions Network, we need your organization and representative to be committed to participation--- working toward connecting the community for the betterment of our young people. Organizations committed to being part of the Asset Champions Network will have one or two representatives participate in the Network.

**Asset Champions role**

- Participates in Asset Champions Network meetings.
- Attends “train the trainer” session.
- Conducts at least one asset training for organization you are representing.
- Helps organization identify how it is currently building assets.
- Possesses a watchful eye – see opportunities to foster asset building into behaviors, conversations and systems in your organizations.
- Helps implement asset building into systems in their organizations
- Recognizes and celebrates asset builders in their mist.
- Brings along a “champion in training” to be your successor.
- Includes youth where possible.
- 

**Perk for organizations participating in the Network**

- Listed on the Children First website with a link to their website.
- Receives a certificate stating participation.

**Perks for Asset Champions**

- Receives asset training & St. Louis Park data to share.
- Participates in a network of like-minded people throughout St. Louis Park.
- Receives a Children First pin.
- Participates in facebook sharing group
- Satisfaction in knowing you’re making a positive difference for our kids.

Organization\_\_\_\_\_

Asset Champion\_\_\_\_\_ Phone:\_\_\_\_\_

Email\_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address:\_\_\_\_\_

I agree to participate in the Asset Champions Network as described above.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

***Attachment 7 - Article by Youth Co-Chair***

Whenever I explain Children First to people, I try to convey that it is most significantly a way of thinking about the community and the ways we can provide for youth.

Children First has impacted my academic career in much the same way; it didn't change the classes I took or how hard I worked, but it did change how I thought about my school community.

The principles of Children First have made thanking my mentors and teachers more of a priority. I've always known the impact good relationships with adults can have, but Children First reminded me how much those relationships help me not only be a better person now, but also help me develop into a better person in the future. The statistics I've seen through Children First have made me more aware of how many students aren't fortunate enough to have one adult mentor, let alone the several I have because of my time at St. Louis Park High School.

Children First has also taught me to have more understanding with my peers. For the most part, youth don't have control over how many assets they have. If my peers don't have the tools of good behavior, an understanding of how important it is to get an education, or a conscience which causes them to apologize for mistakes, that is partially the fault of me and my community. Children First has helped me feel accountability and responsibility for my school community and my peers.

While the concepts of Children First have changed my approach to school, my work as co-chair has also changed my academic career. Through leading small group and large annual meetings I've gained self confidence and presentation skills.

I am aware of how Children First changed me, but I've also seen how it changes other people in my school. From the asset posters in classrooms to the staff members who are asset champions, Children First is in every part of the high school.

Kelsey  
Class of 2011

St. Louis Park's Children First initiative is happy to share the story of how it moved to the civic engagement model of the Asset Champions Network. In doing so, we hope that community members and those from other communities will be inspired to determine innovative ways to embrace and support and intentionally build Development Assets in young people. This manual was made possible through a grant from the Otto Bremer Foundation.

For additional information---

Children First	<a href="http://www.children-first.org">www.children-first.org</a>
Search Institute	<a href="http://www.search-institute.org">www.search-institute.org</a>
America's Promise Alliance	<a href="http://www.americaspromise.org">www.americaspromise.org</a>

