

In This Issue

Colorado Non-Profit Uses Assets to Bridge Culture Gap

Minneapolis Church Embraces the Universal Language of Parenting

Using Assets to Reach Non-English Speaking Parents: A Rookie's Perspective

Asset Builder's Spanish Language Kit

Spread the asset message en Español with Spanish and bilingual books, posters, and handouts. You save 21% by purchasing these resources as a kit!

Expand Your Reach!

The 40 Developmental Assets are available for download at the Search website in over a dozen different languages!

Colorado Non-Profit Uses Assets to Bridge Culture Gap



How do you bring the asset message to members of your community who don't speak English? This is a question that Colorado's statewide Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth initiative, Assets for Colorado Youth, has been trying to answer since 1997.

Assets for Colorado Youth (ACY) started as a grant-making organization, giving money to community groups who had creative ideas using the Developmental Assets framework. ACY focused their efforts on communities with large ethnic minority groups across Colorado and much of their early learning came from these communities.

"Colorado has a growing non-English-speaking population who speak many different languages, but our biggest success has been with the Spanish-speaking population," says Assets for Colorado Youth executive director Stephanie Hoy.

According to Hoy, "There was a group of Spanish-speaking mothers really involved with one of our community partners, the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition. They really reacted well to the asset framework." This group of mothers thought the Developmental Assets were very similar to some of the traditions they grew up with, particularly the *dichos*, or sayings, told to them by their families.

Dichos are Spanish-language proverbs that are passed from generation to generation in many Mexican families. "Most of them are just beautiful sayings that parents would raise their kids with, just like our parents raised us with messages like 'don't put all your eggs in one basket,' but *dichos* are more beautiful and profound," says Hoy.

The mothers working with the parent coalition identified a *dicho* for every asset category as a means to share the asset framework with other Spanish-speaking parents. "We were able to talk to folks not just in their native language, but about the way they grew up and about the messages they received so they could see that the asset framework was very similar," says Hoy.

In addition to the *dichos* that corresponded with each asset category, the mothers also came up with an activity and turned it into a handout. "The handout is bilingual, so it's really fun in a mixed-language group to introduce the *dichos* and get other people to talk about the proverbs and the messages they grew up with," says Hoy.

The *dichos* were just the beginning of ACY's work with Spanish-speaking families. The organization offers all of their materials and trainings in Spanish as well as English and strives to be culturally sensitive in all of their translations. "All of our materials are bilingual and they are translated in a culturally relevant way. They are not translated by a computer; they are translated into the dialect that the parents in that particular community speak," says Hoy.

When asked what she would tell a community just starting to engage a non-English speaking population, Hoy had several tips to share:

- Don't view not being able to speak English as a deficit. "Go in looking for strengths. Sure, there is sometimes a language barrier, but that doesn't make the non-English-speaker inadequate. It's just a matter of figuring out how to communicate," says Hoy.
- Be welcoming and relevant. A commonly held assumption is that if parents don't show up, they don't care. The reality often is that non-English-speakers won't come to parent activities in schools and communities because they don't

feel welcome, they weren't invited, or it's not relevant to them. "What you have to do is find out what would make it relevant to them and extend an invitation or find out why they aren't coming."

- Look for natural connecting places in the community. Is there a local church, neighborhood, or market where non-English speaking individuals in your community feel comfortable? Work through these natural connecting places instead of trying to force new connections. Hoy gives this example from ACY's work: "In parts of metro Denver, there are neighborhoods where a lot of the non-English-speakers are most comfortable in a church, so we do our outreach through the church. In other places they have their own formal networks, so we know if we can get two or three parents involved in recruiting, then they'll bring twenty more."

The language barrier can be a difficult one to overcome, but Assets for Colorado Youth has shown that it's not impossible. In fact, with the correct approach, sharing the assets across languages and cultures can make them more relevant to more people than ever.

Minneapolis Church Embraces the Universal Language of Parenting

The congregation of Ascension Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota is a diverse mix of African, African American, Caucasian, and Latino members. The Latino population is a growing group of young families; the church currently has 450 registered families and estimates that close to 400 individuals in the church speak Spanish.

Responding to the growing Latino population, the church saw a need to assist Spanish-speaking parents with navigating parenting in a new culture. "We knew we wanted to offer something for our parents in the way of enhancing parent-child interaction," says Anne Attea, Pastoral Associate at Ascension Church. "Especially with the immigrant and any non-English-speaking community, parents are intimidated by school systems. Intimidated because you're not only learning the language, but you have to learn about parent conferences and helping with homework and all that."

