

## **Building Assets: How Olivia Learned to Open Her Own Milk**

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*Olivia was just one month old when we met Linda at our volunteer-run library. Over the years, we became regular visitors to the children's section. Linda always assisted in finding new books and easy readers, encouraging Olivia's growing literacy skills. When Olivia went to kindergarten, Linda's friendly face greeted my shy little girl as the teacher's aide in her classroom. The first two weeks of school went great, or so I thought. One day, Linda shared that Olivia had been throwing her milk away at the end of lunch every day. Linda asked her why she wasn't drinking her milk. Olivia confessed she didn't know how to open it, and yes, she was thirsty. Linda guided her small fingers in prying open the container and Olivia enjoyed a healthy drink with lunch every day thereafter. She could now do it "by self." With all the preparation for kindergarten, it had never occurred to me to teach my child how to open a school milk carton, or make the choice between white milk and chocolate milk! I quickly learned how important it was to have other caring adults in Olivia's life to help her navigate her expanding world.*

Parents bringing a new life into the world are filled with hope and optimism for their child's success, from first words to first steps and that first day of school. Parents are a child's first support team, but introducing other safe and caring adult relationships into a child's life is an essential asset to the child. In fact, "Other Adult Relationships" is one of the *40 Developmental Assets* that young children need to succeed. The more positive, caring adults that are part of a young child's life, the higher the likelihood that he or she will grow into a caring and productive adult.

The Search Institute's *40 Developmental Assets* offer families a framework for helping children build various skills, including crucial social and emotional skills. These positive building blocks give strength to young children, but children are unable to acquire assets without support. Young children depend on caring adults to help them acquire Developmental Assets, including relationships, values, attitudes and positive attributes. Parents, extended family members, childcare providers, community members, and preschool teachers are all part of a child's asset acquisition dream team.

Parents will benefit from building a network of caring adults for their child, because they are building support for themselves as well. It can take time to find and foster a healthy adult relationship for a child. It is worth the effort because these relationships have lifelong benefits. Parents must be selective, always keeping their child's safety and well being in mind. Parents can use some of the following activities to help young children form healthy relationships with other caring adults:

### **Family:**

- Share family photos – introduce grandma, grandpa, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Include children in phone calls, letters, cards or drawings sent across the miles.
- Make a scrapbook with your child – remember important people in their lives that don't live in your household.
- Write "thank you notes" with pictures made by the child for gifts received.

## Neighborhood:

- Go for walks – meet and greet neighbors, meet other young children.
- Invite neighbors (parents and children) to your home or yard to play games.
- Start a “book club” - encourage reading to neighborhood children and sharing books.

## Community:

- Check North State Parent’s *Going Places* for activities in your area.
- Go to story time at local libraries or bookstores.
- Volunteer in your child’s preschool - provide an “adult relationship” to other children and set an example for your child.
- Attend community events - allow your child to meet other adults at swimming lessons, play events at local parks, and programs at churches/temples.

“Other Adult Relationships” is just one of the *40 Developmental Assets* that ease a child through the ages and stages of early childhood and into adulthood with increasing capabilities and confidence. With a little understanding of Developmental Assets, caring adults like Linda can intentionally help children like Olivia acquire the building blocks that will enrich their lives, and one day help them build assets in other lives.

Susan Morris Wilson is the Executive Director of the Health Improvement Partnership of Shasta. Her goal is to create communities of "caring adults with positive expectations providing meaningful activities for children."

Deborah Peel is the Marketing and Communications Coordinator at First 5 Shasta. She supports First 5 Shasta’s vision that all children are safe, healthy, and live in nurturing environments to reach their potential. She has two grown sons and a teenage daughter.

### Asset 3: Other Adult Relationships

**All children receive love and comfort from at least one adult other than their parents. Parents have support from individuals outside the home.**

**Infants/Toddlers:** Parents have support from three or more adults and ask for help when needed. Children receive additional love and comfort from at least one adult other than parents.

**Preschoolers:** The child has support from at least one adult other than their parents. Parents receive support from people outside the home.

**School-aged children:** The children receive support from adults other than their parents.

**Learn more about the  
40 Developmental Assets:**

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