

Youth Count Column: April 2012: “Walk the Talk”

Children are our future. We care about our children. Children are our most valuable resource.

We hear these statements regularly. We talk about positive youth development. Floyd County, one part of our region, was recognized as one of America’s Promise Alliances 100 Best Communities for Young People.

Do we stand behind our words with actions that demonstrate this value for youth? Are we really building assets? Are we ensuring that our young people know they are valued? Do we show them support as well as ensuring they feel safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood? Are we modeling positive, responsible behavior? In essence, are we “walking the talk” and ensuring that our actions reflect our words.

As community members we can – and must – ensure that we look at our decisions and actions, ALL decisions and actions, whether they are personal, governmental, programmatic, educational, or any other decisions and actions, through the lens of “What does this mean for our young people?” “How will this impact our children and youth, either positively or negatively?” If a potential determination or action is not in the best interest of our young people then we need to slow down and take another look to ensure that the action about to be taken improves and enhances the well-being of our children.

Whether you’re a parent setting boundaries for teens, a manager or owner of a business which has youth as customers, a local official about to vote on a proposed community project such as funding for parks, stop and look at the impact your decision or action will have for the well-being of your own youth or the well-being of our community’s youth. As a community member, raise your voice for youth and become an advocate for them. Make positive youth development an intrinsic part of how you live. Encourage friends, family, and colleagues to make youth development a priority.

There are unlimited ways you can promote youth development, and of course this is all about building the 40 Assets. Some examples include:

- Set down to dinner with your own young family members – and talk!
- Volunteer for a youth program – 4-H, CASA, Mentor Mii, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, youth sports, and every so many other programs.
- Be spontaneous and acknowledge the accomplishments of young people, whether it pertains to complimenting them on an art project, thanking them for holding the door open for someone to pass through, thank them for helping another young person; you can find dozens of opportunities each day.

Demonstrating youth development doesn’t have to cost a penny; you don’t need to dress a certain way, or be in a particular location. It can happen any time you encounter a young person or have the opportunity to encourage action on behalf of young people.

Don’t wait; don’t ponder over the possibilities. Step out and take action NOW!

For a list of the 40 Assets or for more information about helping our youth, email barbara@youthcount.com or phone Youth Count at 812-923-1160.

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