Over the past 26 years, the Search Institute has surveyed over three million youth about how they experience the 40 Developmental Assets—a research-based model that identifies basic building blocks of human development. They’ve found clear relationships between youth outcomes and asset levels in both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies; the more assets kids have, the better. Youth with high asset levels are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors (such as violence, sexual activity, drug use, and suicide), and more likely to engage in thriving behaviors (such as helping others, doing well in school, and taking on leadership roles). Assets are crucial for the healthy development of all youth, regardless of their community size, geographic region, gender, economic status, race, or ethnicity.

For my study, I chose to focus on the external assets which relate to youth’s experiences at home, in school and in the community. The questions I sought to answer were: Which assets do the youth in Macomb, Illinois currently possess? How strongly do they exhibit these assets? And which assets are they currently lacking or need to further develop? My research focuses on the extent to which Macomb, IL’s youth experience the 20 external assets as described by the Search Institute’s Developmental Assets Model, as well as how youth-serving agencies might use this information to improve their programs and services to better meet the needs of the area’s youth.