

Roanoke Prevention Planning Team

Youth Prevention Priorities

September 2005

Roanoke Prevention Planning Team Promoting Healthy Development of Youth

The Roanoke City Prevention Planning Team (RPPT) is a coalition of youth-serving organizations working together to promote the healthy development of youth. The coalition strives to:

1. Promote community awareness about risky behaviors and attitudes among youth.
2. Implement a unified and comprehensive approach for prevention planning and development of youth services.
3. Identify strategies to increase resources available to young people to help prevent substance abuse, violence, teen pregnancy and school failure.
4. Encourage family and community involvement to build the assets necessary to assist all youth in becoming productive adults of our community.

The foundation of the Roanoke Prevention Planning Team's planning process is data collected every two years from youth enrolled in Roanoke City Public Schools, in grades six, eight, ten, and twelve, on the types and frequency of high risk behaviors in which they are engaging, and positive assets in their lives. Collected over time this data provides a way to assess the health and well being of youth, identify areas of highest concern, and mobilize the community to create healthy options for youth.

RPPT, in partnership with Roanoke City Public Schools, has surveyed Roanoke youth three times during the last six years; November 2000, November 2002, and February 2005. An analysis of student responses over time has revealed consistently high rates of risk behaviors and attitudes in four areas:

- Sexual activity
- Alcohol, tobacco and other substance abuse.
- Violence
- Mental health (particularly depression and suicide)

Roanoke Prevention Planning Team members have studied available data for each of these priority areas and summarized trends and comparisons over time, implications for the community, and recommendations to reduce the occurrence of these negative behaviors. RPPT encourages the community to review these summaries and utilize the information to inform and direct decision-making regarding needs among youth and commitment of financial resources to support youth programming.

Left unattended these high-risk behaviors will have far reaching negative consequences in the personal lives of youth, and City of Roanoke's economic growth and ultimately the quality of life in the valley. Studies have documented that high-risk behaviors among youth lead to increased rates of high school dropouts, juvenile offenders, foster care placements, and welfare dependency, all of which absorb vital

financial resources that could be used to promote our community's positive growth and development. Informed prevention efforts are key to providing Roanoke youth with the assets and protective factors necessary to lead healthy and safe lives now, as well as in the future. An integral part of successful prevention is creating an understanding of human development among parents by providing support and education to enable them to effectively respond to their children's needs.

Survey Information

The Roanoke Prevention Planning Team implemented the *Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors* (Search) survey in the fall of 2000. This survey was administered to students in grades eight, ten, and twelve. The results of this survey would mark the beginning steps of a "unified and comprehensive approach" to prevention planning in Roanoke City. The data from this survey provided a wide range of information about how youth spend their time, their perceptions of school and community life, and their participation in risk-taking behavior.

In the fall of 2002, and winter of 2005, RPPT, in partnership with Roanoke City Public Schools, implemented the *Search Institute Profiles of Student Life* survey and the *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* (YRBS) in grades six, eight, ten and twelve. Each time half of each grade completed one of these surveys. In addition to the youth assets information provided by the *Search*, the YRBS developed by the Center for Disease Control provides more detailed information about specific risky behaviors and other health and safety information.

Implementation of the two different surveys provides a more comprehensive "snapshot" of Roanoke City youth. The *Search* survey is based in the 40 developmental assets paradigm: the more of the identified developmental assets present in the life of youth the less likely they will engage in risk behaviors. Whereas, the YRBS comes from the risk and protective factor paradigm: the more protective factors present for youth the more resilient they become to risk factors.

Administration of the *Search* survey in 2000, 2002, 2005 provides the opportunity to begin identifying trends in youth behavior over time. Implementation of the *YRBS* enables the RPPT to look at national comparisons as well as comparisons to other Virginia communities with Roanoke City youth. For more detailed information about reliability, validity and implementation of the *Search* and *YRBS* surveys please refer to, "Brief Summary of Two Surveys". Financial support to conduct and analyze the 2005 YRBS and Search Institute surveys was made possible by grants from the Carilion Medical Center for Children and the Roanoke City Health Department. The RPPT is grateful for their support without which this report would not be possible.

