



## Teen Assessment Project Executive Summary For the Monadnock Region

The Monadnock United Way, concerned that local youth issues had changed since the Drugs, Alcohol, and Youth (DAY) regional survey was done in 1987, reviewed tools that could be used for another regional youth survey. The University of New Hampshire Teen Assessment Project (TAP) survey was chosen due to its depth, focus on protective factors as well as risk factors, and its community educational component. As was the DAY survey, TAP was used with youth in SAUs 1, 29, 38, 47 and 60. The goal of TAP is to provide communities with local research-based information that can help them better support local teens and their families. Survey results provide a vehicle for youth, parent, school, and community education and action, help secure local funding, stimulate program and policy changes, and lead to changes in attitudes and behaviors that build assets/protective factors in families, schools, and communities.

The Monadnock United Way Assessment Committee involved many community coalitions and agencies in identifying critical questions to ask. These were formatted into a 160 question survey that asked teens about their perceptions of self, family, school, and community; their worries, concerns, and future aspirations; and their activities, both positive and problematic. The survey was administered to 7th through 12th grade students in SAUs 29, 38 and 60 and 9th through 12th grade students in SAUs 1 and 47 in March of 2000. A total of 5,576 surveys were used for data analysis. This represents approximately 84% of the students eligible to take the survey in the Monadnock Region. Following are selected local TAP survey results.

### **Family Characteristics**

The TAP survey revealed the most common living situation for local youth is living with two parents, either biological or adoptive (58%). Other reported living situations include living with a single parent (15%), and living with a step-family (17%).

The majority of youth reported that each of their parents have a high school education or beyond (fathers, 80% and mothers, 86%). Thirty-one percent (31%) of fathers and 32% of mothers have a high school diploma with no further degrees. Thirty percent (30%) of fathers and 32% of mothers

have a Bachelor's Degree or higher. Only 5% of all fathers and 3% of all mothers were reported to have less than a high school education.

### **Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug Use**

The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) survey found many local youth use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Sixty percent (60%) of all youth have used alcohol at some time (middle school, 40% and high school, 68%). Thirty-four percent (34%) of all youth reported using alcohol once a month or more often (middle school, 16%; high school, 42%) and 12% reported using it weekly or more often (middle school, 6% and high school, 14%).

Twenty percent (20%) of all middle school youth and 41% of all high school youth reported binge drinking ("*5 or more alcoholic drinks in a row*") at least once in the past month.

Forty-five percent (45%) of all youth have smoked tobacco at some time (middle school, 31% and high school, 52%). Twenty-one percent (21%) reported smoking monthly or more often (middle school, 10%; high school, 26%) and 16% reported weekly or more often use (middle school, 7% and high school, 20%). Weekly smoking habits increase with each grade level and peak in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade for both genders.

Thirty-six percent (36%) of all youth have used marijuana at some time (middle school, 18% and high school, 45%). Nineteen percent (19%) reported monthly or more often use of marijuana (middle school, 8%; high school, 24%) and 12% reported weekly or more often use (middle school, 5% and high school, 15%).

Sixty-eight percent (68%) of all youth believe it is either "*easy*" or "*very easy*" to get beer/wine/liquor. Forty-nine percent (49%) believe it is "*easy*" or "*very easy*" to get marijuana.

Eleven percent (11%) of all youth have used inhalants at some time (middle school, 12% and high school, 10%). Two percent (2%) of all youth have used inhalants monthly or more often (middle school, 2% and high school, 2%). Sixteen percent (16%) of local youth feel that using inhalants carries "*no*" or "*slight risk*" (middle school, 22% and high school, 14%).

These emerging dependencies put youth at risk of delayed emotional and intellectual growth; developing problems with schools, friends and families; incurring ill health and reduced longevity; accidents; suicide; and unwanted pregnancies (Pedersen & Skrondal, 1996; Pfeifer, Schector, and Yoast, 1987; Small, Silverberg & Kerns, 1993).

