

Compassion Action Network

When Everyone Brings Something, there is more than enough

Un-mined Acres of Diamonds: Identity Formation in Children and Youth

Chris Brooks, Executive Director of World Vision Twin Cities, was the keynote speaker at the recent Compassion Action Network Fall Faith Forum. He began by telling us about his own family and life experiences growing up, focusing on the circumstances that shaped his world view. He shared that due to their interracial marriage, his parents struggled for acceptance in the community. As a biracial youth, Chris struggled to fit in and eventually chose to identify with the black community. He became friends with a group of young men whom he described as "brothers." Though he made some good choices, such as getting good grades in school, he also made bad choices, which led to his involvement in an armed robbery. He was subsequently arrested, which cost him a potential scholarship to Stanford University.

"Un-mined diamonds need to be found and polished to bring out their beauty."

He said he knew deep down he needed to follow a better path and was fortunate to have people in his life who supported and guided him on that path. He is now a mentor and staunch advo-



cate for children and youth and he talked about some of the young people with whom he has connected.

Chris also told the audience that today's youth are like un-mined diamonds that contain hidden radiance and worth. Un-mined diamonds need to be found and polished to bring out their beauty. Likewise, children and

youth need support and guidance to shine and develop a strong positive self-identity. Chris pointed out that children and youth are a valuable community asset and have much to contribute. They need to be listened to, to be encouraged, and to hear how valuable they are. Young people who receive positive messages and support will be able to see themselves with a good future and make good choices to reach that future. Chris also noted that the whole community needs to be involved in supporting children and youth. He emphasized that too many kids have barriers to positive identity development, such as family dysfunction and living in poverty.

In today's world, young people are receiving messages that can be detrimental to their identity development, telling them they are only worthy if they have certain material

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Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from the Compassion Action Network Advisory Board!

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Achieving Youth Mental Wellness

The Achieving Youth Mental Wellness presentation covered four key areas:

1. Youth in Crisis
2. Testing & Evaluation
3. Healing
4. Resources

Identifying Crisis.....

Amanda Gramlich, SMW & LISCSW, Program Manager For *People Incorporated - Psychiatric Crisis Services Division*

It's very stressful to be a teen today; to be liked, to do well in school, to get along with family, or just trying to be an individual. Worry is normal, but feeling very sad, hopeless or worthless could signal a mental health problem.

Every year, an estimated 5 million youth suffer with depression. Females are twice as likely as males to suffer. Threats to safety or threats to harm others (even jokingly) should be attended to. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among teens in MN. 25% of public school 8th graders in MN have considered suicide or hurt themselves on purpose.

Warning signs for parents:

- Thinking, wishing or talking about suicide
- Giving away prized possessions
- Preoccupation with death/violence
- Having several accidents resulting in injuries
- Obsession with guns and knives
- Previous suicidal thoughts or attempts
- Family or friends suicide or death
- Recent loss

What a teen in **crisis** looks like:

- Substance use or abuse (change in drug behavioral patterns)
- Purposelessness
- Anger
- Feeling trapped, like there's no way out
- Hopelessness
- Withdrawal from parents, friends, hobbies & activities
- Recklessness
- Dramatic mood changes

How to help a teen in crisis:

- Ask questions
- Know when to get worried
- Talk to the people important to your child
- Ask for help

To help a teen you must first understand them.....

Dena Bohn, Psy.D. & Licensed Psychologist
Lee Carlson Center in Fridley
Sexual Violence Center in Mpls
Outreach Counseling & Consulting in Shoreview

Psychological evaluations are important to getting at the cause for the crisis. It helps determine the best treatment plan, assess if medication would be helpful, and assist school staff as they work with the student.

With a better understanding, the healing can begin.....

Alan Davis, LMFT
Healing Therapeutic Services LLC - Ramsey

Healing through individual therapy gives a teen a chance to talk with a trained caring person. Most teens see a therapist for 12-15 sessions. Most therapists work with families as well. Examples where family therapy would be beneficial are relational conflicts or eating disorders.

When choosing a therapist it is important that everyone is comfortable with that person. Trust is a critical component to achieving mental wellness.

Questions to ask:

- Do you have experience with problem?
- Do you like working with teens?
- What % of your practice is teens and/or families?
- How long have you been practicing?
- How many sessions do you expect therapy to last and how frequently will you meet?
- How will we measure progress?

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Achieving Youth Mental Wellness continued.....

