

Milwaukee Brighter Futures

A Better Community Through Prevention

Summary of Meeting: Dec. 15, 2009

2009 Youth Survey raises questions on serving youth

A snapshot of the behavior of Milwaukee teenagers has been provided by the recently released 2009 Youth Survey, the fourth in a series conducted since 2004 by Milwaukee Brighter Futures.

At the December 15th Brighter Futures meeting, Jan Wilberg, evaluator for BF and the survey coordinator, reported on the survey conducted in May and June, 2009, among some 335 youth, aged 12 through 18. She said the interviews were confidential and written, conducted in group settings at 10 agencies in the BF network.

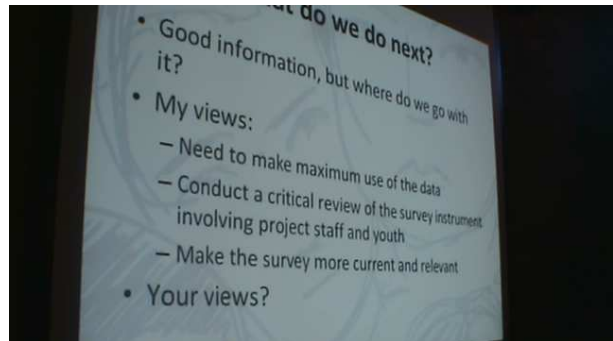
The average age of the respondents was 15.4 years, with 66% being girls and 97% being African-American, Hispanic/Latino or mixed origin. The key findings included:

Safety and violence issues

- 41% rode in a car in the previous 30 days with someone who had been drinking. There is a question, she said, of whether the drinkers were adults, friends or family, which is not revealed in the survey.
- More than half (52%) were in physical fights in the previous year, and 18% admitted to carrying a weapon in the previous month. Do these results indicate a high number of violent activities, Wilberg asked?
- While 88% felt sad or hopeless sometimes, only 11% talked to their parents and 12% to a trusted adult, with 39% turning to a friend.

Substance Abuse (Tobacco, Alcohol and Marijuana)

- More youth tried alcohol (65%) than marijuana (51%) or cigarettes (41%), raising a question as to why alcohol use was more prevalent.
- Having tried the substances, however, does not mean the youth are still using, with only



View of Power Point presentation at December meeting

- 14% saying they were current smokers and 41% indicating they were current drinkers.
- A small percentage indicated heavy usage in the substances, raising question of what should be the biggest concern – heavy users or occasional users?

Sexual Behavior

- Nearly two out of three had experienced sexual intercourse, with the average age of first encounter at 13 years for boys and 14 for girls; some 21% experienced intercourse at age 12 or under.
- Boys tended to have more partners in their past (4.1) compared to girls (2.6).
- 64% used condoms in their last experience, while 20% reported using no method or weren't sure.
- 20% reported getting pregnant or making someone pregnant.
- 14% identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- Wilberg raised the question as to how well workers understand current social mores and cultures around teen sexual behaviors.

In many ways, the behaviors of boys and girls differed, the study showed. Girls, for instance, were more likely to feel sad or depressed (91% to 81%) and twice as likely to find comfort in talking with friends about those feelings compared to boys (48% to 23%). Girls were less likely to have tried alcohol (40% to 26% never tried), to

have sex at a later age and to have fewer partners than boys.

Many of the behaviors that are risky for young people overlap, Wilberg noted, with youth defined as “violent” much more likely to engage in high risk behavior than those defined as “non violent.” (She defined “violent” youth as those who have carried a weapon more than once in the past 30 days and had two or more physical fights in the last year.)

For instance, high risk sexual behavior, defined as “no condom use” or “no contraception” in at least two or more sexual incidents, constituted 28% of the respondents, or 91 youngsters. These individuals were also likely to participate in a greater degree in other at-risk behaviors, including riding in a car with a drinking driver, carrying a weapon, substance abuse or dating violence, she said.

Wilberg said it was important to remember that the data shows that not all of the youth are engaged in risky behaviors. It also indicates that strategies may need to be aimed more directly at those groups of youth who are more likely to engage in such activities.

“What do we do next?” she asked to end the session. She suggested three potential steps:

- Making maximum use of the data, including working more closely with individual agencies to link the data as far as practicable with agency needs.
- Conduct a critical review of the survey instrument using both online staff and youth. “We need to ask the agencies to sit down with us,” she said, “to come up with some creative ideas that will get youth more involved.”
- Making the survey more current and relevant.