Sexual Activity Priority Statement

The effect of teen pregnancy on Roanoke City can be viewed as having community wide consequences. In 2002, Roanoke spent approximately \$9,476,000 on teen births alone. Teen parents are more likely to need public assistance, abuse and/or neglect their children, never complete high school and have fewer employment skills. Babies born to a teen parent are at greater risk for: premature birth and birth defects, lower IQ's, low birth weight, as well as learning and emotional disabilities.

While Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) are not covered in this survey, members of the Roanoke Prevention Planning Team recognize and are concerned by the rates of STDs and HIV infection among adolescents. According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (2003, nearly 4 million adolescents are infected by STDs each year, accounting for 25% of the 15 million new cases of STDs in the United States annually. Roanoke City High School students reported a higher percentage than the national average of students ever having sexual intercourse, having engaged in sexual intercourse before age thirteen, having four or more sexual partners, and having engaged in sexual activity within the last three months.

Additionally, the YRBS survey results show that in 2002, 9.3% of students report they have been pregnant or have gotten someone pregnant. This percentage has increased to 13.3% in 2005.

Trends and Comparisons

Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Roanoke City High Schools (10th & 12th grades)

Behavior	Roanoke		National
	2002	2005	2003
Ever Had Sex	62.3%	60.5%	52.9%
Sexual Intercourse Before Age 13	12.9%	16.7%	7.0%
Four or more Partners During Lifetime	21.9%	25.4%	16.5%

Roanoke City Middle Schools (6th & 8th grades)

Behavior	2002	2005
Ever had Sex	24.6%	27.0%
Sexual Intercourse Before Age 13	18.9%	22.0%
Four or more Partners During Lifetime	7.4%	6.3%

Search Institute Profiles of Student Life

Always use birth control when having sex:

	2001	2002	2005
Grade 6	na	31%	39%
Grade 8	52%	66%	52%
Grade 10	65%	64%	59%
Grade 12	53%	62%	64%

Implications

The impact for Roanoke can be seen in the teen pregnancy rate of 48.9 per 1000 females although recent data from the Centers for Disease Control show that the national teen pregnancy rate is at an all time low. According to data from the Roanoke Adolescent Health Partnership (RAHP), in the last 12 months, **877** pregnancy tests were given at the teen health centers. Of these 877 tests given, 57 of the tests were positive.

Roanoke remains considerably higher than the statewide rate of 27.6 per 1000 females and the Healthy People 2010 target of 43 per 1000 females, and out of the 130 counties/cities in Virginia Roanoke has the 14th highest teen pregnancy rate.

Community Responsibilities

- Comprehensive sexuality education should be included in elementary and secondary education programs.
- A series of forums and workshops should be provided for parents and citizens regarding sexual health and how to talk with youth about sexual activity.
- Offer training experiences for teachers and other youth leaders to enhance their ability to teach Family Life Education/Sexuality Education.
- Disseminate information on sexual health at pediatric health care provider clinics as an opportunity to educate both parent and child.
- For those teens already sexually active promote consistent and correct use of contraception.

Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drug Priority Statement

The use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs by youth negatively impacts their personal health and future, our neighborhoods, schools and community. Research has consistently shown that adolescents who use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs are more than twice as likely to skip school, have poor academic performance, drop out of school, and participate in other risky behaviors, including unprotected sex and violence. Furthermore, the earlier in life youth engage in using alcohol and drugs the more likely they are to develop substance abuse problems as adults. Among Roanoke City youth the average age of first use of alcohol is age 10 (4th or 5th grade) compared to the national average of age 13 (7th or 8th grade). Substance abuse and its related health and social problems, including dropping out of school, higher health care costs, lost human productivity, and domestic violence are among society's most pervasive and costly problems.