Reluctant about therapy? Honesty is the best way to start. Don't spring a therapy session on a child or coerce them into attending. It's important to support your teen by:

- Sharing ongoing concerns with them
- Staying actively involved in their therapy
- Focusing on being a parent (show affection & set limits)
- Knowing their friends (how they're doing is a good barometer)

Community involvement: We can all help teens who are struggling by:

- Spending time with them
- Developing mentoring relationships
- Decreasing stigma around mental health
- Noticing and praising positive changes

Resources:

Teens in crisis:

- People Incorporated Twin Cities Crisis Services
 - 763-755-3801
- www.SAVE.org or 1-800-273-8255
- Hospitals
- Therapy clinics
- Family doctors
- Friends, clergy, and other supports

Testing & evaluation:

- Schools can perform academic testing but for psychological testing, a medical professional is needed:
- Lee Carlson Center™ for Mental Health & Well-Being – Fridley 763-780-3036 or www.leecarlsoncenter.org.
- Healing Therapeutic Services, LLC – Ramsey 763-427-2590 or www.healingts.com
- Other clinics that have psychologists qualified to perform testing & assessment

Patty Halvorson
CAN Advisory board

Ideas and Actions

We asked our participants 'What idea or actions will you take away as a result of attending today's forum?'

"Importance of listening and accepting others"

"Make sure that I try to make youth I encounter know that I'm interested in them"

"Get my church involved with Free House"

"Involve youth at our agency board level"

"To be more purposeful with teenagers in my life"

"Three things youth need to know: 1. they are valuable, 2. they are acceptable, 3. they can have hope"

"Be less judgmental of youth behaviors"

"I learned about new organizations to partner with"

"Try to connect to some volunteer work to help youth"

"Empower the youth I work with to make a difference in their communities"

"Find out what school districts do to defuse bullying and bring that info back to my church community"

"Get plugged into an after school program- perhaps be a host site"

"Do something to share awareness"

"Youth are the leaders of TODAY!"

Call For Mentors!

You can make a difference in a young person's life by becoming a mentor. Mentoring is a committed relationship between an adult and a youth, focused on developing the character and capabilities of the young person. By definition, a mentor means a wise and trusted friend and guide. Mentors are not foster parents, cool peers, police officers, or an ATM machine.

Whether you have only an hour a week, or more, your time will make a significant impact on the life of a child in your community.

A panel of experts educated us on the importance of mentoring at the Fall Faith Forum. Presenting were Penny Kallas, Director of **Kinship** in Anoka County, Carolyn Cornils Scherer, Director of Customer Engagement, **Big Brothers Big Sisters**, Polly Roach, Vice president, **Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota**, and special guest, Zoe who, at the age of 14, has been in the Kinship mentoring program for five years.

As explained by all panelists, mentoring does not require anything fancy, or expensive. Penny Kallas stated, "It's about sincerely spending that time and showing that you really think that they are special, that they are important, and you value their time with you. Kids look forward to being with their mentor."

Based on a study of mentoring programs in Minnesota, mentoring can produce some or all of the following direct benefits:

- Improved school attendance and performance – leading to increased graduation rates, increased post-secondary education, and higher lifetime earnings
- Reduced truancy – resulting in reduced school costs and, ultimately reduced high school dropouts

- Improved health outcomes—including reductions in teen pregnancy, reduced or delayed use of tobacco, alcohol, or illicit drugs
- Reduced juvenile crime (both violence and property crimes)—saving victim costs, court costs, and costly treatment of juvenile offenders.

Mentors are matched according to their interest, their energy level, their pastimes, their expertise, kid experience, and logistics. A mentoring relationship is rewarding for mentors and the child as it's a custom fit on both sides. It's generally a one year commitment but most mentoring relationships last one to two and a half years. And, in some cases, it can be five years or more (see Zoe's story in this newsletter). Mentors must follow a strict application and screening process that was developed to provide protection for both mentors and children.

Kinship of Greater Minneapolis helps children, ages 5-15, in need of additional support to realize their God-given potential through adult friendships. Kinship also provides a unique service opportunity for individuals, couples and families to put their faith into action on behalf of children. One-to-one youth mentoring makes a positive difference in children's lives where additional adult support is needed

Carolyn Cornils Scherer explained the different programs at Big Brothers and Big Sisters. The following are the two main programs.

Community-Based Programs

Volunteers form a friendship with a child. Bigs meet their Littles in a variety of locations two to four times per month. These are one-to-one outings and activities, doing things they enjoy together, i.e.,

- Taking a walk in the park
- Shooting hoops
- Sharing a pizza
- Playing a board game
- Inspiring each other
- Listening to music
- Hanging out and talking

School-Based Programs

Kids that join with the School-based Program meet with their Bigs at designated school locations for one hour a weeks. Here the kids are listened to and encouraged to make smart choices. Other mentoring programs in Minnesota include: Team Mentoring, Peer Mentoring, e-mentoring, Big Couples/Colleagues, Big Families, and children of prisoners.

Polly Roach reiterated what was said by both Penny and Carolyn and also encouraged more mentoring programs in Minnesota. The Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota (MPM) is the driving force in the mentoring movement. Their mission is to lead the state in building and sustaining quality mentoring for every child. MPM formed in 1994 as a community initiative to promote mentoring for Minnesota youth.

