

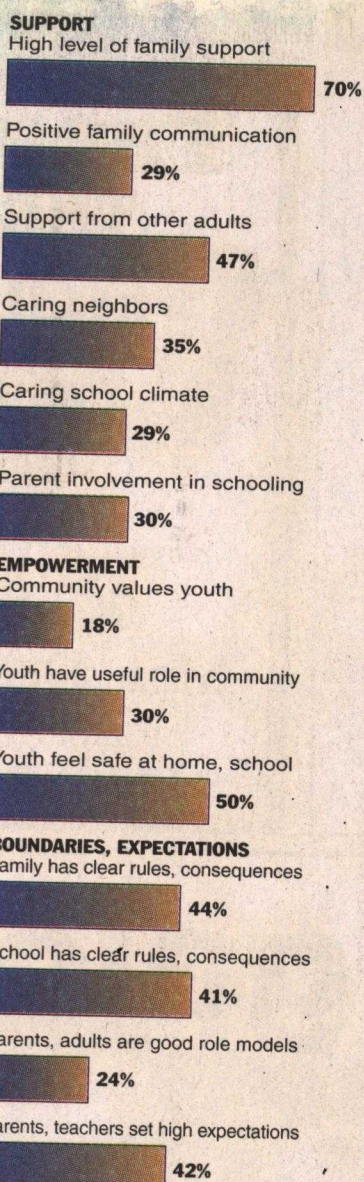
Survey shows teens' role in community



Ian Adamson is one of the few adults identified by San Lorenzo Valley teen-agers as an off-campus role model. Adamson coaches soccer and leads a church youth group that helped out at a Christmas craft fair. Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Teens speak out

A survey last year asked about 900 San Lorenzo Valley teens if they agreed with various statements. The goal was to assess how much family and community support and direction they felt they received. Here is a sample of their responses.



Source: Search Institute

San Lorenzo Valley residents: Give teens what they need to succeed

By JONDI GUMZ
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

A dozen San Lorenzo Valley residents are embarking on a campaign to make the valley a better place for teens.

Their efforts come in response to a survey last year of almost 900 valley youth.

"It shows where we are and what we need to improve," said Robin Lopez-Lysne of the Valley Unity Action Group, an organization formed nine years ago to make the community a safer and healthier place.

The survey, conducted by the YMCA of the Santa Clara Valley, which runs Camp Campbell in Boulder Creek, found positive aspects to life in the valley.

For example, 70 percent of those surveyed reported their family provides high levels of love and support. And 54 percent reported spending three hours or more per week on activities at school or in the community.

But other findings were troubling.

Only 18 percent of the teens surveyed believe youth are valued in the community. And only 24 percent said they see parents and other adults modeling positive, responsible behavior.

Members of the Valley Unity Action Group,

How to build community assets

WHAT ADULTS CAN DO: Learn the names of teens who live near you and greet them by name. You can serve as a role model by finding peaceful ways to resolve conflicts, being motivated to achieve and advocating for equality.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO: Invite senior citizens to have lunch with students. It can civilize the cafeteria and help connect students with adults in the community.

WHAT NEIGHBORS CAN DO: Encourage teens on your streets to talk, and listen to what they have to say.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO: Eat at least one meal together as a family every day. Find other activities to do with your children besides watching TV. Look for other adult role models who can be mentors for your children.

Source: Search Institute, www.search-institute.org

most of whom work with youth in some fashion, met last month to look at the results and figure out what to do next.

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Teens see few role models off campus

By JONDI GUMZ
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

When teens at San Lorenzo Valley High School are asked to name adults in the community who are role models, it's not surprising they mention teachers or other school staff.

Ask them to suggest someone off campus, and there's often a long silence.

That fits in with the findings of a survey of students in grades 7-12 last year in which only 24 percent said parents and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.

Who do teens consider to be role models?

Football coach Doug Morris is one. So is Shel-

ley Peck, who works in the school library, and Jeff Calden, who teaches English and is an assistant football coach.

In 14 years of coaching, Morris has built a football dynasty in the valley, but David Dahl, a junior from Boulder Creek, said he learns more than football plays.

He recalled how the coach talked about the importance of not giving up after the Sept. 11 terrorist attack.

"He's making us better for the community," Dahl said.

Rachel Hutchinson, a junior from Boulder

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Teens

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YMCA leaders recommended local residents focus on areas of concern to make a difference.

The strategy they suggest, based on 10 years of work by the Search Institute of Minneapolis, emphasizes building "assets" — positive experiences that help young people grow up caring and responsible.

