

HC-HY results revealed

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Accentuate the positive.

That's what the Quakertown Area Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth Coalition, now in its fifth year, would like community members to do with local youth. Spending time with young people, giving them a chance, building them up, teaching them skills, and teaching them about life all strengthen assets which are building blocks for the development of successful, happy adults.

This is the premise of QAHCHY — the more of 40 internal and external assets a young person possesses,

the less likely that young person will engage in dangerous behavior known as risk factors. Internal assets are usually nurtured and come from within (values, identity), and external assets come from others or the environment (boundaries, support).

QAHCHY also attempted to accentuate the positive as it unveiled the results of its second student survey Monday before a sparse crowd at the Richland Township building. The 156-question survey, given in October 2002, revealed both positives and negatives concerning the Quakertown area's youth (the assets and risk factors the youth do and do not possess). It asked 1,074 students in eighth, 10th and 12th grades

questions like this one — In my neighborhood, a lot of people care about me — and the students had to agree, disagree, strongly agree, etc.

The 40 assets are divided into eight groups, and questions regarding the external assets were broken into the following groups: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, and Constructive Use of Time.

In the Empowerment category, Quakertown was above the national average in having its youth feel safe, but below the average in the community valuing its youth, Youth as Resources and Service to Others.

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Most Quakertown youth possess about 18 assets

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Lee Rush, community mobilizer for QAHCHY, said he thinks the building of the new skate park in the borough of Quakertown will help youth to feel valued by their community.

Ray Fox, chairman of the QAHCHY coalition, added service to others increases as youth get

older, probably because of high school senior projects. Many students choose projects in community service.

The internal assets were broken into the following groups: Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Social Competencies, Positive Values, and Positive Identity.

Quakertown and the rest of the

country scored just about evenly in Creative Activities and Time at Home under Constructive Use of Time, but scored significantly below the national average in Religious Community, which is "shocking to some," Rush said. The question given the youth regarding religion asked them how much time they spend at religious institutions.

Under Commitment to Learning, Quakertown is right on target with the rest of the country in achievement and motivation, and above the national average in school engagement.

In the Positive Values category, Quakertown youth are significantly below the national average in restraint, which would keep them from drinking, having sex, etc. This is in keeping with Quakertown being higher than the national average in youth. Rush said it isn't unusual for rural areas to have these problems because there is less for youth to do than if they lived in urban areas.

The survey showed that the average number of assets possessed by youth in the Quakertown area is 17.6, which is comparable to the rest of the country. Forty-six percent possess 11 to 20 assets, 27 percent, 21 to 30 assets; 20 percent, 0 to 10; and 7 percent possess 31 to 40 assets. Those in the 0 to 10 category are typically troubled youth, with half of them likely to abuse alcohol. Only 3 percent of the youth surveyed with 31 to 40 assets abused alcohol. Forty-one percent of those surveyed with 0-10 assets abused other drugs, while zero percent of

those surveyed with 31 to 40 assets abused drugs. Meanwhile, 61 percent of those with 0 to 10 assets lived with violence compared to 4 percent of those with 31 to 40 assets. Statistics are startling however, as violence appears to affect even those possessing 11 to 20 assets, which pertains to most of Quakertown's youth (38 percent). Eighteen percent of those with 21 to 30 assets experienced violence in their lives.

The assets have the power to promote. Sixty-five percent of youth with 31 to 40 assets typically succeed in school, while 9 percent of those with 0 to 10 assets surveyed succeed. Forty-five percent of those with 31 to 40 assets resist danger, while only 8 percent of those with 0 to 10 assets do the same.

Currently 80 percent of Quakertown eighth graders are alcohol free, and almost 90 percent are tobacco free. Almost 60 percent of 10th graders are alcohol free and just over 70 percent are tobacco free.

Fifty-percent of 12th graders in Quakertown are alcohol free, and 70 percent are tobacco free. Quakertown is a little higher than the rest of Bucks County and the county in tobacco use.

Quakertown is below the county and national average in alcohol use at the eighth grade level, however, and lower than the county but higher than the national level at grade 10 with more than 40 percent of sophomores drinking alcohol. Fifty percent of Quakertown seniors drink alcohol, which is slightly above the nation and the county. Quakertown

is slightly below the national and county averages in binge drinking by 12th graders at a little over 25 percent, but this is a significant problem that tends to escalate once teens leave home for college.

Quakertown is above the national average in 10th and 12th grades in marijuana use. Forty percent of high school seniors in Quakertown smoke marijuana.

To prevent this risky behavior, QAHCHY's goal is to increase assets in Quakertown youth to 19 by 2005, 21 by 2007 and 31 by 2013, reducing alcohol and drug use by 10 percent in all categories by 2007.

Quakertown school superintendent James Scanlon said coalitions like QAHCHY are important because "all kids are at risk." He has spoken to several families in the last several years who have lost children or had them severely injured while involved in alcohol-related incidents.

"These are good kids, good people," he said.

Scanlon said parents are the No. one influence on kids, whether it be positive or negative. If parents and school personnel work together, a positive experience can result, he said.

"We have a community-full of pretty nice kids," he said, even if some of them look a little "weird" to adults.

Their unusual appearance can give adults something to talk to them about.

"The community needs to do more of that," Scanlon said.

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