Trends and Comparisons

Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Roanoke City High Schools (10th & 12 grades)

Behavior	Roanoke 2002	2005	National 2003
Ever smoked daily for 30+ days	21.6 %	19.3%	17.4%
Had 5+ drinks once or more (last 30 days)	25.1 %	22.8%	32.4%
Ever used marijuana	49.5 %	47.6%	44.5%
Used marijuana in the last 30 days	28.5 %	29.6%	23.9%
Rode in vehicle driven by someone drinking	28.2%	29.3%	31.3%
Drove a car or a vehicle after drinking alcohol	13.3%	10.4%	14.6%
Offered, sold or given illegal drugs on school property	24.9%	29.5%	27.0%

Roanoke City Middle Schools (6th & 8th grades)

Behavior	2002	2005
Ever smoked daily for 30+ days	7.0%	9.5%
First used alcohol at 13 years old or younger	31.9%	28.6%
Ever used marijuana	14.6%	17.2%
First tried marijuana at 13 years old or younger	9.4%	13.3%
Rode in vehicle driven by someone drinking	28.5%	27.0%

Implications

Alcohol and drug use stunts adolescents' emotional, social and intellectual development, and impairs their decision-making skills. The links are clear between substance abuse and academic failure, teen pregnancy, and delinquent and/or criminal behavior. Additionally, young people under the influence of alcohol and drugs are much more likely to engage in risky and dangerous behaviors. One visible impact is the number of youth that report driving a vehicle after drinking alcohol, or being a passenger in a vehicle with a drinking driver. This lethal combination too often results in life changing injuries and even death.

Community Responsibilities

- Send consistent, age appropriate "no use" messages to all children, beginning early in their lives and repeated often throughout their childhood and adolescence.
- Advocate for access to confidential support groups and other prevention services for children to increase their resiliency and skills and to address problems before they escalate.
- Insure parents have the resources to communicate clear expectations to their children that the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs will not be tolerated. Provide them with the information and support to establish age appropriate consequences when family rules are broken.
- Inform parents that their children may be getting alcohol from their friends' parents. Remind parents that they still have a lot of influence over the choices their teenagers will make regarding using alcohol and other drugs. Urge them to stay actively involved in the lives of their teens.
- Enforce laws that prohibit adults from providing alcohol and tobacco products to under age youth.

Violence Priority Statement

Research has shown that youth exposed to violence are at higher risk for a multitude of problems later in life. Youth who learn to problem solve by engaging in violent acts begin to believe that violence is the only way to solve problems. The violent behavior is likely to permeate all aspects of their life and their personal relationships, as well as how they interact professionally. Studies of incarcerated adults have shown that a large percentage of inmates reported a childhood full of violence: either violence they engaged in or violence perpetrated on them. The statistics below demonstrate that youth from Roanoke City exhibit these risk factors.

Trends and Comparisons

Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Roanoke City High Schools (10th & 12th grades)

Behavior	Roanoke		National
	2002	2005	2003
Physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the past 12 months.	16.0%	14.4%	9.5%
Had been forced to have sexual intercourse.	11.5%	13.0%	9.2%
Carried a weapon one or more days within the past 30 days.	18.2%	19.2%	15.7%
In a physical fight one or more times within past 12 months	31.8%	28.8%	29.3%

Roanoke City Middle Schools (6th & 8th grades)

Behavior	2002	2005
Ever carried a weapon (gun/knife)	29%	30%
Ever been in a physical fight	61%	62%
Ever been bullied	47%	43%
Ever bullied someone	39%	38%
Missed school due to fear of bullying	8%	7%

Search Institute Profiles of Student Life

Ever been physically harmed in the home:

	2001	2002	2005
Grade 6	na	24%	28%
Grade 8	28%	35%	29%
Grade 10	38%	31%	30%
Grade 12	31%	32%	24%

Would retaliate physically if pushed/hit:

	2001	2002	2005
Grade 6	na	54%	58%
Grade 8	67%	73%	69%
Grade 10	75%	74%	68%
Grade 12	59%	71%	70%

Implications

Violence leads to violence. The surveys indicate that more than 25% of our children have been physically harmed in their home. It is logical then to expect that these children will carry that aggression into the schools and larger community. Within six years of taking this survey, our middle school children will leave school; high school students will do the same within one year. Both groups will marry, have children and enter the adult workforce. Without intensive, effective programming, another generation of children all too familiar with violence will enter the school system, continuing the cycle.

Community Responsibilities

- Increase the coping skills of youth and address issues of personal violence, assisting youth and families before problems occur.
- Encourage positive parenting skills, parental support of children and participation in parenting programs so that children will identify and report violent behavior without fear of repercussion or retaliation.
- Support education of youth by expanding comprehensive developmental programs in accessible locations; inclusive of information on power and control dynamics in negative relationships and between boyfriends and girlfriends.
- Engage the resources of local law enforcement agencies to identify causes of violence, working within communities to reduce violent incidents and providing community policing in high-risk neighborhoods.
- Promote public awareness and support Roanoke Valley agency programming that provides essential services to youth and families in identifying violent behavior and offering appropriate alternatives to resolve conflict.

