

Build Assets: It's the Constitution

By Derek Peterson, Director of Child and Youth Advocacy

Remember the words: "We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings the liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

These words form the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States. The words echo the sentiments of a nation full of promise. They serve as the guiding principles for the entire spectrum of individuals who call America home. Is this preamble still relevant today? By following the principles of this vision can we work together for the benefits of our communities and our children? The answer is yes.

"We, the people" reminds us that we are in this together. It asks us to consider who the people are in our neighborhoods, villages, and communities. We are to learn their backgrounds, their points of views, and their relationships to one another. Our ultimate goal is to work together, respecting one another as equal partners, in order to make the community healthy, productive, and a nurturing place for the children.

"A more perfect union" speaks directly to the value of strong communities. Here our nation's founders ask us to share some common values. From these values we will have common experiences which will connect us to one another. Building assets is a value that we share with citizens to help create a more perfect union, no matter how diverse our community. By acting upon the asset framework and focusing our efforts on the needs of children, we can form a more perfect union.

"Domestic Tranquility," according to the popular press, is in short supply these days. Peace is important because without it we cannot reach our full, individual potential. We must ask ourselves if there is domestic tranquility strong enough to motivate us to build assets throughout our community?

"Promote the general welfare" tells each of us to do our share in educating the children in our community. The asset framework gives everyone who has a stake in the community a role to fill. By building assets in children, our stake in our community increases. As our stake increases, we will be further motivated to build assets. This upward spiral is a natural process of community attachment. We ask ourselves what can we do to persuade others to promote the general welfare? What can individuals, organizations, businesses, schools, agencies, faith communities, and government services do to build assets in the lives of children and youth?

"To secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity" are the rewards we reap from a strong community. We build assets in youth because children and youth will one day inherit the world. If we have balanced our freedom with responsibility, we will reap the rewards of a safe and tolerant society. What needs to happen in our community to secure the blessings of liberty? What are the strengths of our community and how can we build upon these strengths to insure our liberty for all posterity?

Over 200 years ago, the founders of our constitution knew what we are now just rediscovering. They knew that people need to come together, work together and keep together. By building assets in ourselves, we will create a world that will afford us the luxury of being as free as we choose to be.