



Peter L. Benson, Ph.D.

President, Search Institute

Peter L. Benson, president and CEO of Minneapolis-based Search Institute, is one of the world's leading authorities on positive human development. He weaves together rigorous scholarship with a passionate commitment to understanding—and influencing—society to be more attentive to children and adolescents. His insight, vision, and passion have made him a widely sought speaker, writer, and consultant for major national and international events and policy initiatives.

Dr. Benson's international reputation in human development emerged in the 1990s through his innovative, research-based framework of Developmental Assets, the most widely recognized approach to positive youth development in the United States and, increasingly, around the world. His vision, research, and public voice have inspired a "sea change" in research, practice, and policy. Dr. Benson's work has inspired and guided more than 600 community-based initiatives in 45 states and every Canadian province, and on six continents. The approach has been embraced by most national youth-serving systems and is embedded in the curriculum in numerous colleges and universities. It influences state and national public policy in education, juvenile justice, public health, substance abuse prevention, and other youth-related fields.

Dr. Benson continues to break new ground in the study of human development. Most recently, he has focused on conceptualizing a new understanding of "thriving." He is also the principal investigator and co-director for Search Institute's new Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence, which seeks to advance knowledge, practice, and international interest in this important, but neglected, domain of human development.

Dr. Benson is the author or editor of fifteen books on child and adolescent development, including *Sparks: How Parents Can Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers* (Jossey-Bass), *All Kids Are Our Kids: What Communities Must Do to Raise Caring and Responsible Children and Adolescents* (Jossey-Bass), and *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (Sage). He is the lead author of a groundbreaking chapter on the theory of youth development published in the 2006 edition of *The Handbook of Child Psychology*, the most prestigious reference publication in the field. His newest book, *Vision: Awakening Your Potential to Create a Better World*, was published in May, 2009, by Templeton Press.

Benson joined the staff of Search Institute in 1978 after several years in academia. He became the institute's president in 1985. He holds a doctorate and master's degree from the University of Denver as well as a master's degree from Yale University and a bachelor's degree from Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois. Among his many honors, Dr. Benson was the first visiting scholar at the William T. Grant Foundation (2001–2003) and, in 1989, received the William James Award for Career Contributions to the Psychology of Religion from the American Psychological Association.

Dr. Benson is married to Tunie Munson-Benson, a nationally recognized expert in children's literature and literacy. They have two children, Liv and Kai, and two grandsons, Ryder and Truman.