Mental Health Priority Statement

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth in our nation. Children as young as ten years old see so little hope for the future that they attempt to kill themselves. Research has shown that for adolescents, often with a short time perspective, events of the moment can be powerful incentive for impulsive acts. Adolescents and teens face numerous pressures to fit in socially and perform well academically. Factors which have been shown to relate to the willingness to commit suicide include alienation from family, friends or the community; interpersonal losses such as death of family or friends; and depression. Parents of suicide victims often report there were no warning signs. Most parents today are unaware of reliable screening tests that can find teens at risk. The statistics below reveal the extent of the problem for Roanoke City youth.

Trends and Comparisons

Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Roanoke City High School (10th & 12th grades)

	Roanoke 2002	Roanoke 2005	National 2003
Seriously considered attempting suicide in the last 12 months.	17.7%	19.8%	16.8%
Made a plan on how they would attempt suicide.	12.5%	13.9%	15.6%
Actually attempted suicide in the last 12 months.	10.4%	12.5%	7.6%
Suicide attempts that resulted in need for medical intervention.	3.9%	4.7%	2.3%

Roanoke City Middle School (6th & 8th grades)

	2002	2005
Seriously considered attempting suicide in the last 12 months.	23.9%	23.9%
Made a plan on how they would attempt suicide.	10.0%	11.4%
Actually attempted suicide in the last 12 months.	10.9%	8.4%

Search Institute Profiles of Student Life

Has attempted suicide one or more times:

	2001	2002	2005
6 th grade	na	16%	16%
8 th grade	21%	22%	17%
10 th grade	20%	21%	21%
12 th grade	17%	19%	16%

Implications

In the City of Roanoke, the equivalent of two busloads of our middle and high school aged children report that they have attempted suicide, some once, some as many as 5 or 6 times. As a community, we know the measures that need to be in place to prevent any of our youth from seeing suicide as the only way out.

We have not made good mental health a priority. There has been no statistically significant change in the rate teens contemplate suicide over the last two years. Our community has failed to recognize that suicide among teens is a frighteningly real issue. This may be because teens who contemplate suicide are alone, out of public view. The signs are visible but we must look for them. Something must change.

Community Responsibilities

- Promote the use of community mental health resources for identifying and treating youth depression.
- Promote structured after-school activities that provide a nurturing and supportive environment.
- Offer parent resources and information about adolescent depression and ways for them to communicate with their children.
- Provide opportunities for individuals, who work with youth, to learn how to recognize and respond to signs of serious depression that could lead to suicide.
- Promote activities that communicate to all youth their value and worth to the community.
- Promote the expansion of comprehensive youth development programming at accessible, affordable, after-school settings and provide transportation as needed.

