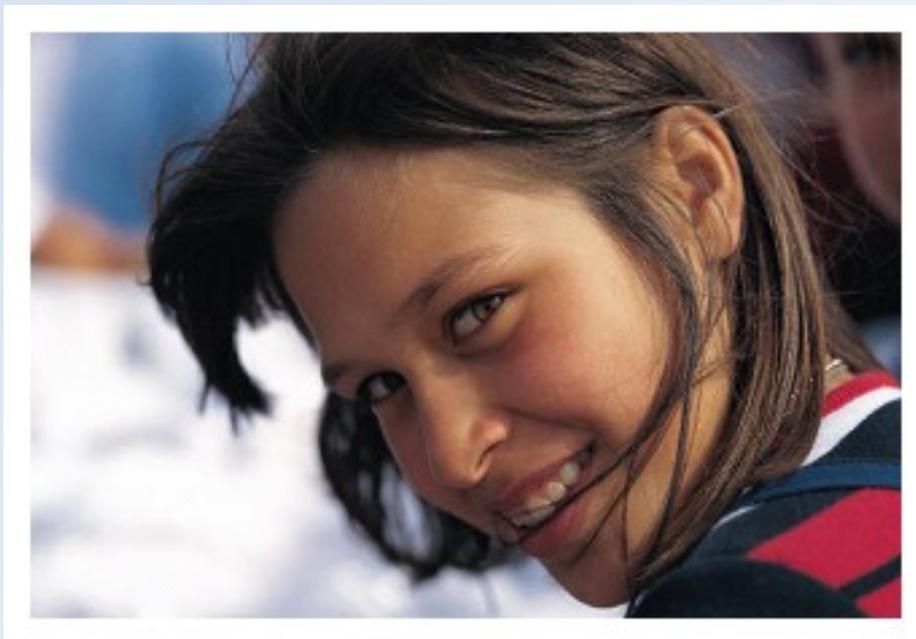


# Youth Asset Study



***Implications for Improving the Health  
of Oklahoma's Youth***

# challenging the status quo

Despite decades of prevention programming, young people remain at risk for a multitude of negative health behaviors and outcomes including substance use, sexual behaviors, violence, and obesity. Unfortunately, Oklahoma's youth do not fare well on many of these measures when compared to their peers in other states. Of the 42 states participating in the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Oklahoma high school students rank:

## 5th highest in

- ⇒ being overweight,
- ⇒ smoking cigarettes in the past 30 days,
- ⇒ being sexually active during the past 3 months, and
