

Editorial

Healthy youth asset program can only benefit Pennridge community

For the past nearly two years, in response to the tragic Columbine school shootings, a group of school and community leaders have met to discuss the strategies of bringing a Healthy Communities/Healthy Youth program to the area. And now it's time to get parents and the community as a whole involved in the effort to help nurture competent, caring and responsible children and adolescents.

Next Monday, the Pennridge community and secondary school

staff members will gather for training sessions to learn about the potential of the "40 Developmental Assets" to raise "healthy, responsible, caring" children. Shouldn't that be the goal of every parent and community?

The school district felt it was important enough last year already to designate next Monday as an early dismissal date for middle and high school students in order to allow all secondary staff and administrators to attend the celebration and training session. Edu-

cators will join representatives of local business, law enforcement, faith communities, senior citizens, government and organizations serving youth to begin in-depth discussions about how the area can use the 40 Assets to create a more "youth friendly" environment.

Clay Roberts, a nationally prominent expert on youth development and community mobilization, will deliver a keynote address at an invitational luncheon program which will kick off the local event, following a training program on the 40 Assets of youth development. That evening at 7:30 p.m. at Penn Central Middle School in Silverdale, Roberts will provide an opportunity for parents and the community at large to become familiar with the HY/HC program. Roberts has developed several national model programs

related to drug education, reduction of violence and AIDS prevention and has appeared on major television shows to talk about asset-building communities.

Assets are the positive building blocks that young people need to grow up to be healthy, principled and caring adults. The more assets young people have, the more likely they are to engage in positive behaviors, such as volunteering or doing well in school. In addition, they are less likely to be engaged in at-risk behaviors. The eight categories of assets are support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity.

More than 500 communities, including large metropolitan areas, have launched Healthy Communi-

ties/Healthy Youth initiatives and find they provide positive vision for children and adolescents. They found that while it is crucial to pay special attention to those youth who have the least, economically or emotionally, nearly all young people need more assets than they have. Central to asset building are strong relationships between all age groups, with consistent messages about what's important and what's expected from families, schools, communities and others. The goal is to increase the total number of assets or positives in each child.

Selected programs locally include implementing parent training for preparing for drug-free years, a mentoring program matching high school and elementary students, homework clubs and a parental program designed to

address substance abuse, violence and school dropouts. Through grants, a community mobilizer is expected to be hired by January to coordinate the long-term youth development program.

The dedicated HC/HY committee so far has been the key stakeholders in the Pennridge effort, but the actual asset building is a far-reaching process which will involve all individuals and organizations within the community. Simply stated, the more assets children have, the less likely they will engage in harmful behaviors. Through this joint effort, all parents and residents can help learn about and build these crucial assets in our youth, increasing their chances of maturing into successful, well-adjusted adults. It's a worthwhile effort and your help and support is needed.