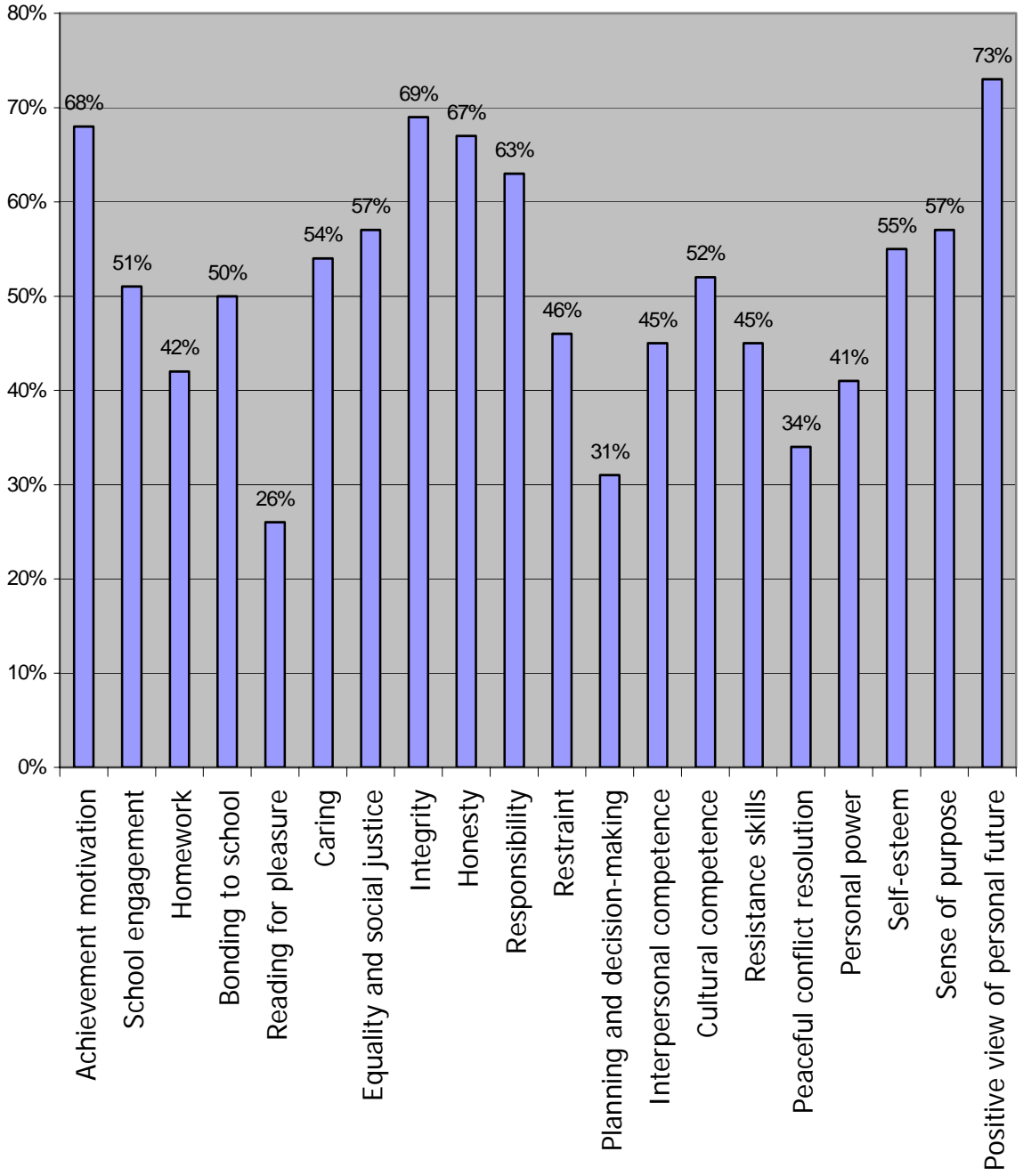
Developmental Assets: A Profile of Roanoke City Youth

Search Institute's framework of Developmental Assets provides a way to assess the health and well-being of middle and high school aged youth. The framework's 40 assets represent a common core of developmental building blocks essential for the positive development of all young people. The assets are divided into two types: external and internal. External assets are the networks of support, opportunities and people that surround youth with positive developmental experiences, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and opportunities for constructive use of time. Internal assets are a young person's own commitments, values and competencies. Search Institute has analyzed youth behaviors in hundreds of communities and the research has consistently shown that youth with higher levels of assets are significantly less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors. Furthermore, they are more likely to exhibit indicators of thriving, such as school success, maintaining good health, exhibiting leadership, and impulse control.

