

Parents are the Foundation!

Teens and Social Justice

March 2008

Every one of us has seen television clips or read articles about people starving or suffering from a terrible injustice. But those images can easily fade as we go on with our lives. It is hard to imagine what it's like to experience chronic starvation or a grave injustice.

Teens know that it's a good idea to care for people – all people. According to the Search Institute, youth are more likely to grow up healthy when they place a high value on promoting equality, reducing hunger and poverty, and working for social justice. In the 2005 SEARCH survey of 1,264 Iowa County youth, 42% of our teens have this positive value. 55% of girls and 30% of boys are willing to promote equality and social justice. Chart A shows this positive value decreases from 7th grade to 12th grade.

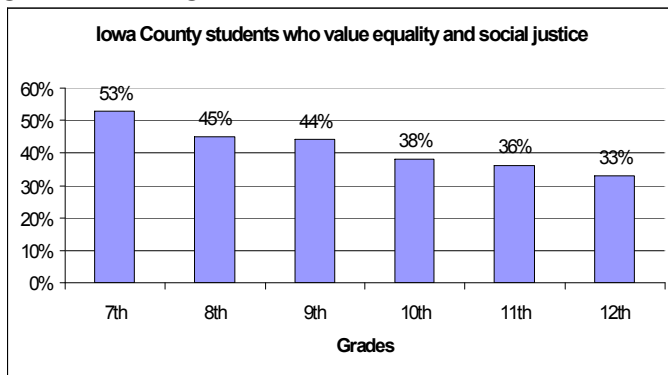


Chart A: Percentage of students who have the value of promoting equality and social justice.

Do Iowa County youth want to help other people? Do they help reduce hunger and poverty? Are they interested in making the world a better place to live? The 2005 SEARCH survey asked Iowa County teens how important these values are in their lives.

Chart B shows that 58% of teens feel helping other people is quite or extremely important.

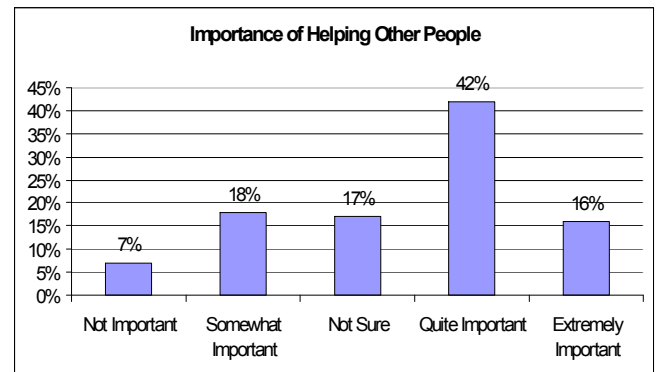


Chart B: Students were asked how important is helping other people in your life.

Chart C shows that 41% of Iowa County teens say reducing hunger and poverty in the world is important.

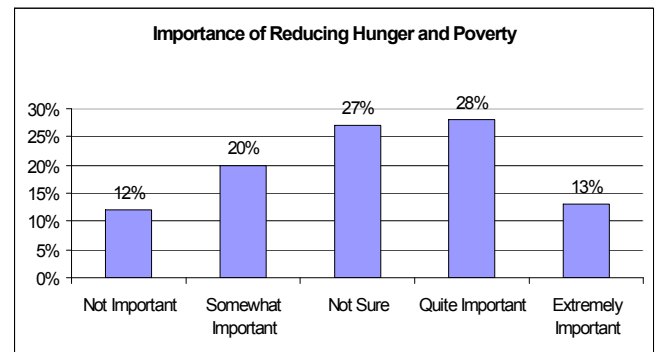


Chart C: Students were asked the importance of helping to reduce hunger and poverty in the world.

As shown in Chart D, 49% of our county teens say helping make the world a better place in which to live is important.

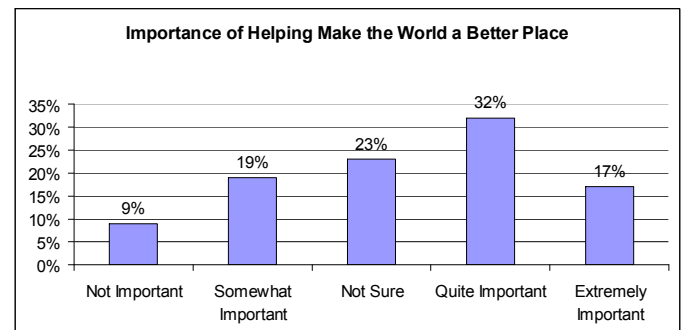


Chart D: Students were asked the importance of helping to make the world a better place in which to live.

Hunger & Poverty in Iowa County

“Justice can be found in many forms – from a whole nation to a lone family in your neighborhood”

Hunger is a real problem for many families. Households with low food security worry about having enough food. In 2002, 37% of Iowa County WIC (Women, Infant and Children) clients are food insecure. In 2006, 11.6% of Iowa County child population was receiving FoodShare (former food stamp program).

Poverty is closely linked to hunger. In Iowa County, 20% of our population is below 185% of poverty. You can find detailed county data and more on the Wisconsin Food Security Project web site: www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/cfs.

Choosing a Cause to Support

“We must be the change we wish to see in the world...” –Gandhi

Young people want opportunities to be generous and give back to their communities. Parents can help teens to choose a cause to follow and support with their time, talents, and resources. Before teens do, however, Louis L. Knowles, author of *World Hunger Organizations*, suggest teens find out the answers to these questions:

- What is the purpose of the organization?
- What types of action does the organization do?
- Who’s in charge?
- How does the organization relate to people in need?
- Where does the organization’s money come from?
- Where does the money go?
- Who decides which project to do?

**REMEMBER –
PARENTS ARE THE FOUNDATION!**

Ways Teens Can Change the World

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has” – Margaret Mead

- ✓ Ask teens which injustice in the world bothers them the most. Discuss ways they can help.
- ✓ Reach out to young men (only 30% are willing to promote equality and social justice) to help with projects in our schools and communities.
- ✓ Invite representatives from service, relief and human rights organizations to speak to young people.
- ✓ Call attention to times when young people’s words and actions don’t match. Encourage them to do the same for you.
- ✓ On your next vacation or class trip, expose teens to communities in need. For example, in Chicago don’t just focus on the popular tourist sites, but learn about areas of the city with problems.
- ✓ Celebrate when a teen acts on a belief or conviction, especially when it was hard to do.
- ✓ Place a bulletin board in your home, classroom or church highlighting people who have made the world a better place. It could be a famous person or someone in your community.
- ✓ Always talk to teens after completing a service project. This helps them to understand the issues and make a connection between their actions and how they affect others

“Parents are the Foundation” is a monthly, school-year newsletter containing information from the 2005 Survey of Student Resources and Assets in Iowa County Schools by America’s Promise and the Search Institute and the University of Wisconsin-Extension Iowa County. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension Teen Assessment Project “Whose Kids?...Our Kids!” newsletter series. This issue was written by Sarah Weier and edited by Ruth N. Schriefer and Deb Ivey. Thanks are extended to the 1,264 7th to 12th graders in Highland, Mineral Point, Pocatonia and River Valley who participated in the survey. For more information, contact us at UW-Extension Iowa County, 608-935-0391 or on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/iowa/>