- ⇒ having taken steroids without a doctor's prescription;

## 6th highest in

- ⇒ using tobacco (any type) during the past 30 days, and
- ⇒ being involved in a physical fight on school property.

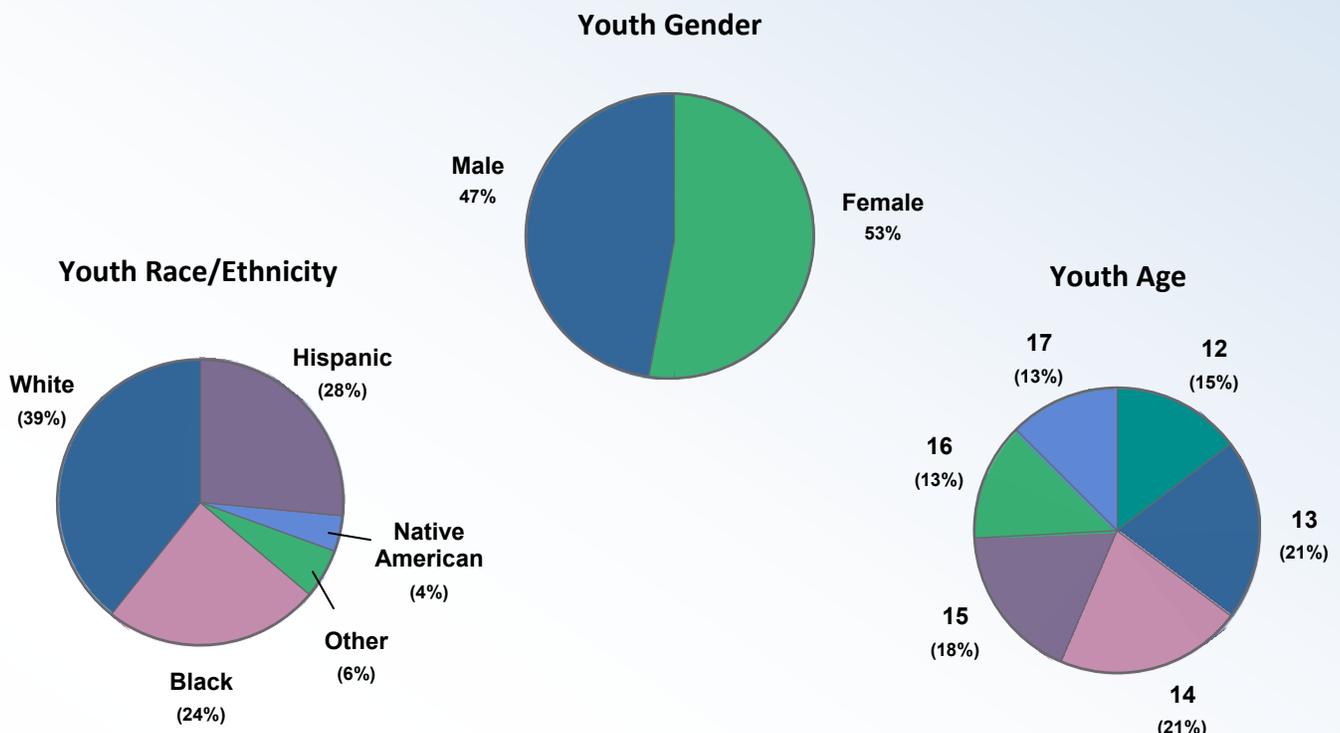
But the story of Oklahoma's youth doesn't have to end there. The *Youth Asset Study*, recently completed by researchers at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, indicates there are a number of youth assets that may contribute to health risk reduction among adolescents. The five-year longitudinal study, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is the only study of its kind in regard to quality, focus, methods, and outcomes.



