

The State of Tompkins County Youth

*A 2012 needs assessment of Tompkins County young people
from birth to age twenty-four*

Executive Summary

Charged with identifying priorities for youth in our community, the Tompkins County Youth Services Department strives to understand the needs of the community to assist in maximizing local resources to best support young people. With the assistance and support of various community stakeholders it has proved important to conduct a community-wide needs assessment of the State of Youth in Tompkins County.

The goal of the *State of Tompkins County Youth* report is to examine a number of community and individual risk factors and assets. The report includes data that suggest community and individual strengths and assets, factors that may contribute to academic success or failure, to criminal or non-delinquent behavior, to skill and workforce development, to good health and overall well-being. It identifies current investments in youth, gaps in services, and opportunities to improve community efforts on behalf of young people.

After analyzing the various research, data collected and conversations it became clear that while some of the strengths, concerns and gaps in needs for youth are age-specific, there were many that crossed the boundaries of age-groupings.



Methodology

A Steering Committee formed from a variety of agencies began the data identification process by determining what information was desirable and then collecting the available data from a variety of sources. Data used in this report were gathered from a variety of pre-existing reports as well as through local focus groups, discussions with key local informants and community surveys.

The Steering Committee determined that information would be most helpful if it fell into age-specific categories. The committee then formed sub-committees composed of:

- Early Childhood (Ages 0 - 4)
- Elementary Aged (Ages 5 - 10)
- Middle School Aged (Ages 11 - 14)
- High School Aged (Ages 15 - 18)
- Beyond High School (Ages 18 - 24)

Each committee group was charged with collecting relevant data and placing the data into one of the four following categories:

1. Community Influences
2. School/Educational Influences
3. Family Influences
4. Peer Group/Individual Influences

The following is a brief summary of some of the key findings from our data analyses and discussions.

The full report is available at
www.tompkins-co.org/youth

Community Strengths

Recreation for All

As the local slogan says, "Ithaca is Gorges," and our youth and families in Tompkins County depend on the natural resources to thrive. There are 100+ gorges and waterfalls located within 10 miles of downtown Ithaca. Along with the waterfalls, gorges and lakefront, the surrounding county offers access to 28,000 acres of public forestland for hiking, mountain biking and outdoor recreation.



An Abundance of Services

Parents, youth workers, and students feel that there are many services in Tompkins County to support the needs of young people and their families. Over 88% of the parents surveyed through the needs assessment were able to identify one or more (most often more) resources that they count on to help meet their needs as they raise their child/children.

“Young people need role models. They don’t know what the future could hold for them. They don’t see the endless possibilities. Without seeing, they can’t create goals. They are lost. They must be introduced to wonderful careers that would make a difference and give them a purpose in life.”

**Tompkins County High
School Student**

Community Concerns

Lack of Employment Opportunities for Youth

According to the Workforce Investment Board of Tompkins County during the mid-2000's, the national teenage unemployment rate ranged between 14 - 18%. Then the economic downturn occurred and teen unemployment began to rise, peaking at 27% in October, 2009. Since then, the recovery has created more than 1 million new jobs for adults and brought the unemployment rate down to 8.2%. However, there's been no recovery for teens. The national average unemployment rate for teens has remained above 20%.

Lack of Support for Parents/Caregivers

The family unit within Tompkins County has changed. Single parent families are on the rise as are multiple families living in one household. According to the 2010 U.S Census, 12.3% of families are spearheaded by a single parent which is a 3% increase from Census 2000.

Financial Hardships Impact Families

According to the 2011 American Community Survey, within Tompkins County 20.2% of children and youth (ages 0 - 18) are living in poverty. This means that many of our children and families are hungry and lacking the basic necessities. Even with free and reduced lunch programs provided by our schools many youth have empty stomachs

Bullying

Bullying among young people can occur in person or through technology (electronic aggression or cyberbullying). Electronic aggression is bullying that occurs through social media, e-mail, a chat room, instant messaging, a website, text messaging, or videos or pictures posted on websites or sent through cell phones.

In a 2009 National Youth Risk and Behaviors Survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control, about 20% of high school students reported being bullied on school property in the 12 months prior to the survey.

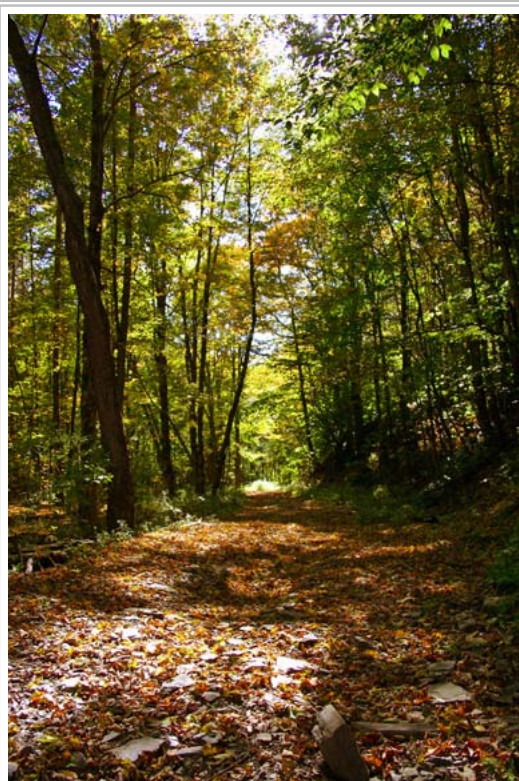
Community Concerns

Substance Use among Youth

The 2010 Youth Development Survey indicated that alcohol continues to be the most widely used drug among Tompkins County youth. Most students (80%) did not drink alcohol in the 30 days prior to taking the survey. However, 55% of students in grades 6 - 12 have had a full alcoholic drink at least once in their lives, up from 49% in 2008. Comparisons with national peers show higher lifetime and 30-day use for local students in grades 10 and 12. Marijuana is the next most commonly used drug by Tompkins County youth. By 12th grade, 45% of students have tried marijuana at least once and 26% are current users (within the past 30 days).

Increasing Mental Health Needs

More than one in four high school and middle school youth reported in the 2010 Youth Development Survey that they felt sad or depressed most days during the past year. These youth reported higher use rates for alcohol, marijuana and pain killers than non-depressed students. They also like school less and are less successful academically.



Concerning Gaps

Availability of Child Care

In Tompkins County the number of young people needing childcare exceeds the number of formal spaces available for care. Based on the labor force participation rate of Tompkins County parents with children under the age of 5.5 years (69%) there are approximately 3,000 young people in need of care in this age grouping.

Transportation

Transportation remains a barrier for youth to participate in activities and to secure employment. Over the past three years, school districts have been reducing the number of late buses they operate due to budget reductions. The lack of late buses prevents students who cannot get a ride home from participating in afterschool activities, work and sports. Currently, there are no school districts that operate 5PM late buses and the number of buses have been reduced.

Community Based Venues for Older Youth to Socialize

Over one quarter of all the middle and high school aged students with whom the needs assessment steering committee met in focus groups or surveyed electronically indicated that they need places to "hang out" beyond those currently available after school and after hours of typical community center activities. This need for places to socialize was verbalized in a variety of ways throughout the assessment.

Technology

The community and schools have begun to embrace this era of technology. To continue to support young people and our future community it is important to help youth to learn to properly utilize the tools and provide access to these tools for all youth. While communities are making strides to increase broadband, provide equipment to all students and train youth and parents on technology, there is still more work to be done.

