

They're all our responsibility

They've been saying it since the results came back from an Oct. 2000 Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth survey that was taken by Quakertown area students in grades seven and 11.

Quakertown has a problem it needs to address.

The survey revealed that Quakertown area youth, while being more healthy emotionally in some respects than youth from other communities, are taking part in some very risky behavior. They are drinking and taking drugs more than youth do in the average American community.

This point was driven home in a startling way June 27 when 30 young adults and seven juveniles, most of whom were from Quakertown, were arrested for buying and dealing drugs after a 10 month long investigation by Quakertown police, the state police and a vice-intelligence unit and tactical narcotic team. The drugs were bought from Philadelphia dealers.

Most of the people arrested were in their early 20s, and no longer considered children. The big question is, how did they get to this place? Is it their parents' fault that they are involved with drugs? Not necessarily. But parental support, direction and encouragement could certainly help to ward off such behavior.

The key is to not let the problem get started in the first place.

"It's pretty late late for those kids," said Lee Rush, who heads justCommunity that oversees Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth. "This was a supply-side intervention, and the holes are quickly filled."

The Quakertown Community School District has been urging parental involvement in an effort to combat drug and alcohol use in the Quakertown area. Parents need to be aware of where their children are, who they are spending time with, and what they are doing. They must never allow parties with alcohol at their homes, and must be firm about drug use of any kind. Parents must make it clear that using drugs is wrong, and a scary thing that could cause their children to ruin their lives.

But what is the real reason they should tell their children they don't want them to use drugs? Because they love them.

Parents should be firm about in their stand against drugs and alcohol, but they should also be open with their children, acknowledging societal pressures. Usually, if they have helped their children to grow up feeling good about who they are, they will not be willing to take the chance of throwing themselves away into a world of drugs, despite the pressures. They'll take the high road.

Part of the problem today is, parents need to get back to putting their children first, and jobs, money and themselves second. Usually something is missing in the lives of those who take drugs: they are trying to fill a void.

So what do we do about the 20 to 23-year olds that have already gotten involved? Is it too late to help them? Maybe the Quakertown community can step in as Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth has called for. Community members need to start thinking of all local youth as their own, and gently attempt to take them under their wings, a little at a time. Little things like stopping and talking to someone on a street corner, rather than avoiding that person, could have a tremendous impact, especially if that person feels rejected by society. People can also help by volunteering to work with youth through coaching or in some other capacity.

Now more than ever, Quakertown residents should not look away. Those that tipped off the police to the drug activity didn't. The results may seem harsh, but they are the first step towards recovery in Quakertown.

Keep your eyes open, residents. Don't be afraid to do it again.