The results of the *Youth Asset Study*, a summary of which is contained in this brief report, indicate many opportunities for intervention to help Oklahoma's youth shape their futures in positive and powerful ways.

*assets simultaneously protect youth  
from numerous risk factors*

Designed to investigate the relationship between youth assets (protective factors) and adolescent risk behaviors and other health outcomes, data were collected annually beginning in 2003 from 1,111 Oklahoma City youth and parents. Participating youth were 53% female and 47% male, ranging in age from 12 to 17 at the beginning of the study. Thirty-nine percent were white, 28% Hispanic, 24% African American, and 4% Native American.



# defining youth assets

Youth assets are **COMMUNITY, FAMILY, AND INDIVIDUAL** factors that help youth avoid risk behaviors and increase the likelihood that they will successfully transition into adulthood. For the purposes of this study, 17 assets were conceptualized and developed based on focus group studies, reviews of the scientific literature, and the investigative team's quantitative research.

# what are the youth assets?

## INDIVIDUAL LEVEL ASSETS

- ◆ General aspirations for the future
- ◆ Educational aspirations
- ◆ Cultural respect
- ◆ Responsible choices
- ◆ Good health practices (exercise/nutrition)
- ◆ Religiosity
- ◆ General self-confidence

## COMMUNITY LEVEL ASSETS

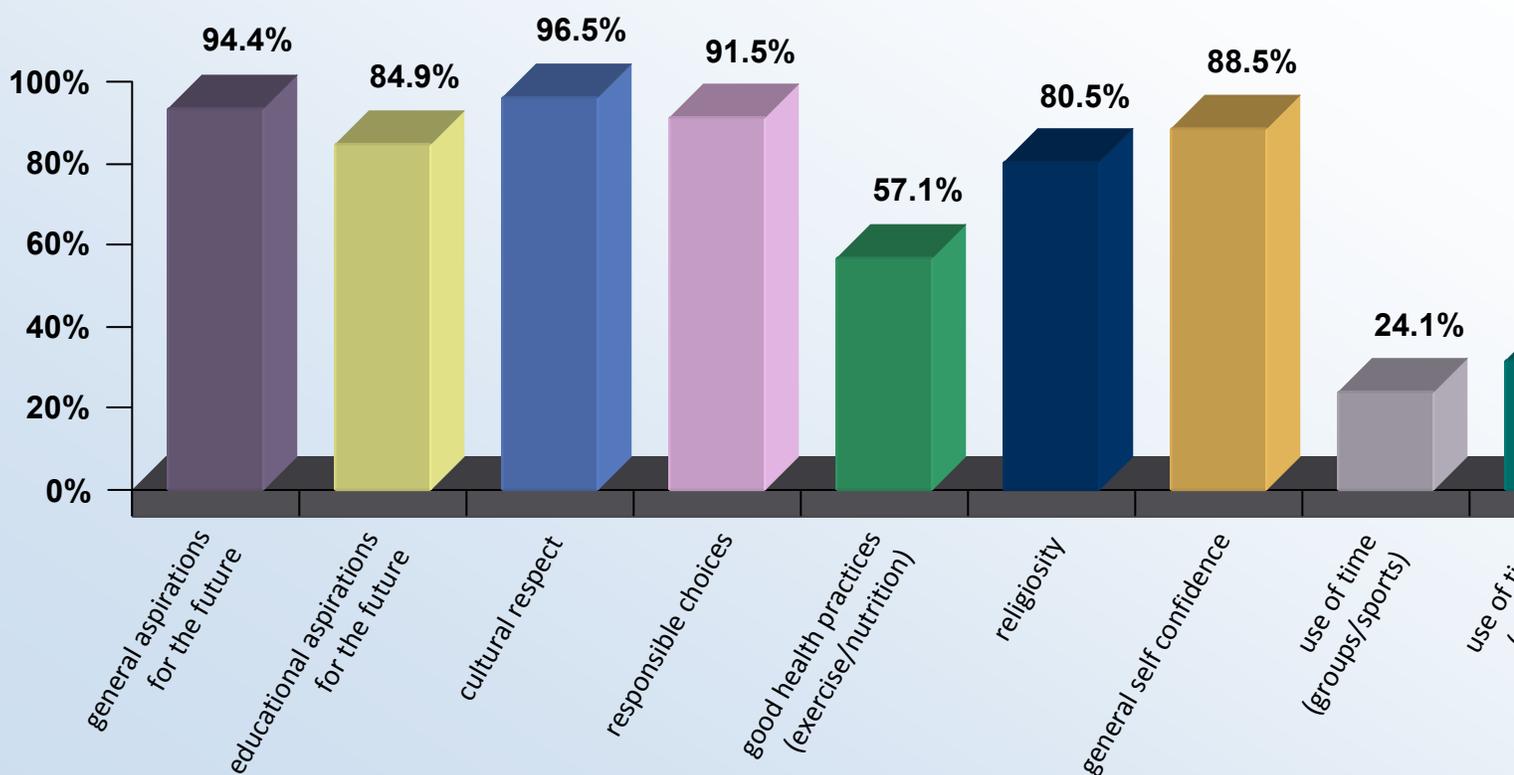
- ◆ Use of time (groups/sports)
- ◆ Use of time (religion)
- ◆ Community involvement
- ◆ School connectedness
- ◆ Positive peer role models
- ◆ Non-parental adult role models

## FAMILY LEVEL ASSETS

- ◆ Family communication
- ◆ Parental monitoring
- ◆ Relationship with mother
- ◆ Relationship with father

