



# KIDS COUNT in Delaware Issue Brief



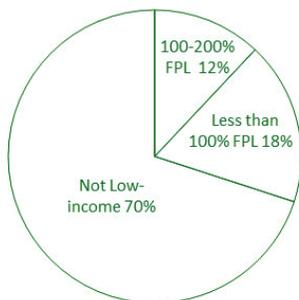
## Strengthening Delaware Adolescents

Fall 2012

Adolescence is the transitional period that spans the ages of 10-24. In Delaware, adolescents make up 19.4 % of the population. Commonly considered a time marked by risky behaviors, it is also a time of immense opportunity because it is a critical period to create life-long patterns of behavior. Supporting and empowering youth to make healthy decisions not only improves their current well-being, but also has far reaching positive impacts later in life. Providing information about the consequences of choices, both healthy and unhealthy, along with fostering their independence, can create opportunities for adolescents to take control of their well-being. When young people feel valued, informed, and empowered, they often make choices that are positive. ☆ ★ ☆

8.6% of Delaware teens are not in school or working. Males that are not in school or working are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior or illegal activities to earn money.

### Family Income Among Adolescents 12-18, Delaware 2009



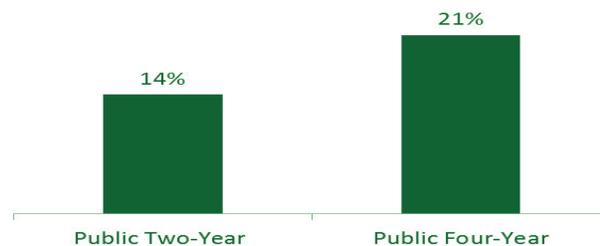
Source: National Center for Children in Poverty  
\*FPL stands for Federal Poverty Level, which in 2009 was \$22,050 for a family of 4

Employment is a major determinant of family well-being. As adolescents transition to adulthood, they feel the impacts of both family hardships and working toward achieving academic and financial success during difficult economic times. Adolescents need achievable opportunities such as affordable higher education or work training to become successful adults.

While it is imperative to recognize why adolescents sometimes engage in risky behaviors and to use interventions to decrease such behaviors, it is even more effective to assure that adolescents have the knowledge, skills, and support to make positive decisions that promote their health and well-being. Positive Youth Development is an effective framework which empowers young people to avoid unhealthy choices, as well as builds on the skills and assets that adolescents already possess. Building protective factors can create a strong foundation for healthy lifestyles and behaviors over the full life span. While adolescents typically exert their independence, research shows that parents are the most likely source of influence.

### College Affordability

Percentage of Family Income Needed to Pay for 2 and 4 Year Public Colleges, DE 2008/2009

