SPEAK OUT LEXINGTON 2000

Speak Out Lexington 2000 to this point

Speak Out Lexington 2000 asked the question, "How Can We Fulfill Our Promise to Young People?" The "Promise" refers to Lexington's status as a partner in General Colin L. Powell's national movement, America's Promise: The Alliance for Youth. General Powell named Lexington a "Community of Promise" in recognition of the many things our citizens have done or are doing to provide the resources young people need to grow into successful adulthood.

In keeping with the spirit of America's Promise, Speak Out Lexington 2000 used an "assets" approach. In practice, this means both building on the strengths and capacities that most young people already have and extending those assets to other young people. The questions asked in Speak Out sessions encouraged participants to think about ways to build on the assets of young people in our community. Participants rose to the challenge, even though most people, by habit, think more easily about what is wrong or missing than they do about making the most of assets that already exist.

For the first time, Speak Out Lexington 2000 offered an alternative program — speakers from the Partners for Youth Speakers Bureau. As of July 15, 2000, 40 groups and 730 individuals had participated in Speak Out sessions or heard Speakers Bureau presentations.

At both kinds of sessions, participants were asked to consider a set of 40 "developmental assets" that have been suggested as contributing to healthy youth development. A preliminary review of the notes from Speak Out groups held so far shows that most groups chose to talk about the asset categories Support, Positive Values, or Boundaries and Expectations.

When checking the list of assets to show which ones are available to them now as young people — or were available to them when they were young — most participants checked most of the 40 assets listed. The three assets most frequently not checked were Youth as Resources, Community Values Youth, and Service to Others — all of which fall within the category of Empowerment.

When adult participants gave examples of the ways in which assets were available to them when they were young, they tended to talk about the influence of individuals in their families and neighborhoods. When giving examples of how assets are available to young people now, both young people and adults tended to talk about institutions: schools, religious groups, and organizations that serve young people.

Participants described many ways in which they presently provide support for young people, as well as ways in which they would be willing to do more. They also suggested many ways that our community institutions could be more supportive of young people, including increasing opportunities for young people to have a more active role in community life.

Interested groups may still hold Speak Out sessions or hear Speakers Bureau presentations. Contact Barbara Sutherland in the Mayor's Office for further information: barbaras@lfucg.com.

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- ➔ Each week a retired couple visits a Head Start center, where they read to the children and help them with projects.
- ➔ A high school basketball player wins an award from a local utility company — not just for her prowess on the court, but for school success and an essay on teamwork.
- ➔ A local law firm sponsors a fund-raising event for an agency that helps women and children facing stressful life events.
- ➔ A newspaper article about the importance of family bonding features local families who set aside time together each week.
- ➔ A group of high school students from a youth program place third in the newspaper's stock-picking contest.
- ➔ Middle school students serve as "peer pals" to first graders; the younger students get help with class work, and the older students' own reading and math skills improve.
- ➔ At a UK library science conference, middle school students present a panel about what makes a good book good.

For the last several months, we have been collecting newspaper articles about ways that local adults and youth are helping to build assets in young people. The collection is now about an inch thick and contains more than 80 items, including those listed above.

But these stories are just the tip of the iceberg! Most of the asset-building activities in our community don't show up in the newspaper. During Speak Out sessions we asked you to list the things you were already doing to help build assets in our community's young people. Here's a sampling of what you wrote:

I volunteer as a . . . scout leader, religious education teacher, sports coach, youth group advisor, camp counselor, Big Brother or Sister, field trip chaperone, preschool assistant, art or music teacher, elementary school reader/mentor, career day speaker, tutor, or supporter of the school band, chorus, or dance team.

I help create a positive community for young people by serving . . . with the PTA, school council, on the board of an arts or service group, or as neighborhood mom or neighborhood good guy!

I make time for young people in my congregation or neighborhood. I . . . set an example, listen, praise, encourage, ask how they're doing in school, talk about responsibilities and career choices, give them odd jobs for money and supervise them to help develop responsibility, help with homework, play games, ask their opinions and share mine.