# how common are the assets?

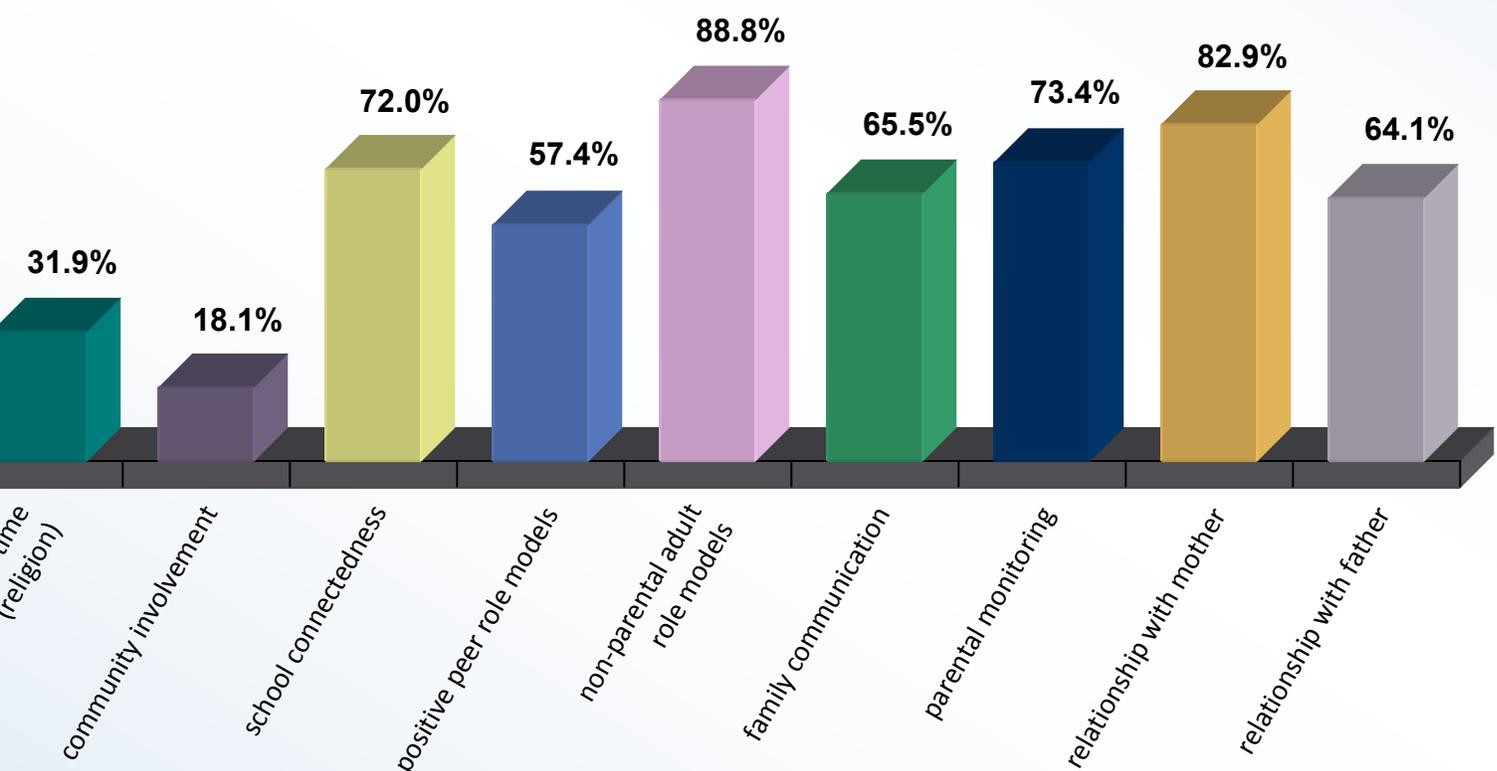
Below is a chart showing the percentage of youth reporting having each asset in the final year of the study.



# what are the advantages of the youth asset approach?

- ⇒ ASSETS PROTECT AGAINST MANY RISK BEHAVIORS AND PROMOTE POSITIVE HEALTH OUTCOMES
- ⇒ EMPHASIZES THAT ALL YOUTH BENEFIT FROM ASSETS, NOT ONLY THOSE DEEMED TO BE “AT RISK”
- ⇒ PREVENTION THROUGH ASSET-BUILDING IS MORE EFFICACIOUS AND COST EFFECTIVE THAN REMEDIAL OR TREATMENT APPROACHES
- ⇒ FOCUS IS ALSO ON THE COMMUNITY AND FAMILY ENVIRONMENT, NOT JUST ON YOUTH
- ⇒ POSITIVE FRAMING AND APPROACH
  - ◆ Promotes positive aspects of adolescents and their families and communities
  - ◆ Does not view youth as problems to “fix”
  - ◆ Reduces or eliminates potential opposition due to political, ideological or financial reasons

dy.



# single, group level, & multiple assets

The *Youth Asset Study* explored a total of seventeen assets and their impact as protective factors for youth. The longitudinal nature of the study produced a vast amount of information. Breaking the data down in different ways allows for a better understanding of the power and potential of the findings. To this end, the information here is organized into three categories: the effects of single assets (the power of one), the effects of multiple assets (more is better), and the ability of assets to promote positive outcomes (promoting positive futures).

## the power of one

The presence of even a single youth asset can have a positive impact on a young person's life: the results of the *Youth Asset Study* indicate that certain assets, when present at the beginning of the study, still provided protection from risk behaviors four years later. These positive impacts were noted across many different assets and many different risk behaviors.