She urged participants to give their views to improve the process. Wilberg said she hopes to convene a group to look at plans for future surveys.

A participant noted that the brains of the young people are still developing, and that it is necessary to learn about what they are thinking, their attitudes and feelings. In response, Wilberg agreed that the current questions lack “any inquiry about hopes and dreams.”
(To view the survey and the PowerPoint, go to <http://milwaukeebrighterfutures.org/reports.php>)



The Cookie Exchange at December meeting

She agreed further on the need to include “line staff” in the discussions leading up to the formation of the questions. “We’re missing that,” she added.

An ‘exciting year’ For TPPN group

The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Network (TPPN) had an “exciting year” during 2009, Anthony McHenry, co-chair, said. The Network has been able to refine its direction as participation by many agencies became more regular during the year, he said.

The Youth Ambassadors program grew stronger during the year, he said, turning the discussion to Jody Rhodes of Neu-Life Center.

Rhodes said the Youth Ambassadors completed three summits with 527 teens and 112 adults, with 68 workshops, with 14 workshops being conducted by Youth Ambassadors. Two of the summits were at schools, she said, and were enthusiastically welcomed by the teachers. The Ambassadors had set a goal of reaching 500 teens, and exceeded that, she said.

Rhodes said the group started with 45 trained ambassadors, and now includes a core group of about 12, who are hoping to participate again in 2010 as well as to involve their friends, she said. Some dropped out, she said, due to the press of other activities.

Plans for future activities in 2010 will largely be designed by the Youth Ambassadors themselves, Rhodes said. “They will lead the way. They will design the summits. They decide how we do certain events.”

She thanks the various organizations who provided workshops at the summits and participated in other ways. “It’s been a great collaboration,” she said.

McHenry, of the Silver Spring Neighborhood Center, said participation in the Ambassadors is open; the kids come from all areas and all walks of life, making for a diverse population.



Jan Buchler leads discussion

In looking at the Youth Survey, he noted the participants were the youth who come to agencies for activities. "They made at least one good decision in their lives. They came to an agency where there is a caring adult there," he said. He said if the survey had been conducted among youth who were not in the programs, and were out on the streets, the results might be greatly different. "There's a population we need to get our hands on," he said.

He referred to the Family Unity Night, which sponsors the concept of using family dinners as a way to enhance communications between parents and children. He said the Night's goal is to get parents to understand that they "should be the teacher of our children."

He said plans are being made to expand the reach of Family Unity Night, particularly in partnering with similar initiatives of United Way. Family Unity Night has been declared to be held the second Thursday in October each year, with families being urged to have dinner together between the hours of 5 and 9 p.m.

New officers of the network for 2010 were elected at the December meeting: Deborah Bryant of the Medical College of Wisconsin will be treasurer, and Jeffery Roman will be secretary. JoCasta Zamarripa of Planned Parenthood and McHenry will be co-chairs. The Network meets every second Thursday of the month at noon at Silver Spring Neighborhood Center, 5460 N. 64th St.

Cooperative actions feature MCAPS efforts

The work of Brighter Futures agencies and others in the community are vital to the betterment of the community, Jan Buchler, of the Parenting Network said, in giving the Milwaukee Child Abuse Prevention Services (MCAPS) coalition report. She praised the efforts of persons in the room.

"There's so much more need so it's going to take all over us to be more thoughtful and efficient in the way we work," she said.

She cited the Welcome Baby project that came out of the Family Resource Connection as a new program that exemplifies the fact that we are working together to better serve families.

She also discussed the role of the Public Policy Committee which meets on the second Monday of each month at 2:30 p.m. at United Way.

Buchler asked the audience to discuss the question: How can we use the Youth Survey information to get parents more involved? Some of the comments from the audience:

- **The Parents Matter! Program curriculum was recommended as a tool to assist the parents in discussing sexual relations with children. It consists of five sessions for parents of 4th to 6th graders.**
- **It is an ongoing process of building trust between youth and adults, aiming at getting children to become more open to parents.**
- **Create a message to honor the parents for having children. Must develop a relationship with parents who may have had a child at a young age so that they show pride in being good parents who want their children to thrive.**
- **Strengthen peers to give positive messages on sexual relationships, stating that having sex is "not cool." The peer pressure has been a success in decreasing smoking among children, it was noted.**
- **Must work from a strength-based model and deal with parents with the realization that parents want the best for their children.**