## **Sexuality**

Overall, 33% of all youth reported they have had sexual intercourse (middle school, 18% and high school, 41%). Sixty percent (60%) of 12<sup>th</sup> graders have had sexual intercourse. Only 60% of sexually active teens always use some form of birth control (middle school, 52%; high school, 62%).

A high percentage of local teens do not talk with their parents about sexuality issues. Within the past year, 54% either "*never*" or "*rarely*" talked to their mothers and 70% "*never*" or "*rarely*" talked to their fathers about whether or not it is okay to have sex. Even fewer teens had birth control discussions with their parents in the past year, with 66% who either "*never*" or "*rarely*" talked to their mothers and 79% who "*never*" or "*rarely*" talked to their fathers about the issue.

Eight percent (8%) of local teens reported some degree of forced sexual activity by an adult (males, 5% and females, 11%). Two percent (2%) reported current sexual abuse by an adult and 6% reported previous sexual abuse.

## **Emotional Health**

Worries of local youth, listed from greatest to least are: getting good grades at school (63%); how they look (48%); getting along with parents at home (46%); how well their parents get along with each other (36%); not fitting in with the other kids at school (29%); and that their family has enough money to get by (25%). Other concerns include that their parents drink too much or use drugs (13%); and being pressured to drink or use drugs (9%).

Overall, 72% of all local teens reported feeling depressed or sad at some time during the past month (61% for males and 83% for females). Twenty-three percent (23%) of local youth reported having serious thoughts of suicide during the past month (18% for males and 27% for females). Twenty-three percent (23%) of local youth had made plans at some time to kill themselves (17% for males and 28% for females) and 14% reported they had actually attempted suicide at some time in the past (10% for males and 18% for females).

## **Parent-Teen Relations**

Good communication is a key part of healthy parent-teen relationships. Many local youth felt they had not had a good talk with their mothers or fathers in the past year about whether or not it is okay to have sex, birth control, AIDS and other STDs, the risks of drinking and using drugs, and personal problems. Parents were much more likely to talk with their teens about job or education plans.

Forty-six percent (46%) of all teens reported they worried either "*very much*" or "*quite a bit*" about getting along with their parents at home (middle school, 45%; high school, 47%). A high percentage of teens felt their parents either "*often*" or "*very often*" cared about them; 90% felt this way about their mothers and 80% for their fathers. Sixty-two percent (62%) of students felt that their mothers were fair "*often*" or "*very often*" when it came to enforcing the family rules; 59% felt

this about their fathers. Parental monitoring, sharing family values, and letting teens know there would be consequences were all found to be related to lower rates of regular smoking, drinking, and sexual activity by local teens.

### **Student Time Use**

Local youth spend the most time (at the level of 5 or more hours a week) watching TV (52%). The other activities that occupy 5 or more hours per week for local youth include staying at home alone with no adults present (44%); doing homework or studying (43%), participating in extra-curricular school sports or activities (39%); working for pay (36%); using the Internet (29%) and engaging in non-school activities (17%).

### **Perceptions of School and Community**

Sixty-two percent (62%) of local youth felt they were getting a good, high quality education, 53% indicated they enjoyed going to school, and 44% felt school rules were enforced fairly.

Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the youth often think about doing things so that people can have things better in the future, 61% felt it is important for them to contribute to their community and society and 78% consider it their problem if their neighbors are in trouble and need help. An additional 45% of teens would choose to give up their free time to help raise money for a neighborhood project. Seventy-six percent (76%) feel their community is a good place to live, but only 17% feel there are a lot of fun things in town for kids their age to do.

Seventy-eight percent (78%) of students reported feeling safe at school, yet 13% of students have carried a weapon on to school property in the past month.

### **In Closing**

Youth today face many challenges as they grow and develop. The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) provides information that empowers youth, parents, neighborhoods, schools, youth-serving organizations, agencies, the spiritual community, law enforcement, and community leaders to work together to develop and implement strategies addressing concerns identified. TAP can serve as a vehicle for youth, parent, school, and community education and action. In addition, it sets a baseline from which to evaluate the impact of local efforts to encourage positive youth development in families, schools and communities.

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A MANY partner project.  
(Monadnock Action Network with Youth)

September 2000