I spend quality time in meaningful activities with . . . my children, grandchildren, or the children I teach. I talk with them, ask their help with chores, give books and educational toys, encourage music, praise their efforts, set standards and limits, help them set goals, teach them to resolve conflicts, help them explore their emotions, ask about their activities, maintain high expectations but love them unconditionally, help other parents develop relationships with their children.

WHAT ARE DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS?

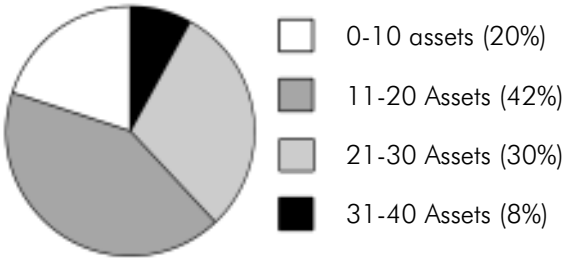
Research by the Search Institute has identified 40 positive experiences, relationships, and qualities that help young people grow into healthy adults.

These 40 factors, called "developmental assets," are things that everyone in the community can help nurture in our young people.

The assets fit into eight categories: support, empowerment, boundaries & expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competence, and positive identity.

WHAT ASSETS DO LEXINGTON'S YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE?

Research shows that the more assets a young person experiences, the more likely he or she is to engage in positive behaviors like doing well in school or maintaining good health habits, and the less likely he or she is to use drugs or engage in violence. While it is unlikely that any young person would experience all of the 40 assets, ideally all youth would experience at least 31. Unfortunately, surveys of more than 100,000 young people around the country show an asset picture more like this:



What would that chart look like for Fayette County's young people? We will soon have an opportunity to find out! This fall Kentucky Child 2000, in cooperation with schools and the Search Institute, will conduct a survey of 7th, 9th, and 11th grade students in about 25 Kentucky counties, including Fayette County.

When we get the results in early 2001 we will have information about how many assets our young people have, and which assets are strongest. We will also learn about young people's attitudes and behaviors. This information will help our community determine how to build on what is working well for our young people, and how to improve what is not working well.

DIALOGUE ON YOUTH

To supplement the ongoing Speak Out sessions and Speakers Bureau in the coming year, the Mayor's Office and Urban County Government will sponsor a Dialogue on Youth. The Dialogue on Youth will be modeled on the work of Nobel laureate David Bohm and will present an opportunity to learn an innovative approach to group work on matters of common concern. Steve Kay will facilitate the sessions and will provide an introduction to this specific dialogue method at the beginning of the first session.

The Dialogue on Youth will include a total of six sessions, held on the fourth Tuesday of September, October, and November 2000, and January, February, and March 2001. Each session will be from 6:00 to 8:30 PM at the Lexington Public Library. Because continuity of participation is very important, we ask that everyone who is interested in participating attend the first session and commit to attend at least five of the six sessions. Space in the dialogue is limited, and those who want to participate must register in advance. If you would like further information, please fill out the form below.

VOLUNTEER/REQUEST FORM

____ I would like to volunteer for the Community Ties Festival.
____ I would like to request a speaker.
____ I would like to request a Speak Out Lexington session.
____ I would like more information about the Dialogue on Youth.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

TO CELEBRATE OUR YOUNG PEOPLE AND OUR COMMUNITY, SPEAK OUT LEXINGTON PRESENTS:

Thursday, October 5, 2000 5-8 PM
Victorian Square and Children's Museum

The Community Ties festival will offer:

- ➔ Free food to tempt a variety of tastes
- ➔ Exhibits of local asset-building activities for children and youth
- ➔ Entertainment to delight children, youth, and families — showcasing youth talent
- ➔ Hands-on activities for people of all ages
- ➔ A ceremony expressing our community's commitment to young people
- ➔ Loads of other activities

The whole community is invited, especially those who took part in Speak Out Lexington 2000! Put it on your calendar now, so you and your family will not miss this one-of-a-kind event!

To make Community Ties a huge success, we need the skills and enthusiasm of many volunteers. You can sign up as an individual or with a group to:

- ➔ Work with a festival committee
- ➔ Make decorations ahead of time
- ➔ Help decorate, greet people, or clean up on the day of the festival

For more information, or to volunteer, call the Mayor's Office, 258-3100, or return the form on page 3.

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