



Housatonic Youth Service Bureau

NORTHWEST PARENTS' CORNER

February 2010

A quarterly newsletter of parenting tips, reflections, and ideas

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HYSB Honors artgarage Founders

In October, the Donald T. Warner Community Service Award was presented to five remarkable people... Joel and Diane Schapira, Jim Meyer, Amy Jenkins, and Sandy Dennis... adults who have taken a lead role in making a difference in the lives of children. They are the founders of the Artgarage at HVRHS, an after-school studio space for students.

Joel, Diane, Amy and Jim volunteer their personal time, taking turns to keep the Artgarage open four days a week after school. If you were to stop in you would see kids actively involved in painting, drawing, making pottery, sculpture, sewing, writing poetry, and trying their ideas in a host of other mediums. Kids go to the Artgarage to work on homework, and are often seen creating visual pieces for a history project or another class assignment. Time involved in creative activities at the Artgarage helps kids unwind, and re-charge after school. The Artgarage is a place where kids can go to connect with peers in a safe, welcoming space. There are only two rules. "Be nice. Clean up."

Dr. Peter Benson, president of the Search Institute, and creator of the framework of Developmental Assets, says, "We tend to tell our children how to survive, or achieve, but there's something else to shoot for – *thriving!* Discovering the 'spark' that's inside a child and creating a life that lets his or her



unique light shine... art, music, computers, movies, politics, whatever it is – Kids come alive when they talk about their 'sparks'. It's about forming and deepening a positive identity. We should not only seek to help kids *succeed*, but to bring out the *best* in them, tapping into their personal potential and passion. Purpose and passion are the hallmarks of a life that matters, a life worth living. They are the source of joy and happiness."

That 'spark', the hidden flame that excites you, comes from the gut. It motivates and inspires you. It can become a lifelong vocation or career, or it can balance other activities to create an emotionally satisfying, enriched life. It can get kids going on a positive path, away from the conflicts and negative issues – violence, promiscuity, drugs, and alcohol – that give teens a bad name. A spark gives kids a sense of purpose and personal power, increases their self-esteem, shields against depression; and makes them feel optimistic about their future.

What are your child's 'sparks'? Talk with them. Give them a venue to express themselves. Help them discover their own abilities and possibilities. Guide them to try new things and take next steps. Reveal your own struggles, dreams and lessons learned. Help kids discover and cultivate the sparks of talent and interest that can shape the rest of their lives.



~ Jill Gibbons

The Results Are In!

The Search Institute survey “Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes & Behaviors,” offered to more than three-hundred 7th, 9th, and 11th graders in Region One, has yielded some interesting insights into the needs and strengths of young people in our community.

Jim Conway, the Search Institute’s senior trainer, came to HVRHS to explain the results and give us a deeper understanding of the students’ perspective. He describes the survey results as a lens for looking at the life of kids, a tool for improving systems which already exist in the community, and a reminder about the power of relationships. He says, “Young people see our community through a different set of eyes. Unless we are willing to see it from their viewpoint, we are missing something.”

Conway suggests a shift from thinking of young people as absorbing community assets, to young people being assets in the community; from seeing deficits, to seeing strengths; from incidental relationships, to intentional relationships; from an atmosphere of blame to a feeling of common responsibility; from serving troubled young people, to meeting the needs of all young people; from looking at youth services as professional work, to considering youth’s needs as everyone’s work.

It Takes a Village

While teens of different generations share many common experiences, what has changed for today’s teens is whether or not they have access to what they need to grow up healthy.



Their healthy development really does ‘take a village’ and one of the major changes in our lifestyles has been the way we isolate from others. “We have privatized ourselves,” says Conway, “We’ve moved from being a society on the front porch watching, hearing, aware of what is happening in the neighborhood, to a society on the back deck, secluded in our own yards. We have garage door openers so we don’t even have to get out of our cars until we are sealed inside.” This has had a profound effect on children, who they meet, and who they interact with.

When parents were asked if they would welcome the healthy involvement of non-parental adults with their children, 87% said, ‘Yes’. However, when non-parental adults were asked if they thought parents would welcome their involvement with their children, 80% said, ‘No’. In today’s society, with kids growing up in homes where both parents are working, schools are taking on the role of creating a caring environment for nurturing kids.

How Will These Results Be Useful?

There is a correlation between the number of assets a young person reported having and their behaviors. The more assets, the less likely to report negative behaviors, such as drug & alcohol use, violence, and sexual activity. The assets model offers a common language to use in addressing these issues.