Mentoring Works! Young people who have mentors have a better chance of succeeding and are more likely to make positive choices. Yet, in Minnesota there are an estimated 265,000 at-risk young people who need and could benefit from an adult mentor. For more information access the following websites: www.bigstwincities.org, <http://kinship.org/>, <http://www.mpmn.org>, <http://www.search-institute.org/developmental-assets/lists>

Sue Kennell
CAN Advisory Board

Beyond Homework Help: Spurring Student Success

According to research conducted by the Search Institute, of the 40 developmental assets that adolescents need to have in order to avoid risky behaviors & instead thrive in the adult world, boys typically have only 17.2 assets, while girls have 19.9. Five of these assets; 1) how motivated they are to achieve academic success, 2) how engaged they are in learning, 3) how well they complete their homework, 4) how bonded they are to their classmates and teachers, and 5) how much they read for pleasure - specifically pertain to their ability to succeed in an educational environment. As a community, when school districts are faced with severe budget cuts and the teacher-student ratio continues to increase, how well do we support middle and high school students in these areas?

The Youth First Community of Promise program offers educational assistance to at-risk youth living in the cities of Anoka, Ramsey, and Andover. Youth 1st, as a site of promise, works to ensure that each student in their program experiences 5 basic promises:

- Caring adults
- Safe places
- A healthy start
- An effective education
- Opportunities to help others

As program coordinator, Heidi Geiss told us at the Fall Faith Forum that "before staff can even begin to help students with

homework, staff have to first fulfill three promises: 1) communicate to the students that they care about them, 2) establish Youth 1st is a safe place to talk and, 3) be themselves, and help them get their physical needs met. They accomplish this by listening to the students and building relationships with them, working closely with school staff on behalf of the students, and getting to know the students' families.



Eighty percent of the students served by Youth 1st are from non-English speaking families and qualify for free or reduced meals at school. This places them in a category as students at risk of not completing high school. Yet, this year alone, Youth 1st expects 11 seniors to graduate. The keys to the success of the program, Heidi states, are the collaborative manner in which staff work with teachers and family members on behalf of the students (they are in regular contact with both school personnel and parents and hold students accountable to both) and the time staff invest in getting to know the students. Youth 1st isn't just an after-school program where kids go to get help with their homework. Youth 1st sponsors basketball games between local police & fire department personnel and the students to encourage positive relationships between the 2 groups. They also offer "family clubs" where the families of the students can come for a free meal, get help from staff on a

variety of issues, hear a speaker, or visit various resource tables and win a free door prize. Staff also encourage students to plan their futures by taking them on college visits, helping them study for the ACT/SAT exams and completing college applications. During the summer months, the staff provide educational programming, free lunches, field trips and several community service opportunities where the students get to help someone else. When asked what the students like best about the program, the common response is "Heidi" or "Kelly" (both staff), which testifies to the difference adults can make in the life of a youth.

Ways to get involved in Youth 1st:

- Volunteer as a homework helper
- Help with maintenance/repair projects at their sites
- Offer technical support
- Donate school supplies &/or winter clothing
- Provide food for snacks or sponsor a meal
- Sponsor a field trip

For more information, contact Heidi or Kelly at 763.421.8530 or visit the Youth 1st website at <http://www.youth1st.net/>.

Gayle Alexander
CAN Advisory Board

Mentoring Works!!!



We were very fortunate to have a special guest during our mentoring break-out and faith community panel at the Fall Faith Forum at The Church of St. Stephen.

Zoe, age 14, has been in the Kinship mentoring program for five years. Zoe met her kinship family when she was just 8 years old. In the beginning she would meet with her mentor family every

weekend. Now that she is older and busier, she meets with them every other weekend. A typical weekend for Zoe and her mentor family could be swimming at their health club, followed by a movie at their house. And, she is invited to many of their regular family outings and treated as one of the family.

Zoe thinks of her mentor parents as an Aunt and Uncle that she could go to anytime for anything. Their daughter who is two years younger – is “just like a best friend” whom she gets along with wonderfully.

Zoe has great memories from the past years; like playing board games, going to movies, going out to celebrate another year with her mentor family, and how it pleased her when they came to see her when she was in a play at school. She has pictures showing that they are as close now as they were the day they met. Zoe said that she never had second thoughts of going with her mentor family during these past years.

Zoe thinks that some teens would

like to have mentors but they just don’t know how to go about it. “People should consider mentoring” because it’s been such a benefit to her. It helped her not hang around with the bad crowd and when she is with her mentor family, she “is reminded that there is a different side of life.” Her friends think it’s cool that she goes and does stuff.” “I learn a lot from them” (her mentor family.)

Is it worth it? “Yeah, I think of them as family.”

