

Survey Suggests a Grim Forecast for Area Youth

Written by Jesse Virgil

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Ninety-one percent of Quad Cities teenagers do not have sufficient “developmental assets” and are therefore less likely to be successful adults, a recently released survey found. On January 27, the United Way of the Quad Cities Area announced the results of a survey filled out by 8,000 seventh-, ninth-, and 12th-grade students from nearly every school district in Scott and Rock Island counties. The survey, conducted by the Search Institute, measured the number of “developmental assets,” out of a possible 40, that the teens possessed.

“Developmental assets represent the positive relationships, opportunities, skills, and values that promote the positive development of all children and adolescents,” according to the Search Institute, an independent not-for-profit organization based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The institute created the survey and developed the concept of the 40 development assets.

According to the Search Institute, those teen who have 31 or more assets have the best chance of moving through adulthood successfully. The survey measures external factors in the teens’ lives, such as family support, adult role models, and creative activities, along with internal factors, such as planning and decision-making, sense of purpose, and self-esteem.

The surveys ask teenagers questions about their family, school involvement, and risk-taking behaviors, and measure the assets dichotomously – in other words, whether the teens “have” or “do not have” the asset.

The results of the survey, conducted in December, showed that only 9 percent of Quad Cities youths surveyed had 31 or more assets. The average number of assets possessed was 19, slightly above the national level of 18.6, according to the Search Institute’s 2003 survey of almost 150,000 sixth- to 12th-graders – the most recent national statistics. Fifty-seven percent of Quad Cities youth surveyed had fewer than 20 assets.

The Search Institute has found that teenagers with fewer assets tend to take more harmful risks in their lives. According the Quad Cities survey results (which can be found at <http://www.unitedwayqc.org>), teenagers who have 10 or fewer assets average 8.8 risk-taking behaviors, which include

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alcohol use, violence, illicit-drug use, and sexual intercourse.

On February 21 (7 p.m.) and 23 (9 a.m.) and March 2 (noon), the United Way of the Quad Cities Area will hold hour-long community forums related to the survey. The meetings will be held at the United Way of the Quad Cities Area office, 3247 East 35th Street Court in Davenport.

“We’re going to be holding the forum so people from all over the Quad Cities, different organizations, and different factors, can come in here to hear the results,” said United Way Vice President of Strategic Marketing Jennifer Nolin. “We can begin talking about ways the community can come together to increase those assets.”

The United Way has come up with three possible steps toward achieving the goal of helping area teenagers raise their numbers of assets. Those steps include a public-awareness campaign to “make asset development part of our community’s culture,” according to a statement on the organization’s Web site.

Another step is a youth-advisory group that would “help guide United Way’s efforts to ensure our methods and approaches are relevant to young people.” The last step is a “call to action,” which says that “United Way will facilitate and convene partners from all sectors of the Quad Cities to educate and provide in-depth training on the assets.”

The forums are free to the public, but registration is required. To register, e-mail (uway_meeting_notice@unitedwayqc.org). For more information on the forums, e-mail (scaldwell@unitedwayqc.org).