So, what can each one of us do to help build assets in young people? Conway says, “Be aware of ‘moments in time’ during your day when you can be intentional about connecting with kids. Intentional individuals build assets. Do things *with* young people, not *to* them, or *for* them.”

The Power of Relationships

A significant piece of information gathered from the survey of young people in Region 1 falls under the External Assets category, the positive developmental experiences that families, schools, neighborhoods, community groups, and other organizations provide young people.

When asked whether they perceive that adults in the community value youth, only 24% of the kids said, “Yes.” It is important to understand, kids aren’t saying there aren’t enough programs, they are talking about how people look at them. They are talking about relationships.



All caring adults, parents, community residents, business people, elected representatives, and organization members can assume personal responsibility for developing sustained, caring, inter-generational relationships with young people and building assets by taking the following actions:

- Listening carefully
- Sharing respectful conversation
- Enjoying their company and distinguishing them by name
- Complimenting positive behaviors
- Acknowledging youth when they’re present
- Involving youth in decision-making

Local Assets - Heroes for Kids

Celebrating a local person who is making a difference in the lives of young people, someone who is spending time with them and building developmental assets!

Dominick Caiati is the mastermind and creative force behind an after-school program at Lee Kellogg school in Falls Village, where kids in grades K- 8 can enjoy unstructured play time, hang out, and socialize. Now in its second year, the program has grown from 10 to more than 30 children per day!

Father of an 8-year-old son, Dom was initially motivated by his son’s requests for play-dates every day, and now sees the after-school program as an important component in the community. It is an opportunity for children in a wide range of ages to have natural, organic interactions, much like they would have in a small neighborhood. With older kids mentoring younger ones, both are benefiting! Parents have expressed their gratitude. Supporting the after-school program is also a way for the community to show it values young people and supports their healthy development!

The after-school program meets on Tuesday and Wednesday from 3:15 to 5:00 p.m. Dominick likes to offer one art-related project each month, and is looking for volunteers from the community. Anyone with a special skill set or specific project, willing to offer their time, can contact Dom at 860-824-1415.

New course offerings from HYSB!

Kids and Divorce – For Better or Worse - Tuesday, March 9, 2010

Participants will view the PBS one-hour special video that examines the emotional and legal aftermath of divorce, seeking to discover: What's best for the kids, when life continues as usual, but nothing is ever the same again? The video will be followed by a facilitated group discussion.

Growing Up Online - Wednesday, March 17, 2010

MySpace. YouTube. Facebook. Nearly every teen in America is on the Internet every day, socializing with friends and strangers alike, "trying on" identities, and building a virtual profile of themselves. A generation with a radically different notion of privacy and personal space, today's adolescents are grappling with issues their parents never had to deal with. The one-hour Frontline video that investigates the risks, realities, and misconceptions of teenage self-expression on the World Wide Web, will be followed by a facilitated group discussion.

Raising Cain – Exploring the Inner Lives of America's Boys

Two sessions: Tuesday, May 4 & 11, 2010

What can we do to keep our boys from growing into men who are stoic, silent, and explosive – more prone to anger than to empathy? The PBS documentary by Michael Thompson, Ph.D., exploring the emotional development of boys, provides surprising new information about their inner workings, and dispels a number of commonly held misconceptions, while highlighting innovative programs to bring out the best in boys! The two-hour video will be shown over two sessions and followed by facilitated group discussions.

Sessions are 6:30 - 8:00 pm at Housatonic Valley Regional High School.
The courses are free, but you must register with Foothills Adult Education:
1-800-300-4781.

Childcare can be made available with advance request to HYSB.

'Spark' Notes

"When kids can name a spark, every outcome you and I care about changes dramatically," says Dr. Peter Benson of the Search Institute. They are more likely to get higher grades in school; they are more likely to be physically healthy; and they are more likely to volunteer to help other people.

Think about your child and his or her unique personality. Does she like to take things apart and fix them? Does he like to draw or paint? Write stories or poetry? Play music? Care for animals? Build your child's interests by taking him places to see how his talent can be used. Seek out other adults who can mentor your child in her area of interest. Be your child's biggest fan and cheer him or her on!

Housatonic Youth Service Bureau

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www.hysb.org

- Crisis intervention & counseling
- Parent support
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- Resource library
- Seminars & workshops
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- Special events & guest speakers

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