

A "CALL TO ACTION"

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"Inspiring, just inspiring" were the first words spoken to me at the conclusion of the October 16th Waterbury YOUTH SUMMIT: What's Up With Our Kids. In a room filled with approximately 200 educators, elected officials including Board of Aldermen and Board of Education Members, juvenile justice workers, judges, social workers, mental health providers, medical care givers, youth program directors and staff, area business representatives, and more, the Waterbury Prevention Policy Board had just shared with the greater Waterbury community the results of its Youth Survey conducted earlier this year. The national survey from the Search Institute was given to a sample of sixth and ninth graders in Waterbury public and non-public schools. The survey was designed to help the Waterbury community better understand the needs of our youth and to develop asset-building strategies to meet those needs. For decades, the Search Institute has been helping communities to determine what youth need to become stronger, healthier, more successful young people.

In addition to learning telling and sometimes unexpected facts and figures, those in attendance were treated to an emotional appeal by youth to answer the Call to Action that the survey results represent. "It's the Little Things" according to young people, that cumulatively have the power to change their lives - to make a difference. While there were concerns concerning data around youth feeling safe in neighborhoods and in schools, and the lack of adults valuing youth or

serving as a positive role model in the life of a child, for example, there was also a revelation that in Waterbury, almost 75% of those surveyed are HOPEFUL about their futures. This fact alone sets the stage for the broader community to embrace the small steps that can impact the lives of our youngest citizens. In a ten minute multi-media presentation, our young people called out for simple gestures of support. Gestures that parents and families, youth programs, and all community members can make. They told us young people want us to 'look them in the eyes and know my name,' 'ask me about my homework or my family,' 'come to one of my games - I'll know you were there,' 'open my eyes to new things,' 'expect me to do my best,' 'tell me you knew I could do it,' 'you don't know it but I will remember you'...

While deliberate steps need to be taken to build assets among youth in our community, many are as simple as those stated by students. Jim Conway, Senior Trainer from Search Institute, came from Madison, Wisconsin to help review and interpret the survey results with those in attendance. His countless anecdotes of communities in which building assets among youth has caught on gave support to the premise that simple steps on the part of multiple community sectors can effect great positive change in the outlook for Waterbury youth. All we need is commitment and some time.

To learn more about Developmental Assets, or to request information including an Executive Summary of the 2007 Prevention Policy Board Youth Survey Results, contact Louise Brown at lbrown@waterbury.k12.ct.us or Amanda Hunyadi at ahunyadi@waterburyyouthservices.org or 203-573-0264.