

Positive values — an Amherst priority

According to the Who's Who Among American High School Students 26th annual Survey of High Achievers, America's top teens identify the "decline of social and moral values" as today's greatest national crisis, as well as the biggest problem facing their own generation.

The positive values assets (caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility and restraint) identified by the Search Institute and promoted through the efforts of members of the Amherst Task for Healthy Community / Healthy Youth, are about building a strong inner core of positive values. They are about forming beliefs and convictions that guide choices and decisions, shape priorities, and influence what people say and do. They are about caring for others and oneself.

The recent visit by the Dalai Lama sent a reminder to the community: "Warmheartedness is the key to deeper satisfaction and more happiness." Reinforcing the internal assets within your family, friends, and community will contribute to a person's "warmheartedness." We asked community members what they personally do to increase a positive environment for themselves and the people around them and the following is what we came up with.

Caroline B., Williamsville Central School District: "I have a strong belief and passion in surrounding myself with people that give positive energy to themselves and others. In a world where we seem to be connected by cell phones, texting and computers, I strive to connect personally with the people in my life by choosing to be present. I work every day to show compassion and warmheartedness to all individuals with whom I come in contact."

Peggy R., parent: "Making the environment a more

positive place. Lead by example ... wherever I am and wherever I am interfacing with, contributing in a sincere and constructive way to bring a little sunshine on the dullest of days and situations ... positive communication contributes to achieving a positive environment!"

Marcia B., parent/administrator: "I have recently tried softer lighting in our offices; staff have commented that it is more inviting and calming...I think there may be many factors to consider in a positive environment. Reinforcing positive behavior means catching people doing good and commenting on it; perhaps even more thank yous. Rewarding good behavior with special, unexpected treats is an example of a thank you for a team environment. A positive attitude is contagious; it begins with each one of us and bridges over to others that we meet along the way. Warmheartedness begins with "U": double "U" (W).

Carol, age 16: "I try to be as positive and honest as I can be. I am there for my friends and family when they need me, and I always come through."

A Search Institute survey conducted among eighth-, 10th-, and 12th-grade Town of Amherst students revealed the following:

- 49 percent of students possess the "caring" asset, which means they place a high value on helping other people.
- 48 percent of students possess the "equality and social justice" asset, which means they place a high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger

and poverty.

- 68 percent of students possess the "integrity" asset indicating that they would act on convictions and stand up for their beliefs.

- 62 percent of students are honest and would tell the truth even when it is not easy.

- 61 percent accept and take personal responsibility.

- 40 percent possess the asset "restraint," which tells us they believe it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.

Amherst residents experience a high quality of life, due in large part to the many caring volunteers living and giving within our town limits. Are you a taker or giver in this environment?

Every community member has a responsibility to contribute to his or her community. Whether it be through the physical act of volunteering as in a neighborhood cleanup, or doing something on a smaller scale such as a phone call, a card, a smile or a prayer. We can each experience "warmheartedness" in our own way, and what better time of the year to give it a try?

Happy Holidays to all.

*(The Healthy Community*Healthy Youth column is presented as a forum for family discussion. Your comments and suggestions are welcome. If you have an idea for a topic, please let us hear from you. Send a note to the Amherst Task Force, 4255 Harlem Road, Amherst, NY 14226 or e-mail Sally@eccpasa.info.)*





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