Communities can do this in several ways — by creating a caring climate, making young people feel valued, setting boundaries and providing constructive ways for young people to spend their time.

The more assets in a young person's life, the less likely he will choose to use drugs or alcohol, have sex or engage in violence, according to the institute. Having more assets also increases the likelihood the youth will succeed in school, value diversity and learn the value of saving money for something special.

The strategy has proved successful in rural and urban areas.

Essex, Vt., population 21,000, began building assets five years ago. Teens raised \$30,000 in 30 days to reopen a teen center. They nominated 170 adults for being mentors, and recognized them by putting their photos on a poster. Last year, residents won an award from the institute for their accomplishments.

Everyone in the community, from parents and schools to service clubs, neighborhood groups and businesses, can help provide positive experiences for youth, according to the institute.

Adults can help simply by learning the names of the teens who live or work near them and greeting them. Employers can take a personal interest in teens and give them a lot of feedback, praise as well as criticism.

Role models

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Creek, suggested Peck for her efforts to help students be more accepting of others different from themselves. Peck worked on a project for the National Coalition Building Institute at the school.

"I was part of it, and she was really passionate about it," said Hutchinson, who would like to see more programs to help students deal with stereotypes and racial slurs.

Cassandra Baginski, a junior from Scotts Valley, knows Calden from working as a trainer with the football team.

"He's just a great person," she said. "He's easy to talk to."

Calden teaches English, and he does a good job because he knows how to motivate students, said Rika Fukumuro, a junior from Felton.

A sense of humor is what makes math teacher Terry Umstead a role

model for Tom Stallings, a junior who lives in Mount Hermon.

"He tells jokes," said Stallings. "He's not stressful."

Only two of the 10 teens queried at the school last week said they knew an adult role model off campus.

Trevor Storey, a senior from Boulder Creek, suggested Jay Van Pykeren, who leads the Young Life nondenominational Christian group.

"He's kind, and he cares about everyone," Storey said.

The group, which used to meet in Santa Cruz, started meeting once a week in San Lorenzo Valley this year. College students volunteer as leaders, and about 50 high school students are involved.

"We build relationships with kids," said Van Pykeren, 32, the father of three boys ranging in age from 14 months to 6 years. "Hanging out with them is a lot of what we do."

Elisabeth Hogue, another Boulder Creek senior, suggested her friend's dad, Ian Adamson.

"It takes everyone working together," said Deane Shokes, vice president of operations for the YMCA of Santa Clara Valley.

To encourage adult role models, the San Lorenzo Valley group suggested recognizing adults who serve in that capacity. Students could make the nominations, one member suggested.

Other group members brainstormed ideas to make youth feel valued.

Yolanda Perez-Logan, who works with the county probation department, suggested local businesses post signs saying "Teens Welcome Here."

Some business owners are nervous when teens walk in because their property has been vandalized by youth.

Although only a tiny percentage of

teens have engaged in vandalism, it hurts the reputation of teens in general. More positive interaction between teens and adults could improve the situation, according to Shokes.

"Kids need to know somebody cares," she said.

Cassie Sprenger, director of the San Lorenzo Valley Teen Center, has an idea to build better relations between teens and businesses in Felton, Ben Lomond and Boulder Creek.

She plans to recruit teens to speak with business owners about how they can create positive experiences for youth and what they would get out of it. The goal is not only to provide businesses with information but also help teens develop their speaking skills.

"It would be really great if business-

"He helps people with disabilities, he plays the guitar at Bonny Doon Presbyterian Church, and he leads the youth group," she said. "And he's a soccer coach."

Adamson said soccer is "a great way to mentor kids," but acknowledged that it takes time.

"With the pressures on adults these days, you struggle to make that a priority," said Adamson, 52, who has three children ranging in age from 13 to 20.

Several of the teens interviewed said they work, but none of them considered their employer to be a role model.

One teen from Boulder Creek, a senior who has played football, basketball and soccer, said he couldn't think of any adult role models.

"I don't talk to that many parents," he said.

The Young Life youth group meets at 7 p.m. Monday. For information, call 423-5478.

Contact Jondi Gumz at jgumz@santa-cruz.com.

es were aware of the power they have to improve lives of young people," she said.

If a business could give an employee one hour a week of paid time off to spend with a teen-ager, "that could make a big difference," Sprenger said.

Teens can make a difference for younger children, she added.

"Remember how cool you thought your 17-year-old cousin was?" she said. "It doesn't take much."

For more about the youth project, call Robin Lopez-Lysne at 336-1242. For information about teen speakers, call Cassie Sprenger at 335-9760. For information about community assets, check the Web at www.search-institute.org.

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