

Asset-Building Ideas for Senior Citizens

Growing older can bring many positive things: knowledge, wisdom, experience, perspective. Sharing some of this wealth with young people builds assets in a way that no other age group can. Whether you work outside the home or in, have grandchildren or don't, have a lot of money or a little, you can offer young people support, a sense of history, boundaries, and most important, a positive relationship with a caring adult. Here are some ideas for how seniors can build assets:

- Post the list of 40 Developmental Assets™ in your home. Commit to doing at least one thing each day to strengthen assets in a young person.
- Speak well of children to other adults. If you hear people making negative generalizations about young people, don't let them get away with it.
- Ask your friends about the children and youth in their lives. If you have a chance to meet those young people, tell your friends what you like most about them.
- Reach out to the children and youth in your family, whether they are your grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews, or other relatives. Send letters and e-mail messages, visit, phone them, or invite them to your home. Let them know your door is open if they want or need you. Remember birthdays and important milestones in their lives.
- Start a "Round Robin" letter for your extended family. Write a brief personal update, include a picture or two, and send it to one person. That person does the same thing and sends it to the next person, who adds her or his contributions. The letter keeps going around (getting thicker and thicker) until everyone has seen all of the entries. Encourage young children to enclose pictures they've drawn.
- Introduce yourself to the children and youth who live near you. Learn their names and greet them when you see them.
- Make spending time with children and youth part of your routine. If you take a daily walk, greet young people you see along the way. When you're at the grocery store, smile at the young children and say hi to them. Be sure to talk with one or two young people each time you go to church.
- Spend time with young people doing things you enjoy. If you like to crochet, teach a young neighbor how; If you like to tinker with cars, talk with the automotive teacher at a high school about volunteering.
- Volunteer at a childcare center, school, or church activity for children and youth.
- Become a "foster grandparent" for a family that doesn't have grandparents or whose grandparents live far away.
- Set boundaries for when you are willing to care for other people's children—including your own grandchildren. You'll be a much better asset builder if you don't feel resentful or taken advantage of as a babysitter.
- If you had a special older person in your life when you were a child, think about the things that made that relationship special. Offer young people in your life some of those same gifts.