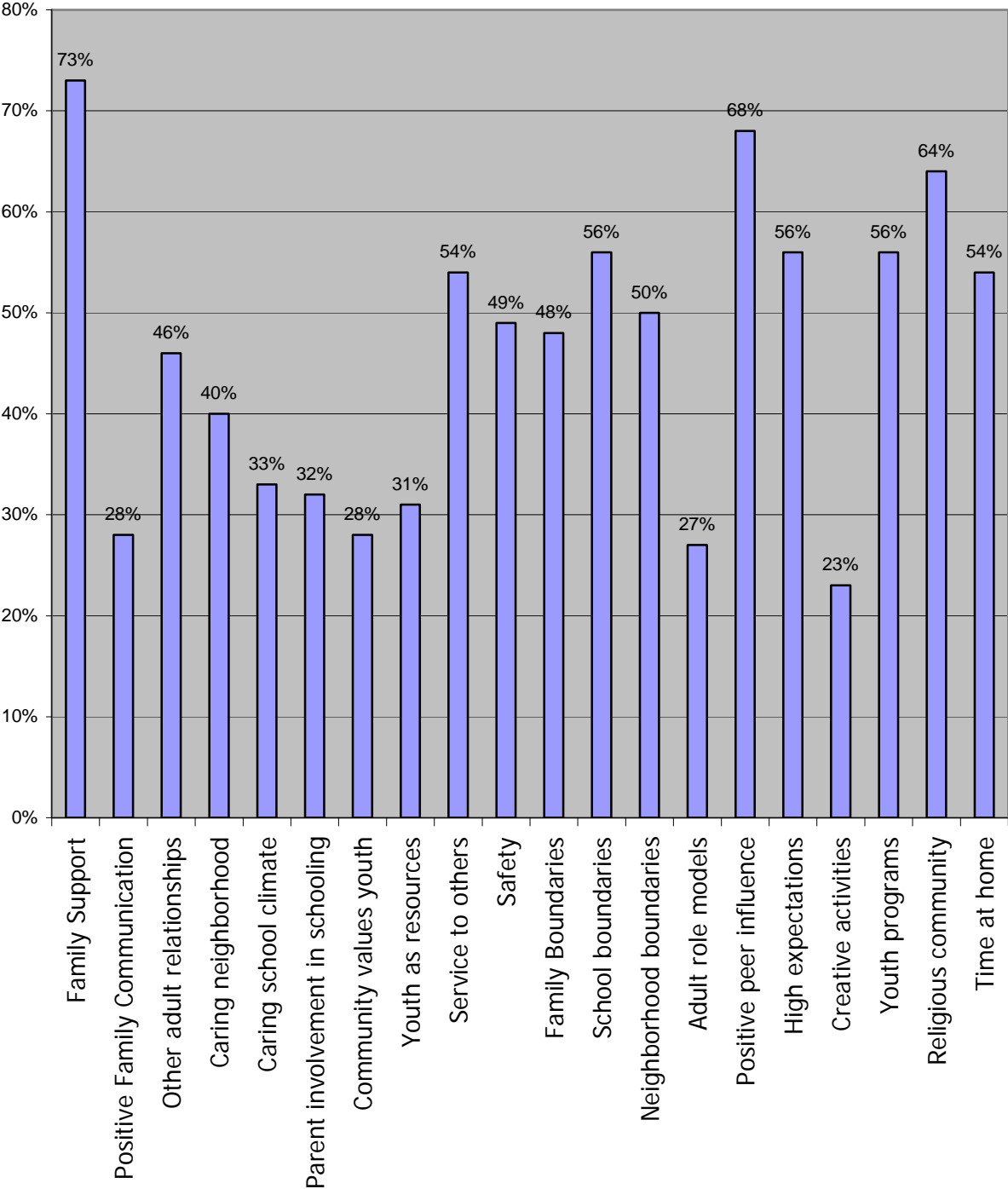
Search Institute's framework of Developmental Assets provides a way not only for assessing our youth, but a way for mobilizing community-wide action to ensure young people have the solid foundation they need to become tomorrow's competent, productive, and caring adults. It highlights how every member of our community can participate in building assets among our youth. According to Search's research, youth demonstrate the most success in refraining from risky behaviors and thriving in school and community when they experience 31-40 developmental assets. Each community needs to establish a goal for what percentage of youth it seeks to be at this level.

In February of 2005, youth enrolled in Roanoke City Public Schools, in grades six, eight, ten and twelve, completed the Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors survey. The following charts summarize the extent to which Roanoke youth experience each of the 40 developmental assets, and how the number of assets they experience relate to their risk-taking behaviors. Roanoke's data is in alignment with the Search Institute's research findings in that the youth reporting the most developmental assets engage in the least number of risk behaviors. This summary provides direction on which assets our community needs to strengthen among our youth to help them feel valued and supported, be successful, and choose a healthy lifestyle.