To address these issues, Ascension Church began offering workshops from the Parenting Partners program, which uses the Developmental Assets in its approach, in Spanish. The congregation got involved with the Parenting Partners curriculum through an invitation from Search Institute to help with a project targeting parent engagement in school success.

Now starting their third group of workshops this fall, the congregation has reacted very well to the introduction of the Parenting Partners program, with twelve to fifteen parents participating in each class. According to parent facilitator Her-nando Escamilla, "Parents involved in the first groups are inviting other parents to get involved too."

The curriculum covers topics like communication, boundaries, discipline, and academic success. "The program highlights the negative images we tell our kids, like 'just sit down and be quiet,'" says Attea. "The parents learn how to say something else that would be more positive. That's been very helpful."

The parents have enjoyed getting to discuss their own experiences with parenting and how they were treated when they were kids. "The favorite part for the parents is when they interact with other people during the activities," says Escamilla. Getting to discuss their feelings and express their emotions about what is going on in their lives has been particularly popular with the parents.

When working with non-English-speaking populations, Attea advises people to be flexible and change the materials to suit the language they use—not just translate them. "Our congregation is mostly Mexican, but we have Central Americans and people from South America. So even something that might become common language-wise or culturally with the Mexicans may be different with the folks from other countries, so everything has to be adaptable."

The church has heard from the parents and children that the program is making a difference. "At the end of the program, we ask questions about what they think about the workshops and a couple of parents have said 'it just changed my life' and we see it in the kids," says Escamilla. "I just talked to one of the girls and she said her parents are doing things a lot differently now. They don't yell or say bad words. I'm pretty sure with this kind of program people make changes in their lives."

The Parenting Partners curriculum is helping Ascension make their church a better place for kids to grow up through educating parents and building Developmental Assets.

Using Assets to Reach Non-English Speaking Parents: A Rookie's Perspective

August Trainer Tip

Jenny Jolly, Search Institute Online Content Editor

Let me begin by introducing myself as an asset-building rookie. That's right—I'm a two-week-old member of the Minneapolis Search Institute family, and before yesterday, assets and asset building were abstract notions that I only really understood on the surface. I was still lacking a real, meaningful — or more accurately — personal connection with the concept. So like any good organization dedicated to the proper training of its employees, Search Institute sent me to a type of "summer asset camp," a place where I could go to make sense of it all. So, what is "summer asset camp," exactly?

Each summer, Search Institute hosts a training of trainers (TOT) here in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This training is a place where educators and adults who are passionate about reaching children can convene for an intensive crash course in asset building. I was fortunate enough to attend one of the most popular asset training sessions, Building Developmental Assets in School Communities, led by Search Institute asset-building expert and trainer extraordinaire, Chris Beyer. Now this particular training was designed to aid educators and school administrators, but as a training participant not employed in the field of education, I found the dynamic to be interesting, simply because I had the opportunity to talk to and learn from a group of people I probably never would have interacted with otherwise. The environment was collaborative, supportive, and empowering, and as we worked together to learn about the principles of asset building, we worked together toward a greater understanding of what lies at the core of this research-based approach to connecting with the kids around us. If I were asked to describe what the experience meant for me in one sentence I'd say, "It really put the notion of asset-building into perspective." I learned that when it comes to asset-building, it doesn't really matter who you are—English speaking or not—because anyone can do it. Knowing and believing that this idea is true, should be motivation enough for anyone to become a catalyst for change. Sometimes, all it may take is a bit of creative thinking.

One story that stuck with me was about an educator from Colorado Springs, Colorado, who came up with a brilliant idea for getting parents involved in their kids' education. Because the particular school where this educator taught was overwhelmed with low-income families, she came up with the idea to install a washer and dryer in the basement of her school. She then invited all parents to come do their laundry in the school's basement in exchange for one hour of volunteer time in the classroom per laundry visit. The parent response was stunningly high, and what an innovative way to get parents into the classroom, engaging with their own kids! Every educator out there is capable of thinking progressively, the way she did, in order to reach those who are most vulnerable.

Although language differences may make it more challenging for you to reach parents, it is absolutely worth the effort. Consider these words of wisdom that I picked up in the training: If parents are their child's first asset builders, it makes our job easier. If parents are not their child's first asset builders, it makes our job more important. When I think back to my personal upbringing, some of the asset builders who come to mind weren't native English speakers. My great aunt, a Spanish speaker, sparked my interest for the arts; my great grandmother, a Spanish speaker, celebrated everything with me—including me! If your students have asset-building adult influences in their lives then your job will be much easier. As you strive to overcome language barriers, remember that we are all allies in the grand scheme of asset building.