

RAISING TOMORROW'S ADULTS

Who, What, Why...

Over 2800 teenagers from throughout Berkshire County participated in the Berkshire County Prevention Needs Assessment Survey in 2006.

They were asked questions about:

- their use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- youth behaviors such as violence and delinquency
- antisocial behavior
- positive and negative influences in their life

The survey told us what risky behaviors our children are involved in, why they engage in these behaviors, and what issues we, as a community, need to address to protect them.

Using this survey, Berkshire County families, schools, community leaders, youth providers and others can work together to create a healthier environment for youth. By giving this survey on a regular basis, we can track trends and progress in our community.

Additionally, data from the Berkshire County Prevention Needs Assessment Survey will help schools and agencies secure funding for special programs addressing prevention and positive youth development.

The Berkshire County Prevention Needs Assessment Survey was sponsored by:

Berkshire Health Systems
REACH Community Health Foundation
Berkshire United Way
Pittsfield Prevention Partnership
Northern Berkshire Community Coalition
South Berkshire Youth Coalition

And supported by:

Berkshire Youth Development Project
Berkshire County Legislative Delegation
Berkshire County Middle and High Schools.

Imagine a child



who didn't have to worry about substance abuse.

One who could attend a party and resist the temptation of alcohol – or, better yet, not even encounter it.

Imagine a child



being able to graduate from high school with

every classmate he entered with – none having succumbed to drug addiction or been the victim of a drunk-driving accident.

Imagine a child



healthy and well-rounded, supported by family and

friends, recognized by teachers and neighbors, beginning a journey to fulfill his or her own dreams for further success in life.

What will it take?

RAISING TOMORROW'S ADULTS

The Berkshire County Prevention Needs Assessment Survey

What helps and hinders positive youth development and what we can do about it

2006

The Berkshire County Prevention Needs Assessment Survey

RAISING TOMORROW'S ADULTS

Today's kids are faced with numerous challenges as they make their way through childhood, their teen years and into young adulthood. The most typical problem behaviors among adolescents are:

- alcohol and other drug use
- delinquency
- dropping out of school
- unplanned pregnancy
- violence

The Berkshire County Prevention Needs Assessment Survey is an evidence-based survey that assesses risk and protective factors linked to these adolescent problem behaviors. The survey gathers the perceptions of young people about the four major influences in their lives: their peers, family, community, and school.

The intent of the Prevention Needs Assessment Survey is to provide our community with information about the environment in which we are raising our children. By going straight to the source and asking youth about their lives, we can identify the root causes of adolescent problem behaviors and focus on changing the community conditions that contribute to them. The science of prevention will help us to find strategies that have proven effective in minimizing the negative factors in the environment and strengthening the positive elements that support productive, healthy living.

The goal is healthy behaviors for all children and youth.

This is how we start...

Research shows ...

There are certain elements in a child's life that will increase or decrease his or her likelihood of becoming involved in typical adolescent problem behaviors:

Risk factors are conditions in a young person's environment that increase his or her likelihood of engaging in problem behaviors.

Protective factors are those factors in a young person's life that increase his or her likelihood of developing healthy, positive attitudes and behaviors.

The Berkshire County Prevention Needs Assessment Survey identifies the levels of the risk and protective factors present in our community.

Where we're doing well...

- Children say they are attached to their neighborhoods and consider them to be clean and free of crime.
- They say that their closest friends are not engaged in antisocial behaviors such as skipping school or stealing.
- Onset of such antisocial behavior is occurring at older ages.
- Young people report having many opportunities to participate in school events, sports, community activities and responsibilities.
- They feel they are a valued part of a family unit.
- Young people note that they are recognized and rewarded for their efforts at school.

What we need to work on...

Results for Berkshire County tell us that the risk factors that contribute to problem behaviors such as underage substance use are greater here and the protective factors are weaker than the national norms. Not surprisingly, the rates of problem behaviors are higher than state and national averages, including drug use and teen pregnancy

The following **risk factors** rate highest among Berkshire County youth:

- **They don't think adults in their community feel it's "very wrong" for kids to engage in smoking, drinking or other drug use.**
- Most have been exposed to adult antisocial behavior and drug use within the last year.

- At least one very close friend smokes or drinks regularly, and may even be using "harder" drugs like marijuana, LSD or heroin.
- They feel that their social status among peers (being viewed as 'cool') would improve if they smoked or drank.
- These young people don't feel it's "very wrong" for someone their age to smoke and drink regularly, and even use other illegal drugs.
- They don't think that parents would really disapprove if they stole petty items, vandalized property or even started a fight.
- Parents don't voice very clear expectations about their behavior, and they don't monitor them closely.
- There are no clear rules or expectations around drug and alcohol use.
- They feel that the likelihood of "getting caught" doing drugs or engaging in antisocial behaviors by parents or police is relatively low.

The levels of some **protective factors** were reported as not being strong enough to buffer exposure to the previously mentioned risk factors. For example:

- **Our children don't feel that parents, other family members, neighbors or friends recognize their efforts and contributions.**
- Young people don't see working hard in school and the community as either rewarding or profitable.
- They may not have the social skills needed to effectively communicate, resolve conflict and stand up to peer pressure.
- Our children lack a strong belief in what is "right" and "wrong".
- Religious involvement among youth is relatively low.

What we can do...

The results of this survey lead us to conclude that there is a need to:

Make a strong community stand that rejects youth substance use as the norm.

Deliver clear expectations and consistent consequences to our children.

Provide opportunities for youth to be involved with their families, schools and communities in a meaningful way.

Recognize our children's efforts as well as their successes.

Teach by example the social, emotional and cognitive skills they will need to be successful.

The Berkshire Youth Development Project partners are helping to organize comprehensive community planning efforts to develop and implement strategies that will reduce risk factors and boost protective factors, with the goal of creating a healthier environment for Berkshire County youth to grow up in.

To become part of this process, please contact the Berkshire Youth Development Project partner in your region.

**Northern Berkshire
Community Coalition**
663-7588

**Berkshire United Way/Pittsfield
Prevention Partnership**
442-6948

**South Berkshire
Youth Coalition**
528-1919