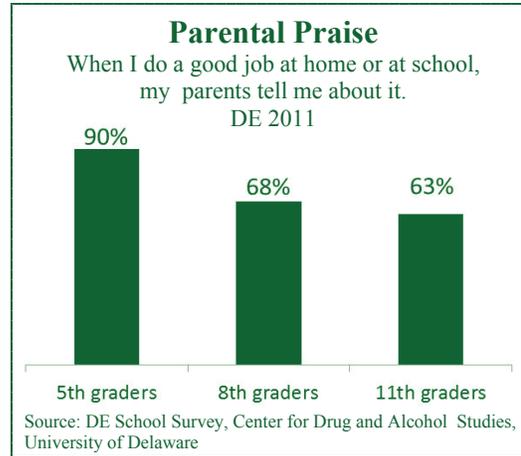


Source: The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education



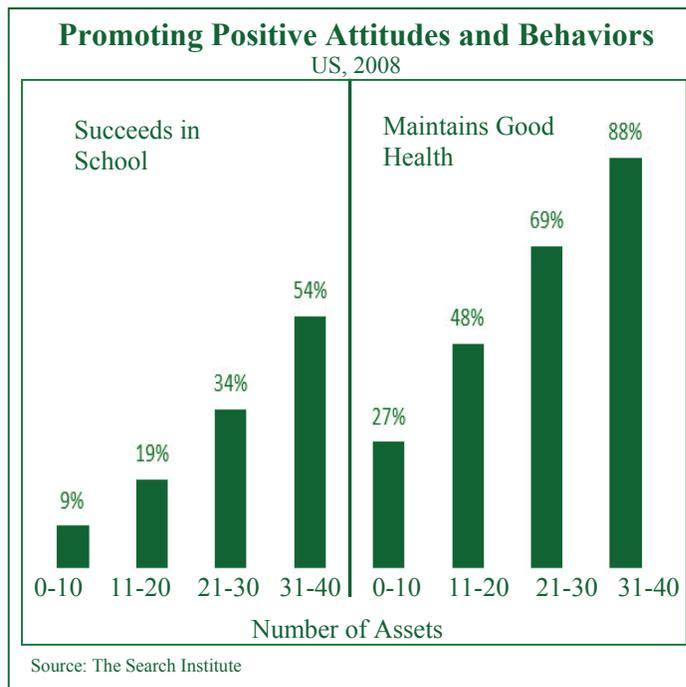
## What Young People Need to Succeed

The most important component of improving the well-being of adolescents is to consider them valuable resources and assets to be nurtured and supported, not problems to be fixed. Communities should engage and utilize adolescents as active participants in program development and community activities. Valuing young people is a powerful tool and connecting youth to the people and places in their environments will lead to positive results. Deterring risk behaviors is only one side of the coin. The other side is ensuring that adolescents are prepared for adulthood. While adolescents can benefit from a variety of programs, research shows that it is more effective to provide young people with caring, positive role models. Adolescents that are connected to others are less likely to engage in risky behaviors in addition to exhibiting positive long-term effects such as improved mental health and academic success. Adolescents need the opportunities to become successful, contributing, and healthy adults because they are the next workforce, parents, leaders, and community members.



In a National study of over 3 million young people, only 25% reported that they feel valued by their communities. Additionally, only 28% feel they have positive adult role models.

Developmental Assets are the building blocks created by the Search Institute. The list consists of both external and internal assets that speak to Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, and Positive Identity. By focusing on what is right with young people and not their problems, building Developmental Assets creates successful young people that feel empowered to make positive decisions. Asset development does not require funding nor does it link to specific programs. To have a positive impact on the lives of Delaware adolescents, adults should foster relationships and provide supports that guide and value youth. It only takes a little time and a commitment to make young people feel noticed and respected.





## What Are Developmental Assets?



### 40 Developmental Assets® for Adolescents (ages 12-18)

Search Institute® has identified the following building blocks of healthy development—known as Developmental Assets®—that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.