- ◆ Youth who reported at the beginning of the study having a relationship with their father were almost **twice as likely not to skip school** four years later.<sup>†</sup>
- ◆ Youth who initially reported being connected to school<sup>††</sup> and having strong family communication<sup>††</sup> were about **twice as likely not to experience thoughts of suicide or to attempt suicide**.
- ◆ Youth who reported making responsible choices and having aspirations for the future were **more than twice as likely to be engaged in sufficient physical activity** in the final year of the study.<sup>†</sup>
- ◆ Youth with good exercise and nutrition habits at the beginning of the study were **1 ½ times more likely not to use drugs and almost twice as likely not to carry weapons** four years later.<sup>†</sup>
- ◆ Youth who reported having a positive, non-parental role model at the beginning of the study were **1 ½ to 2 times more likely not to smoke or drink alcohol** four years later;<sup>††</sup> and those who participated in organized group activities or sports **were 1 ½ times more likely not to use tobacco or alcohol**.<sup>†</sup>
- ◆ Youth whose parents reported monitoring their activities at the beginning of the study were nearly **5 ½ times more likely not to have become sexually active** by the final year of the study.<sup>††</sup>
- ◆ Youth who initially reported having educational aspirations for the future were **4 ½ times more likely to always wear a seatbelt** four years later.<sup>††</sup>

<sup>†</sup> among youth who were 12-14 years old at the beginning of the study

<sup>††</sup> among youth who were 15-17 years old at the beginning of the study

All reported associations are odds ratios.

## more is better



While the presence of even one asset can have a positive impact on a young person's life, the results of the *Youth Asset Study* indicate that the more assets a young person possesses, the better!

- ◆ Youth with at least 3 of the family level assets were **more than 5 times more likely not to have become sexually active**; and those with at least 2 of the community level assets were **almost 8 times more likely not to have become sexually active.**<sup>†</sup>
- ◆ Youth with 5 or more individual level assets were **twice as likely not to smoke.**<sup>††</sup>
- ◆ Youth with 5 to 7 individual level assets were **almost 1 ½ times more likely not to drink alcohol.**<sup>††</sup>
- ◆ Youth with at least 3 family level assets were **more than 1 ½ times more likely not to use drugs**; and those with at least 4 community level assets were **more than twice as likely not to use drugs.**<sup>†</sup>

<sup>†</sup> compared to youth with 0 or 1 asset

<sup>††</sup> compared to youth with 0 to 4 assets

## promoting positive futures

In American culture, the transition to adulthood is celebrated as a rite of passage, but navigating that change is a tough job for many youth in Oklahoma. Focusing on four areas of adolescent health - physical, mental, social, and financial - the *Youth Asset Study* identified assets that can help to ensure successful transition from youth to adulthood.

- ◆ The more assets youth possess, the more successful they are in transitioning to early adulthood.
- ◆ Community level and family level assets were particularly strong predictors of a successful transition.



# developing Youth Assets

*“It takes a village to raise a child.”*

As it turns out, that isn't just a pretty bit of folk wisdom. Family and community level assets consistently demonstrate the strongest potential to reduce risk and harm to youth. Developing individual level assets certainly gives youth important tools with which to build their present and future; but constructing nurturing environments through family and community connections creates a space in which young people can use those tools to the fullest benefit. Consider the following as possible avenues of action:

- ⇒ IDENTIFY & NURTURE THE TALENTS AND INTERESTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE
- ⇒ ENCOURAGE RELATIONSHIPS WITH POSITIVE ROLE MODELS, BOTH ADULT AND PEER
- ⇒ OFFER EXPERIENCES THAT EXPAND YOUNG PEOPLE'S ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE
- ⇒ PROMOTE POSITIVE FAMILY COMMUNICATION
- ⇒ ENCOURAGE GOOD HEALTH PRACTICES
- ⇒ WORK TO CONNECT YOUTH WITH SCHOOL IN POSITIVE WAYS AND ENCOURAGE EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS
- ⇒ SUPPORT PARENTS IN THEIR EFFORTS TO MONITOR THEIR CHILDREN
- ⇒ PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN ORGANIZED GROUP ACTIVITIES, SPORTS, AND RELIGIOUS OR FAITH-BASED ACTIVITIES
- ⇒ ENGAGE YOUTH IN SERVICE TO OTHERS



## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Dr. Roy Oman  
College of Public Health  
The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center  
P.O. Box 26901  
Oklahoma City, OK 73190

Phone: (405) 271-2017 x46752  
Email: Roy-Oman@ouhsc.edu

On the web:  
[www.coph.ouhsc.edu/coph/hps/yas/Home.asp](http://www.coph.ouhsc.edu/coph/hps/yas/Home.asp)

## YOUTH ASSET STUDY RESEARCH TEAM:

- ◆ Cheryl Aspy
- ◆ Sheila Cavallo
- ◆ LaDonna Marshall\*
- ◆ Sharon Rodine\*
- ◆ Lindsay Boeckman
- ◆ Janene Flabr
- ◆ Roy Oman
- ◆ Eleni Tolma
- ◆ Sarah Vesely

*\*Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy*

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