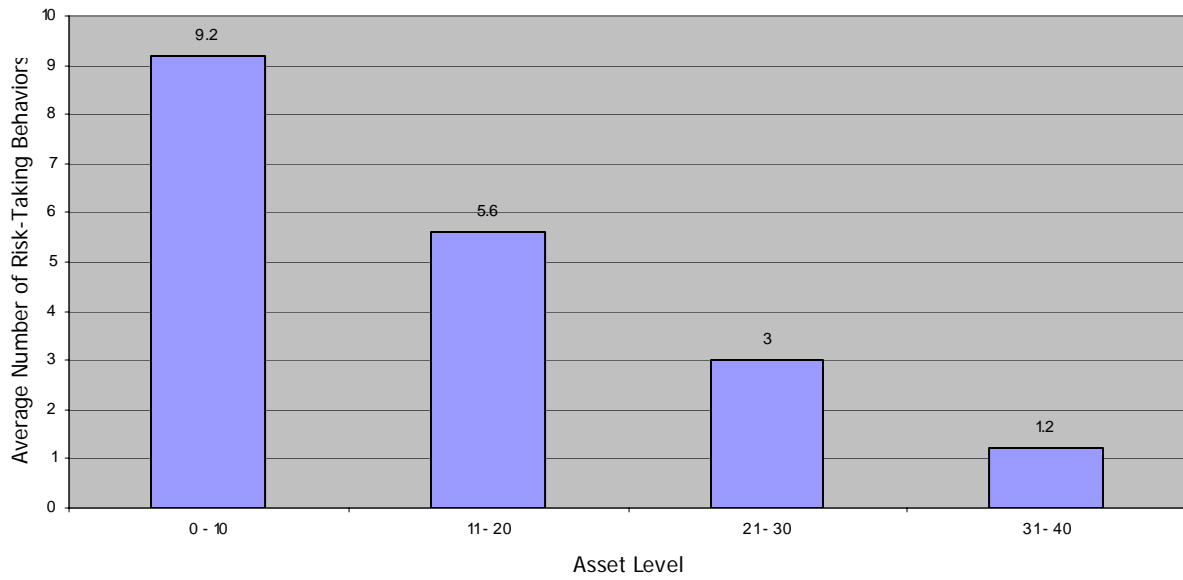
Percent of Youth Reporting Each of 20 Internal Assets



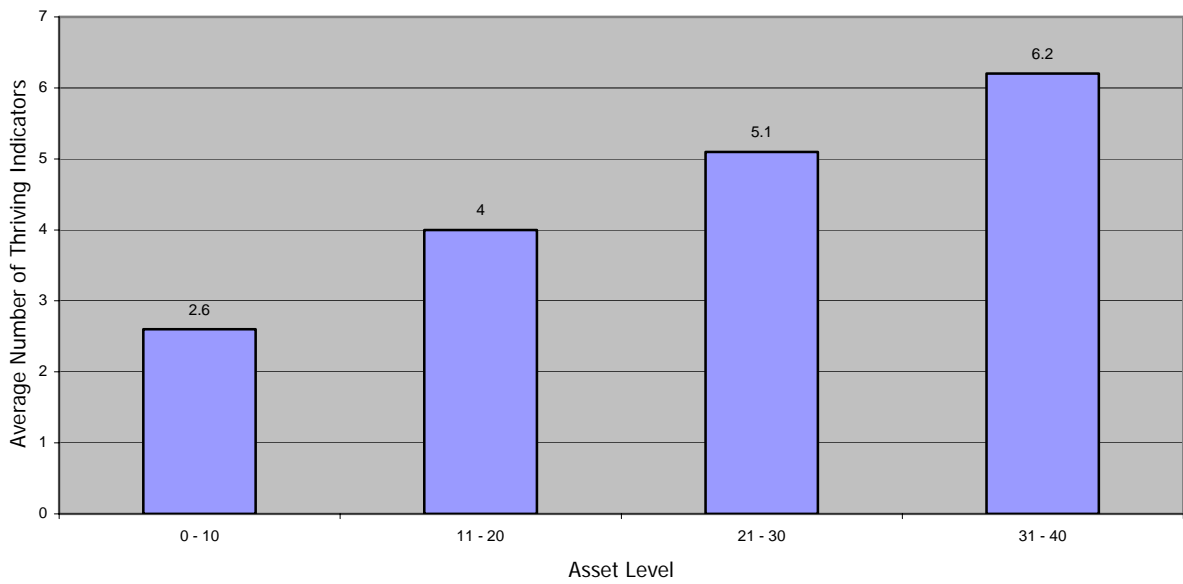
Percent of Youth Reporting Each of 20 External Assets