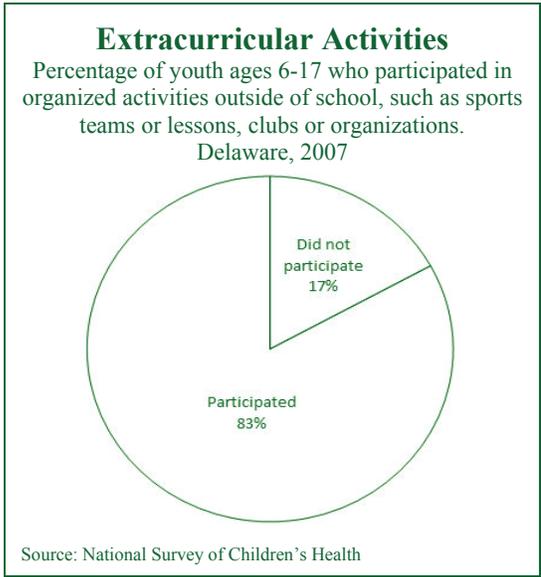
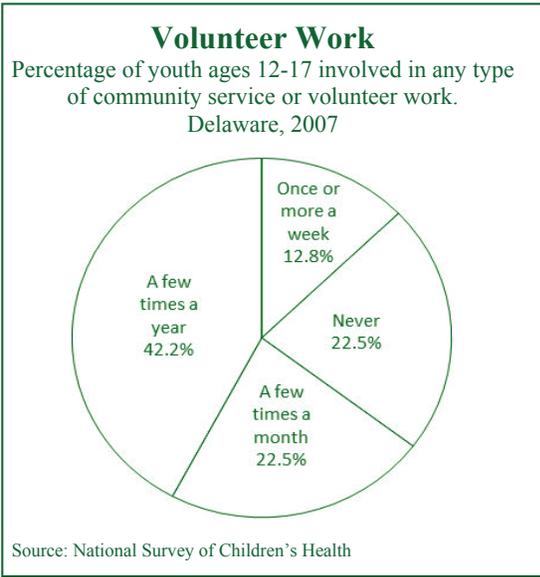
<b>External Assets</b>	<b>Support</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Family support</b>—Family life provides high levels of love and support.</li> <li>2. <b>Positive family communication</b>—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.</li> <li>3. <b>Other adult relationships</b>—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.</li> <li>4. <b>Caring neighborhood</b>—Young person experiences caring neighbors.</li> <li>5. <b>Caring school climate</b>—School provides a caring, encouraging environment.</li> <li>6. <b>Parent involvement in schooling</b>—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.</li> </ol>	
	<b>Empowerment</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. <b>Community values youth</b>—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.</li> <li>8. <b>Youth as resources</b>—Young people are given useful roles in the community.</li> <li>9. <b>Service to others</b>—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.</li> <li>10. <b>Safety</b>—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.</li> </ol>	
	<b>Boundaries &amp; Expectations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. <b>Family boundaries</b>—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.</li> <li>12. <b>School Boundaries</b>—School provides clear rules and consequences.</li> <li>13. <b>Neighborhood boundaries</b>—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.</li> <li>14. <b>Adult role models</b>—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.</li> <li>15. <b>Positive peer influence</b>—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.</li> <li>16. <b>High expectations</b>—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.</li> </ol>	
	<b>Constructive Use of Time</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. <b>Creative activities</b>—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.</li> <li>18. <b>Youth programs</b>—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.</li> <li>19. <b>Religious community</b>—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.</li> <li>20. <b>Time at home</b>—Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.</li> </ol>	
	<b>Internal Assets</b>	<b>Commitment to Learning</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. <b>Achievement Motivation</b>—Young person is motivated to do well in school.</li> <li>22. <b>School Engagement</b>—Young person is actively engaged in learning.</li> <li>23. <b>Homework</b>—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.</li> <li>24. <b>Bonding to school</b>—Young person cares about her or his school.</li> <li>25. <b>Reading for Pleasure</b>—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.</li> </ol>
		<b>Positive Values</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26. <b>Caring</b>—Young person places high value on helping other people.</li> <li>27. <b>Equality and social justice</b>—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.</li> <li>28. <b>Integrity</b>—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.</li> <li>29. <b>Honesty</b>—Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."</li> <li>30. <b>Responsibility</b>—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.</li> <li>31. <b>Restraint</b>—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.</li> </ol>
		<b>Social Competencies</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>32. <b>Planning and decision making</b>—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.</li> <li>33. <b>Interpersonal Competence</b>—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.</li> <li>34. <b>Cultural Competence</b>—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.</li> <li>35. <b>Resistance skills</b>—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.</li> <li>36. <b>Peaceful conflict resolution</b>—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.</li> </ol>
		<b>Positive Identity</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>37. <b>Personal power</b>—Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."</li> <li>38. <b>Self-esteem</b>—Young person reports having a high self-esteem.</li> <li>39. <b>Sense of purpose</b>—Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."</li> <li>40. <b>Positive view of personal future</b>—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.</li> </ol>

Source: The Search Institute. Available at [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