Sue Kennell
CAN Advisory Board

Food Support Change

ATTENTION
Someone you know may now be eligible

Effective Nov. 1, 2010 the Food Support program no longer has an asset limit and the gross income limit increased from 130 percent to 165 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

For more information go to http://mn.bridgetobenefits.org/Food_Support2.html

Un-mined Acres of Diamonds continued.....

things or look and dress a certain way for example. Community members and organizations must help remove the barriers and counteract the negative messages.

Chris mentioned some strategies to help our young people develop positive identities. First, real support is needed, including help getting basic needs met but also really listening to what youth have to say. Second, each young person needs to be seen as a

unique individual. They need to hear that they are more valuable than things and appearances. Adults should not give acceptance to youth only because they meet certain expectations. Third, young people need to be empowered. Youth need to be able to share the powers they already have; their gifts, talents, and voice. This means including them in community groups and organizations to get their input.

In summary, Chris urged the forum audience to help youth see themselves beyond their immediate environment and capable of a bright future. He left everyone with two questions to think about: how can I as an individual and how can this community, support and guide our valuable wonderful young people?

Ellen Raeker
CAN Advisory Board

Community Response Panel



The Faith Forum ended on a high note, with various members of the Anoka County community discussing how their organizations respond to the needs of youth and an invitation from BridgeLink outlining how we could get involved.

Zoe, a student who has participated in the Kinship program, talked about how having a mentor through Kinship has helped shape

her life. She is a young woman with obvious talent who expressed appreciation for finding a mentor with whom she has connected. www.kinshipinc.org

Tom Richards, Program Director for TreeHouse, spoke about the challenges students in their program face daily and how connecting with each other and caring adults at TreeHouse offers them the support they need to make positive choices in difficult situations. www.treehouseyouth.org

Liz Martin, Assistant Youth Pastor at Emmanuel Christian Center, highlighted the strong need kids have to be heard and cared about. She also discussed various ways in which ECC reaches out to

students.

Dr. Michelle Langenfeld, Associate Superintendent of Anoka Hennepin School District, discussed the Faith Based Initiative, a collaboration between the district and local faith communities to raise awareness and foster open communication as they seek to address the serious issues students face.

Jill Discher of BridgeLink posed the question "what steps will you take this year to impact youth?" and participants shared their ideas in small groups. A list of ways to get involved with the organizations that participated in the Forum was also provided. <http://bridgelinekanoka.org/>

We Couldn't Do It Without Our Speakers



Chris Brooks / Mary Jo Loftus



Dena Bohn



Commissioner Dan Erhart



Amanda Gramlich



Tom Richards



Caolyn Cornils Scheer



Alan Davis



Jim Barber



Zoe / Liz Martin



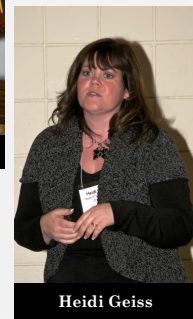
Dr. Michelle Langenfeld



Jill Discher



Polly Roach & Penny Kallas



Heidi Geiss

Photos by mkahlephotography.com

Mission Statement

To mobilize community organizations to recognize the value and benefits of working together, because when everyone brings something, there is more than enough.

Vision Statement

By working together to serve our community, every community organization will recognize and utilize its own unique gifts and resources.

Advisory Board

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***When everyone brings something,
there is more than enough***



Spread Some Holiday Cheer!

During this holiday season, many families must choose between paying the electric bill & buying gifts for their children. Help make the choice easier for them by donating to one of the following programs:

- **Christmas Committee** - Toys for Joy program for low income families living in Anoka County - call 763.323.4982
- **CEAP** - food & gifts for families in need throughout Anoka County- call 763.783.4930
- **SACA** - food & gifts for children who live in Columbia Heights, Hilltop, Fridley & Spring Lake Park - call 763.789.2444
- **Salvation Army** - Operation Joy gifts for children of disadvantaged youth throughout the Twin Cities - call 651.746.3595 or 651.746.3412
- **Youth 1st** - serving at-risk youth - need stocking stuffers for 40 middle & high school students - call Kelly at 763.421.8530

A Note from Elisa



My husband, Nate, and I moved to the island of Rota at the end of August. Rota is owned by the US and is part of the Northern Mariana Islands, located south of Japan and east of the Philippines. The island is very beautiful and the people are so friendly. We are both working at the local junior high school; Nate is teaching Computers and Technology, and currently, I'm substituting for 7th Grade Language Arts. We've enjoyed visiting the bird sanctuary, eating lots of rice, and learning more about this side of the world. Geckos and cockroaches still make us jump, but the view of the ocean and mountains is absolutely majestic!

Elisa Thibodeau- Former CAN Board Member

The CAN board would like to thank Elisa for her dedication and service while she was a board member.