The Power of Assets to Protect Against Risk-Taking Behaviors



The Power of Assets to Promote Thriving Indicators



Recommendations

- **Engage a broader community of individuals, organizations and agencies to assist in setting 2007 YRBS goals as well as developing and carrying out strategies to reduce the percentage of adolescents who report risk behaviors.**

2005 survey data make it clear that the percentage of middle and high school adolescents who are exhibiting risk behaviors is increasing not decreasing. As a community of caring citizens we are moving in the wrong direction when it comes to reducing risk behaviors and building positive assets for all of our children. The efforts of our public agencies, not-for profit organizations, parents and guardians to reduce risk behaviors among adolescents over the past two years has been insufficient and too fragmented. Survey results clearly indicate a need to increase participation in setting realistic goals for our children as well as a need to increase participation in the development and implementation of strategies to reduce risk behaviors among adolescents. The Roanoke Prevention Planning Team is ideally situated to assist in this effort.

- **Create a system of accountability that utilizes, in part, YRBS and Search Institute data to measure progress and report performance.**

Collectively setting goals to reduce adolescent risk behaviors and build assets is important but not sufficient. Reducing adolescent risk behaviors and building assets through individual programs and partnership efforts must include measures to evaluate effectiveness. While most agencies and organizations are held accountable for individual prevention program efforts, there is no overall measure of effectiveness for the collective efforts of the Roanoke Community to reduce adolescent risk behaviors. The bi-annual YRBS and Search Institute Survey results should be used as an accountability mechanism by which Roanoke leaders measure the "over-all" success of their efforts.

- **Conduct and adequately fund the YRBS and Search Institute surveys on a biannual basis for the purpose of tracking the condition of adolescents in our community.**

It is imperative that we monitor and track the condition of our youth on a regular and consistent basis. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey and Search Institute Survey of Developmental Assets provide a clear picture of adolescents in our community. The surveys are windows into the world of adolescents and while the view may be alarming, we need to keep a constant sentry posted to provide us with information around which we can make decisions to improve our efforts to reduce adolescent risk behaviors. Gathering and analyzing this information is a public not a private

responsibility. The City of Roanoke should budget for the cost of conducting these surveys, preparing reports and disseminating information.

- **Encourage Roanoke City public policymakers, private foundations and state government leaders to utilize the survey data to set funding priorities for the prevention of youth risk behaviors and the development of asset building strategies for adolescents in our community.**

Decisions regarding funding priorities need to be data driven by a perspective that includes the viewpoint of adolescents gained through the YRBS and Search Institute Survey. Public and private sector leaders can encourage effective prevention efforts by requiring those that they fund to participate in community wide prevention efforts that address the priorities identified in these biannual surveys.

- **Reproduce, widely disseminate and publicize the results of the YRBS and Search Institute survey results as a means of increasing awareness and knowledge of the condition of adolescents in our community.**

The condition of our adolescents needs to be made public. It is no longer sufficient to provide a small group of prevention planners and programmers with these data. Prevention experts understand the need for and seek the participation of the entire Roanoke Community. Caring community citizens, parents and guardians will only take action and become involved when they understand the magnitude of need among our adolescents. All of our children are the responsibility of all of the citizens in our community. Responsibility for our children's care cannot and should not be relegated to public and not-for-profit agencies and organizations. To engage our public means educating our public by providing them with an opportunity to look through the window into the lives of our children that these surveys provide.

Agencies participating in the preparation of this report:

Blue Ridge Behavioral Healthcare



Carilion Medical Center for Children



Child Advocacy Center of the Roanoke Valley



Conflict Resolution Center



Council of Community Services



Family Service of Roanoke Valley



Roanoke Adolescent Health Partnership



Roanoke Area Youth Substance Abuse Coalition



Roanoke City Public Schools



Roanoke Valley CASA Foundation



Teen Pregnancy Prevention Project