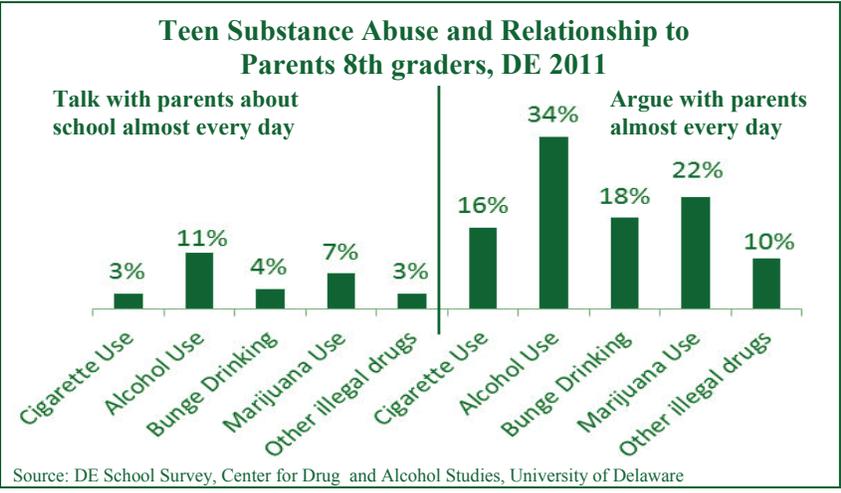


## Unstructured Time

There are opportunities to make Positive Youth Development actionable. Adolescents typically have increased amounts of unstructured or unsupervised time, parents and communities become more disengaged, and many times this age group also has inadequate access to preventive health and mental health services. More free time and less support and guidance from adults can undermine an adolescent’s ability and motivation to take responsibility for their health and behavior choices. Recent research into the adolescent brain shows that brain development continues into an individual’s twenties. The last part of the brain to be completely developed is the pre-frontal cortex which regulates executive functioning (thing like decision-making and impulse control). This may explain why, despite cognitive improvements, adolescents appear to be more prone to erratic or emotionally influenced behavior and a disregard for risks and the resulting consequences. For these reasons, it is all the more crucial to continue to engage adolescents and provide guidance.



Parents play a critical role in helping their children engage in healthy risk-taking (i.e., playing sports, making new friends, volunteering) and avoiding negative, unhealthy risk-taking (i.e., substance use and abuse, sexual activity, violence).



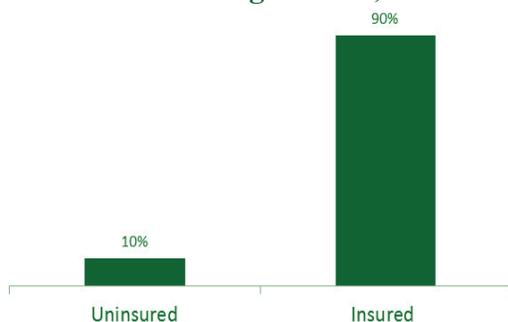


## Adolescent Health

A report from the National Adolescent Health Center states the top policy goal for this population is to improve access to healthcare. Some of the barriers cited in the report include financial barriers, types of services currently available, legal restrictions, and adolescents' own perceptions of restricted health care access.

Adolescents are more likely to be uninsured and underinsured than younger populations. A 2008 report by the Urban Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation shows that 10% of Delaware youth aged 13-18 were uninsured compared to 6.5% of those aged 0-5. A 2012 report released by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services shows that 3.1 million young adults have gained health insurance because of the health care law.

**Health Insurance Among Delaware Adolescents ages 13-18, 2008**



Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Vaccinations should not be overlooked as a child gets older. Pediatricians recommend booster shots beginning at age 11 or 12. One of the vaccinations recommended for adolescents relates to Human Papillomavirus (HPV). HPV can cause a variety of health issues such as cancer and genital warts in both males and females. Additionally, HPV often has no symptoms making it vitally important to receive the full 3-dose vaccination.

One way to combat barriers to healthcare is through school-based health centers (SBHCs). There are 28 SBHCs in Delaware high schools. SBHCs typically offer a range of services including physicals, mental health services, nutrition counseling, and reproductive health services. Adolescents are more likely to use SBHCs because of the convenience in utilizing their services and how they empower youth to take control of their own health. The American Academy of Pediatrics reports that SBHCs have been shown to improve adolescents' health for several outcomes while also reducing health care costs. Students who use SBHCs are more likely to have received recommended vaccines and screening for high-risk behaviors, compared with those who do not use SBHCs. Students who use SBHCs have also been shown to have higher satisfaction with their health status and have healthier behaviors, such as more physical activity and greater consumption of healthier foods.

**School-Based Health Centers in Delaware**

Center	High School	School District
Brandywine	Brandywine	Brandywine
Caesar Rodney	Caesar Rodney	Caesar Rodney
Cape Henlopen	Cape Henlopen	Cape Henlopen
Christiana	Christiana	Christiana
Concord	Concord	Brandywine
Delcastle	Delcastle Technical	New Castle County Votech
Delmar	Delmar Senior	Delmar
Dickinson	John Dickinson	Red Clay Consolidated
Dover	Dover	Capital
Glasgow	Glasgow	Christiana
Hodgson	Paul M. Hodgson Votechnical	New Castle County Votech
Howard	Howard of Technology	New Castle County Votech
Indian River	Indian River	Indian River
Lake Forest	Lake Forest	Lake Forest
Laurel	Laurel Senior	Laurel
McKean	Thomas McKean	Red Clay Consolidated
Middletown	Middletown	Appoquinimink
Milford	Milford Senior	Milford
Mt. Pleasant	Mount Pleasant	Brandywine
Newark	Newark	Christiana
Polytech	Polytech	Polytech
Seaford	Seaford Senior	Seaford
Smyrna	Smyrna	Smyrna
Sussex Central	Sussex Central Senior	Indian River
Sussex Tech	Sussex Technical	Sussex Technical
William Penn	William Penn	Colonial
Wilmington Campus	Cab Calloway School of the Arts	Red Clay Consolidated
Woodbridge	Woodbridge	Woodbridge

