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Youth Supports

A resource to encourage and empower youth leaders for the expansion of the Lord's kingdom.

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- Ministering to High-Risk Youth
- Youth Ministry Resources

Ministering to High Risk Youth

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As a veteran of youth ministry for 20 years, I never cease to be amazed at behavior that youth engage in. Just when I start thinking that there is no behavior youth engage in that could surprise me...guess what happens?? In fact, it appears to me that the behavior of youth continues to increase in the level and types of risks taken. Or is it that the level of understanding the difference between good and bad risks has become less defined?

There was a time when the predominantly Christian youth population I ministered to and with was not as apt to engage in life ending attempts as some of their peers. Now it seems that youth raised in a Christian home with healthy parents are just as susceptible to suicide attempts and other risky behavior, e.g. alcohol and drug abuse, eating disorders, violence, sexual activity as their counterparts are.

Why are our youth engaging in increasingly risky behavior? What is our role as youth professionals in ministering to them in a context of grace? How intentional are we in addressing the risk taking behavior of our youth?

At a recent public school district training on youth at risk in our community, it was suggested that youth are increasing their risk behaviors in an attempt to make a difference! Have youth of today lost opportunities for responsibility and being significant? Due to the onslaught of dishwashers and microwaves, youth do not even have to wash dishes or cook to add to the function of the household. Are we as a Body of Christ that our youth belong to providing roles and responsibilities for our youth that they find meaningful?

As adolescents develop, their task is to go from being dependent to independent, and from captivity to freedom. This is the time of greatest change in their lives physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, and perhaps even spiritually. The most common questions asked are :Who am I? Where do I belong? and Do I make a difference?

Do we minister to youth with an attitude of trying to fix their problems or do we intentionally try to promote their strengths? I know that every time I am sitting at

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K-Scope on Hood Canal!

the Behavioral Health Center after an attempted suicide of a youth I know and love, it is way too late to try to fix their problems. At that point all I can do is give them my unconditional positive regard and acceptance, (as Christ does for all of us!) help them accept their loss, and focus on their strengths!!

I was reminded again at the training I attended, of the 40 Developmental Assets (Search Institute) that kids need to succeed including family support, a caring neighborhood, self-esteem, and resistance skills. Research has shown time and time again that the more assets young people have, the less likely they are to lose their way and get into trouble. Perhaps it is time we pulled out the 40 assets again and evaluate where our ministries are developing these assets with our youth and where we could improve on developing assets with our youth.

Of course as Christians, we have the greatest asset ever to offer our youth: The grace and unconditional love found only through Jesus Christ!!! We have a message to share with youth that goes beyond the walls of any church building or program or this life!! It is my prayer that as we minister to all youth, from all walks of life, that the message of Jesus be first and foremost in our relationship with them! Only through Christ, can youth (and all of us!) completely answer the questions: Who am I? Where do I belong? And Do I make a difference???

—Carolyn Hackman, Director of Youth and Family Ministry, St. John Lutheran Church, Idaho Falls, ID. <carolynh@onewest.net>

-ed.: For more information on Search Institute's Developmental Assets, go to <<http://www.search-institute.org/assets/>> or call them in Minneapolis at 800-888-7828.

Find past issues of Youth Supports at:

http://www.nowlcms.org/educational_services/YouthSupports.aspx

“Kaleidoscope,” one of the premier youth ministry programs of the Northwest District, is set for July 8-13, 2007. Arranged by the the Youth Ministry Task Force of the district, this creative and dynamic experience of the Christ community will be held at the Christ Lutheran Retreat Center near Belfair, Washington. The registration fee is \$150. Congregations are encouraged to offer scholarship assistance for their high school youth. Because of the nature of the program, only 35 participants will be included — and no more than four from one congregation. Youth currently in high school are encouraged to apply by June 11 (postmark). After this date registrations will be accepted on a “first come, first served” basis. Jeff Kranich, DCE at Hope/Seattle, will serve as the dean. Pastor John Schmidt (Prince of Peace/Tacoma) serves as the K-Scope Coordinator and will be the “pastor-in-residence.” Registration opens March 1. Contact Pastor John Schmidt for more information at 253-584-2565 or KscopeNOW@cs.com

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