

# New community group forms to hear and support area's youth

By Patrick L. Sullivan

FALLSVILLAGE—A new group, the Northwest Corner Prevention Network, has been created, to help formulate policies and recommendations to help the youth of the Region One School District.

Lynn Marlowe from the Housatonic Youth Service Bureau is the group's first director and Lesly Ferris, director of Kent's Park and Recreation department, is the president.

The six towns in the district are Sharon, Salisbury, Kent, Cornwall, North Canaan and Falls Village.

The network is a group of individuals, busi-

nesses and community service groups. The idea is to increase what are called "developmental assets" using results from a survey taken by Region One students in grades seven, nine and 11.

The survey was taken late last year, and the overall results will be made public beginning in April.

This is the second time the survey has been taken in Region One.

Marlowe said the public "rollout" begins in April with focus groups of students from the three grades who will look at the survey results. Two groups of six students in grade seven will then

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lead presentations at the six elementary schools in the district. Freshmen and juniors will hold an assembly at Housatonic Valley Regional High School.

There will be another presentation May 17 at Salisbury Congregational Church.

Marlowe said that network members have spoken to elected officials, businesspeople and clergy "to get them to buy in before the rollout."

Over the summer the network will consider strategies.

The authors of the developmental assets survey, The Search Institute, have asked 3 million youths about how they experience 40 developmental assets over a 20-year span.

"The results are compelling: The more assets kids have, the better. Youth with high asset levels are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors (such as violence, sexual activity, drug use and suicide) and more likely to engage in thriving behaviors (such as helping others, doing well in school and taking on leadership roles)," according to the first page of the executive summary.

The 40 developmental assets are divided into two broad categories: external and internal.

### Feeling undervalued

External assets include: family support; positive relationships in neighborhoods, with other adults and at school; the role of youth in the community; boundaries for behavior set by families, schools or communities; the influence of peers; and constructive uses of time.

Internal assets include: an individual's commitment to education (including active participation at school, doing homework, and reading for fun); positive values (does the young person place a high value on helping others, being honest and accepting responsibility); social competence (can the young person resist negative peer pressure, does the young person have positive friends); and positive identity (self-esteem and a sense of purpose).

As was the case the last time this survey was given, the younger students reported more positively than their older counterparts.

For example, under "external assets," 88 percent of the grade

seven students reported family support, compared to 76 percent of freshmen and 56 percent of juniors.

The students do not seem to think their communities value them; only 43 percent of seventh-graders, 22 percent of freshmen and 17 percent of juniors reported they felt their communities value youth.

Just under half of the seventh-graders believed they had clear family boundaries (48 percent); 30 percent of the ninth-graders and 33 percent of the grade 11 students felt similarly.

And under "constructive use of time," 26 percent of the students in grades seven and nine reported being involved in "creative activities," and just 14 percent of the juniors.

Under the "internal assets" heading, 86 percent of the seventh-graders said they were motivated to achieve in school, versus 66 percent of the ninth-graders and 48 percent of the juniors.

Under "honesty," 79 percent of grade seven and 50 percent of grades nine and 11 rated themselves as honest, and under "resistance skills" the numbers were 60 percent, 30 percent and 27 percent, respectively.

But under "positive view of personal future," the numbers were higher: 84 percent for grade seven, 73 percent for grade nine and 64 percent for grade 11.

### Goal: increase positive assets

Armed with the survey data and the results of the discussions with young people, the network plans to develop strategies to increase the number of students reporting positive assets. Ferris pointed to the kind of support that youth basketball programs get from families and the community as a whole, and said that support continues into the high school years.

All the members of the network — 22 at the last meeting — plan to talk to three friends, with the idea that those people will in turn talk to three others.

Anne Hughes, an intern working with the group, said, "We hope to get some buzz from more than one sector."

Marlowe said the network is planning to send out an "Asset of the Month" to parents. April's communication will be about self-esteem, with helpful pointers for parents.

Anyone interested is welcome to come to the meetings of the

Northwest Corner Prevention Network, at the Geer conference room in North Canaan, 9:30 to 11 a.m. on the second Tuesday of the month.

Interested people may also call Marlowe at 860-824-4720 or Ferris at 860-927-1003.

There will be a prescription drug take back day Saturday, April 28, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the high school. People can drop off expired or unneeded medications, including veterinary medications. At the last such event, cut short by October's freak snowstorm, the group collected 12 pounds of medications for disposal.

# AN EFFORT ON DRUGS

By KATHRYN  
BOUGHTON

## FALLS VILLAGE—

Twenty-first century American parents know they need to keep a wary eye on their children. Dangers abound from the readily recognizable hazard—teaching children to stay out of the road, for instance—to the unseen sexual predator that so often makes headlines, to the peer pressure that could lead young people

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# Northwest Corner Drugs Issue

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The powerful prescription narcotic medicines that so often sit unremarked in our medicine cabinets have become one of the newest, and most prevalent kinds of addiction, according to area experts.