Source: Delaware Division of Public Health

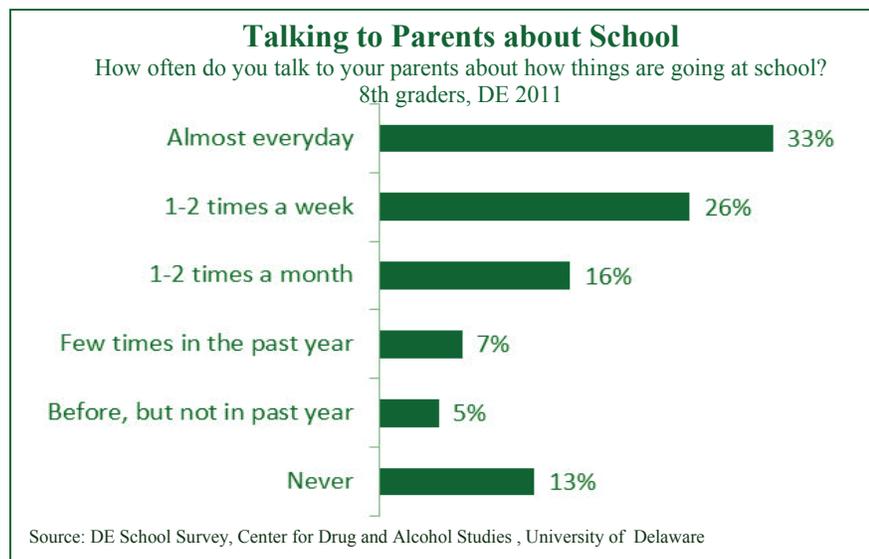


## Optimizing Outcomes for Adolescents

The Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs and the National Network of State Adolescent Health Coordinators, reports a healthy adolescent is characterized by the ability to realize individual potential around critical developmental tasks, including the ability to:

- ★ Form caring, supportive relationships with family, other adults and peers.
- ★ Engage, in a positive way, in the life of their communities.
- ★ Engage in behaviors that optimize wellness and contribute to a healthy lifestyle.
- ★ Demonstrate physical, cognitive, emotional, social and moral competencies.
- ★ Demonstrate resiliency when confronted with life stressors.
- ★ Demonstrate increasingly responsible and independent decision-making.
- ★ Experience a sense of self-confidence, hopefulness and well-being.

My Life, My Plan is a collaborative initiative between the Delaware Healthy Mother and Infant Consortium and Delaware's Division of Public Health whose aim is to educate teens on reproductive life planning and healthy choices. This tool targets teens ages 15–18 with messages on setting goals and empowerment to make positive life choices. The plan is available at <http://dhss.delaware.gov/dph/chca/files/teenlifepanfinal.pdf>



The development of healthy adolescents is a complex and evolving process that requires supportive and caring families, peers and communities; access to high quality services (health, education, social and other community services); and opportunities to engage and succeed in the developmental tasks of adolescence. All young people need support, guidance, and opportunities during adolescence, a time of rapid growth and change. With this support, they can develop self-assurance in the four areas that are key to creating a happy, healthy, and successful life:

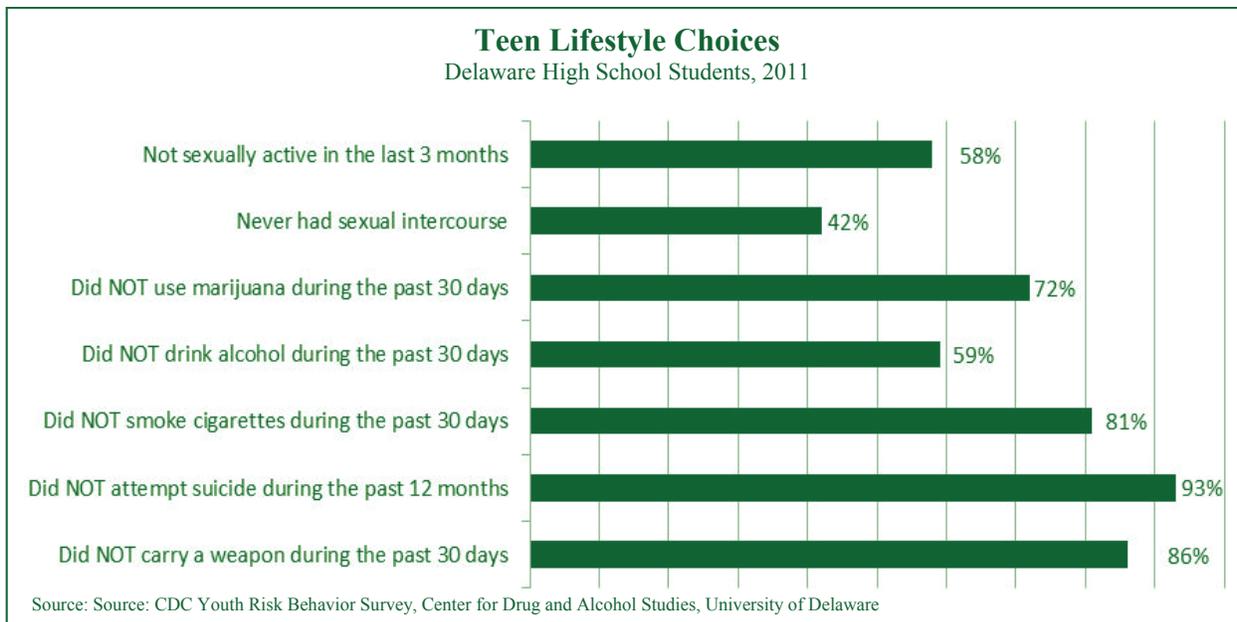
- ★ A sense of competence: being able to do something well
- ★ A sense of usefulness: having something to contribute
- ★ A sense of belonging: being part of a community
- ★ A sense of power: having control over one's future

Studies of more than 2.2 million young people consistently show that the more assets young people have, the less likely they are to engage in a wide range of high-risk behaviors and the more likely they are to thrive.

~ Search Institute



## Improving Adolescent Well-Being



To improve adolescent environments we need to strengthen, support and preserve families, improve the social and economic conditions of families, and reduce exposure to unhealthy conditions and behaviors.

There are many programs in the community that are targeted to the adolescent developmental stage. Many of these programs focus on increasing protective factors for youth and young adults. Sometimes called ‘positive youth development’ or an ‘asset development approach’ each of these programs draws upon a foundation where policy, funding and programming are directed at providing a support system to young people as they build their capacities and strengths to meet their personal and social needs. Specifically, effective youth programs:

- ★ Give careful attention to quality implementation,
- ★ Involve caring and knowledgeable adults,
- ★ Have high expectations for the behavior and achievements of participating youth,
- ★ Involve parents or guardians,
- ★ Create a sense of community among participating youth and involve community members in the program,
- ★ Provide comprehensive services capable of dealing holistically with the needs of youth,
- ★ Understand that youth can contribute to helping improve their communities,
- ★ Value work-based learning and
- ★ Provide long term and follow-up services.



In summary, while adolescents benefit from a variety of programs, programs often work in silos that are focused on a particular issue. Research shows that adolescents can benefit the most from comprehensive support and guidance from adult role models. Adolescents benefit from having adults that build a young person’s Developmental Assets. Whether one is a parent, a teacher, a neighbor, or an advocate, reaching out to young people is something that anyone can do. Asking a young person’s opinion, including them in conversations and decision-making, or even just noticing them will build that young person’s assets and make them feel valued. Performing small acts of asset-building can create life-long skills such as honesty, restraint, and responsibility.

*One of fifty-three similar projects throughout the U.S. and its territories funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, **KIDS COUNT in Delaware** is housed in the Center for Community Research and Service at the University of Delaware and led by a board of committed and concerned child and family advocates from the public and private sectors. **KIDS COUNT in Delaware** is especially indebted to the support of the University of Delaware and the State of Delaware.*

Research on assets within the family, school, and neighborhood found that eating dinner together as a family was one of the most important factors associated with positive adolescent development. In fact, after accounting for the influence of sex, race, and family household income, this collective activity among family members was the strongest predictor of positive adolescent functioning.

~Child Trends

