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Teens call for more youth activities

Upper Bucks coalition asks students to brainstorm on building community assets.

By Kelly Madsen

Special to The Morning Call

When they're looking for something to do, most students whom Quakertown Community High School freshman Tammie Downing knows hang out in the parking lot at Quakertown Memorial Park.

There's also the borough skate park, but they have to pay to get in.

"We just want a place to hang out. Somewhere with music and a pool table. Somewhere that is not expensive because teens don't have any money," Downing said.

She isn't the only one who thinks Upper Bucks is short on activities for teenagers. That opinion was echoed among more than 60 students who participated in Monday's first Upper Bucks Youth Summit at James A. Michener Library in Quakertown.

The Upper Bucks Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth Coalition, which has branches in the Pennridge, Palisades and Quakertown Community school districts, sponsored the daylong workshop and brainstorming session for teenagers "to share what is OK about living here and what is not," said Lee Rush, founder of justCommunity, which raises money for the coalition.

The coalition seeks to increase the number of assets, or "building blocks" necessary in the lives of well-adjusted youths and strong communities, Rush said.

The coalition's national organization identifies 40 assets to look for, including

neighborhoods, achievement motivation, honesty, equality, self-esteem and peaceful conflict resolution.

"The more assets you have, the more protection you have against abusing tobacco, drugs and alcohol," Rush said.

The overall goal of the coalition, said Palisades junior Ben Fabian, is to "teach kids to make the right decisions and do what is right for them."

Most teenagers at the summit agreed that there are few fun things to do in their school districts.

While Downing suggested youth community centers in each district, others wanted to see more events that bring all three high schools together, such as carnivals, picnics, game and movie nights, and community service projects.

"We only get to see kids from other schools at events like [the youth summit]," said Michelle Kluskiewicz. "We like to meet new people, so we need more get-togethers."

The teens will meet again May 16 to scrutinize their list of wants and see what is workable and how they can make them realities, Rush said.

"The adults aren't going to do these projects, but we give you the support you need," Rush told the students.



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TIYANA QUATTLEBAUM (clockwise from bottom left), Katie Briggs, Shana Rakowsky, Angela McGowan and Dylan Stutts do a team-building task. The students were from different school districts.



"The adults aren't going to do these projects, but we will give you the support you need."

LEE RUSH

founder, justCommunity

ALI BARDAY, a 10th-grader at Pennridge High School, designs a picture to illustrate positive family communication, one of the 40 community assets emphasized by the Upper Bucks Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth Coalition.

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