

# HC-HY hopes to do survey

By JANE THOMPSON-SMITH  
Of The Free Press

The Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth initiative of the Quakertown area is hoping to have another student survey taken that could analyze the number of assets and risk factors area youth possess.

The more internal and external assets, or experiences or qualities, they possess, out of 40 identified by the Search Institute of Minneapolis, Minn., the more likely they are to grow up happy and successful.

Examples of external assets are family support, caring neighborhood and youth as resources. Examples of internal assets are school engagement, integrity and sense of purpose.

In October 2000 a survey was given to area public and private school students in grades seven and 11. This fall, HC-HY would like to give it to students in grades eight, 10 and 12.

Lee Rush, executive director of justCommunity, that oversees HC-HY, said through the surveys, and valuation of behavior changes in kids in area programs, the initiative will be able to tell if it is having an impact on area youth.

"We recommend doing a survey every other year," he said. "Our hope is that we will be able to measure progress over the year."

Quakertown school superintendent James Scanlon said a survey would probably be done at Quakertown, but he hasn't spoken to the school board about it yet because its members are busy dealing with building projects.

The first survey showed that the average number of assets possessed by Quakertown area youth is 19. HC-HY is hoping to up that number to 20 by 2003 and 25 by 2010.

"Our goals are modest," Rush said, "which should show people how hard this is."

He said to raise the number of assets, a general awareness is needed by the whole community.

"We need to change our interactions," he said.

HC-HY is hoping to raise awareness through the school calendar for the 2002-03 year, which will have the 40 assets as its theme. The Quakertown National Bank will do the same with its calendar.

The last survey showed that Quakertown is above the national average (18) in number of assets possessed, but Rush still considers that number low.

There were some real positive results revealed in the survey. For example, three-quarters of Quakertown area youth have a positive view of the future.

"You can't do much without some optimism," Rush said.

Quakertown area youth have a lot of family support, and are engaged in and motivated to do well in school. Two-thirds of them consider themselves to be honest and responsible.

But some negatives were also revealed.

Alcohol and drug use are up in Quakertown area youth, and violence is a problem. Students surveyed were above the national average in tobacco, alcohol, marijuana and inhalant use.

Out of 11th graders surveyed, half had alcohol to drink once or twice in the last 30 days before the survey (one-quarter of seventh graders). Three-quarters of the eleventh graders attended a party with alcohol served at it, and half had ridden in a car one or more times when the driver had been drinking.

Quakertown Community High School principal Mario Gallante said he doesn't "know if he totally agrees" Quakertown is above average.

"It might be more talk," he said. But the talk concerns him.

"It isn't the school setting," he said. "But there are weekend parties."

The drug of choice is back to alcohol, he said, adding people tend to be socially permissive with it.

"It's not a right of passage," Gallante stressed. "(Underage drinking) is against the law, and it's not in the kids' best health interests."

Quakertown Community School District carries out a zero tolerance policy concerning drugs and alcohol, but it also attempts to help students that use them. Its active Student Assistance Team has been in place for 20 years, and is one of the oldest in Bucks County.

"It's one of the best," said Gallante. "We work with a lot of kids — 100 to 150 a year."

Through the Student Assistance Team the school attempts to intervene if there are suspected drug and/or alcohol problems, through parent contact and possible counseling.

"The good news is, kids are resilient," Gallante said. "And most resist the temptation."

The school also teaches about drugs and alcohol and addiction in health classes, and has its own chapter of Students Against Dangerous Decisions. It also holds a Prom Promise at prom time in which students promise not to drink, and White Out Day, which brings home the realities of drunk driving.

The school doesn't stand for violence, either.

"Schools across the area are much more clear about what is and isn't OK than they were a decade or 15 years ago," Rush said. "If there's a fight in a school in Quakertown, they call the police. But it's school policy versus 5,000 parental policies. It's a real challenge."

Several Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth programs have been implemented in the Quakertown area in an attempt to increase assets in general. One is the BIGS program, in which older children work

with younger ones. BIGS, which is funded through a state Community Care grant, is already in place at Quakertown Elementary School and will begin at Richwood Elementary in the fall.

The Upper Bucks YMCA is currently holding an after school program for middle school age youth, and the Quakertown Parenting Center is tentatively planning to hold a workshop entitled, Preparing for the Drug Years.

justCommunity will hold its annual conference again this year called Unleashing the Power of Youth. Hundreds of adults and youth from several states attended last year to learn how to foster positive youth development.

A house bill has also been proposed that would allow youth to vote on private nonprofits such as the YMCA or justCommunity.

You may contact Jane Thompson-Smith at [jsmith@berksmontnews.com](mailto:jsmith@berksmontnews.com)