"In Northwest Connecticut, [the drug of choice] used to be heroin," state Rep. Roberta Willis told officials at a recent Legislative Breakfast in Cornwall. "Then it was oxycodone and now it is Opana." Opana, also known as oxymorphone is used to relieve moderate to severe pain.

"Young people are getting access to prescription drugs," she continued. "It is so easy. You go to the emergency room complaining about back pain and you get a pain killer. Then you go to New York State, get a doctor, say you are in pain and get another prescription. Supposedly we have a larger database where that would be picked up—well, it's not being picked up. There is a breakdown in data collection."

The pay off for obtaining the drugs—whether they are illicitly obtained by doctor shopping or filched from a parent's or grandparent's medicine cabinet—can be substantial. Mrs. Willis reported that the street value for

a single pill can be more than \$100.

Area groups working with young people are well aware of the problem and are working to reduce access to drugs. The Housatonic Youth Service Bureau, working in conjunction with the Northwest Corner Prevention Network, and the state police at Troop B, will host a second Community Prescription Drug Take-Back Event Saturday, April 28, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Housatonic Valley Regional High School, 246 Warren Turnpike Road.

The take-back day provides families and community members with a safe and confidential way to dispose of unused prescription medications.

"We have started doing prescription drug take backs to remove these substances from the home and to give people a proper avenue for their disposal—not flushing them down the toilet, which brings its own problems," said Nicholas Pohl, director of the HYSB Household disposal of drugs can easily taint water supplies and contaminate ecosystems.

"But an equal function of these events is to increase awareness of the problem in the community," said Mr. Pohl. "We want people to remember that these drugs are serious and need to be monitored. If they are misused or taken off-label, they can

have serious consequences. It is very easy for families and kids to forget that. We are trying to get people talking about it."

He said area substance abuse centers have reported a big increase in the number of people admitted who identify prescription drugs as the source of their addiction. "Look in any medicine cabinet and you will find prescription drugs just sitting there," said Mr. Pohl. "There are so many avenues to get them. Even open houses are becoming targets—people come in, look through the bathroom and check out the medicine cabinet to see what is there. There are creative ways to get them and people will find a way."

He said he has no concrete figures about drug use among young people in the Region 1 School District, which includes Canaan, Falls Village, Cornwall, Salisbury, Kent and Sharon. The HYSB has done an assets survey, however, that looks at the number of assets young people have in their lives—intact families, church participation, civic organizations and the like. "The survey gives a snapshot of families and how the young people are experiencing those assets," Mr. Pohl said. "The more assets they experience the more likelihood of their making positive decisions. We're looking at prevention through collaboration, getting the message out about developmental assets and how to preserve our families and our young people."

That survey also questioned the teens about the use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco within the past 30 days.

"The developmental assets survey focuses on the use of marijuana, alcohol and tobacco," he reported. "It doesn't touch on pre-

scription drugs. They will change that in the future and then we will have a better hold on it. What we could see was that the use of tobacco is lower than marijuana and alcohol, so something is being done right about tobacco. But I don't think we have the level of education for marijuana and alcohol.

"I wouldn't be surprised if for some kids involved it is easier to get prescription drugs than alcohol or cigarettes," he continued, adding that athletes are a particularly vulnerable population because they are often given pain medications as the result of injuries.

The survey is anecdotal, he conceded, but said it did reveal that substance use and abuse is an issue for young people in community.

During the Prescription Drug Take Back on April 28, representatives from HYSB, the Northwest Corner Prevention Network, and the State Police will be available to answer questions. Interested parties can anonymously drop off their medications for proper disposal. The collected medications will be transferred to the National Guard for incineration.

Twelve pounds of prescription drugs and medications were collected at the Prevention Network's first take-back event last October.

The April event in Falls Village coincides with the national take-back initiative. DEA administrator Michele M. Leonhart has noted in a release that these events "have dramatically reduced the risk of prescription drug diversion and abuse and increased awareness of this critical public health issue."

The Northwest Corner Prevention Network was started in 2010 in an effort to foster dialogue about developmental assets and substance abuse/addiction related issues in the area. HYSB provides programs, services and events for children, youth and families living in the six towns that make up the Region I School District.

For more information about The Northwest Corner Prevention Network or HYSB, call 860-824-4720, or visit [www.hysb.org](http://www.hysb.org).

The event is free and open to the general public. Refreshments will be served. Questions about this upcoming event may be directed to HYSB at 860-824-4720