



**Healthy Community • Healthy Youth® Initiative of Livingston, Inc**  
*A collaborative partnership between youth and adults creating a community where all young people thrive*

## ***What is success?***

*What is success?*

*To laugh often and much;*

*To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children;*

*To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;*

*To appreciate beauty;*

*To find the best in others;*

*To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition;*

*To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived;*

*This is to have succeeded.*

*Ralph Waldo  
Emerson*

# Neighborhood Coffees 2008

***“THE STRESS OF SUCCESS”***

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION**

**MAY 2008**



*Neighborhood Coffees are funded through a generous grant from the **United Way of North Essex***



# Neighborhood Coffees 2008

## *"THE STRESS OF SUCCESS"*

May, 2008

Livingston Healthy Community Healthy Youth Initiative's Strong Families Committee recently sponsored its first series of Neighborhood Coffees. The format of the Coffees was modeled after the Bernards Township Building Youth initiative which graciously shared their wealth of knowledge with the Livingston community. Sixteen events took place in homes and three community sites during the weeks of March 10 and March 24, 2008.

Funded through a generous grant from the United Way of North Essex and hosted by local residents, the Coffees provided an opportunity for neighbors, a discussion leader, and local high school students to talk about the stressors that youth encounter as they navigate through the challenges of everyday life. Discussions focused on two major themes:

- Livingston youth are highly successful.
- Livingston youth are negatively affected by the stress and high expectations to succeed.

The Coffee discussions examined our community's definition of 'success', explored how this definition guides our actions and affects our family and friends, and how we work together, as neighbors, to direct our intentions for success toward healthy community growth.

The feedback from Coffee participants was overwhelmingly positive. A host reported: "The process works, the conversation flowed, people were honest and insightful. Some guests I knew, others I didn't, but everyone had one thing in common, the desire to learn how to help their kids and our community deal with the issue of stress". A participant shared that she had been in Livingston several years, and this was the very first conversation she had had that went beyond the superficial social niceties. At the close of the evening several groups shared phone numbers in order to meet again. One of the facilitators noted: "We had a variety of opinions and experience as relates to success, failure, and how we deal with stress and pressures. People offered some of their own personal stories and shared strategies and resources." Another reported that it was great to see the dialogue. "The parents and adults were involved. The teens were composed and open to sharing their opinions and experiences. Thank you for making this possible! I hope we continue this process. What HCHY is doing is unique, exciting and wonderful."

The following document is a synopsis of the discussions held during the Coffees as well as a summary of evaluations shared by hosts, adult facilitators, and student consultants during a follow-up debriefing held on April 16, 2008.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Robin Beckerman, HCHY Vice President and Strong Families Co-chairperson  
Bonnie Granatir, HCHY Executive Coordinator

# Neighborhood Coffees 2008

## *"THE STRESS OF SUCCESS"*

At each of the Neighborhood Coffees 2008, participant discussions were carefully recorded. In addition, at the conclusion of each event, the guests, host, adult facilitator, and student consultants completed a formal evaluation for review by the Strong Families Committee.

The results of the discussion notes and formal evaluations were presented and reviewed during a joint debriefing of hosts, facilitators, and student consultants.

From these responses, several messages repeatedly appeared. They were:

- There is a strong need to create balance in one's life.
- Communication is the key to feeling connected, fulfilled, and safe.
- We must impart and emphasize the importance of coping skills and resiliency.
- Drugs and alcohol; lack of sleep; and feelings of isolation leading to depression are related to the stress felt by our youth.
- Experiencing and expressing "gratitude for what we have" engenders a sense of balance and satisfaction.

Two specific goals of the Neighborhood Coffees program were to:

1. Expand our ideas of "success" and "failure".
2. Find strategies to reduce stress and foster resilience.

A full summary of Coffee dialogue related to these goals and feedback from the debriefing is contained herein. Additionally, a survey of high school students' perceptions of stressors and coping mechanisms is included.

### • **DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS**

- "We use money as a marker for what other people see us as but not what we really are" (Teen quote)
- Success is not monetary, but rather doing what you like, overcoming obstacles, and making a difference in the lives of others.
- Stress is ubiquitous in the lives of students AND adults
- Stress has both positive and negative aspects.
- Students feel stress comes from the teachers.
- Teachers feel stress comes from the parents.
- Messages regarding academic success are inconsistent.

# Neighborhood Coffees 2008

- **STUDENT-IDENTIFIED STRESSORS AND PRODUCTIVE WAYS TO HANDLE STRESS**  
(From March 2008 Livingston High School Grade 9 Student Survey)

## Student Identified Stressors

Tests/Quizzes/SAT's/HESPA's/Grades  
Trying to fit in with friends/peer pressure/relationships  
Smoking /drugs/alcohol  
Competition  
Rumors/lies/popularity standards/reputation  
Being a genius/being stupid  
Becoming an Individual/struggle for perfection  
Sports/Extra Curriculars/Urging to do what YOU want  
Decisions about future  
Going to Harvard/Yale/Princeton - AP classes  
Getting enough sleep/being tired  
Pressure from parents, peers and self  
Eating disorders  
Sexual orientaion  
Not enough security/violence (gangs and guns)

Unrealistic teacher demands  
Lack of free time

## Productive Ways to Handle Stress

Any type of exercise jogging/yoga/kickboxing  
Punch a pillow or scream into a pillow  
Do something fun - see friends/shop/listen to music  
More sleep  
Take a study period/participate in study groups  
Vacation/breaks  
No more then 2 tests per day  
Meditation  
Don't procrastinate/learn to balance time and prioritize  
Watch TV or play video games  
Mid-terms just don't have them  
Ask for help  
Have a hobby  
Volunteer  
Communication with teachers and guidance counselors  
Teacher awareness of and proactive response to student stress level  
Family

- **ADULT PARTICIPANTS' REACTIONS TO TEENS' EXPERIENCES**

- Worrisome.
- Very concerned for students.
- Very insightful. Allowed me to see things through my children's eyes.
- I was amazed at the amount of stress that some kids can put on themselves.
- Very surprised so many students are doing drugs and alcohol to reduce stress.
- I was surprised at the level of stress and that it comes from all places: school, friends, parents, and sports.
- Very open and candid
- So much more is required of them today tan years ago
- It blew my mind. As an assistant prosecutor in the juvenile section, this will affect my approach in some instances.
- To overachieve is a goal.

# Neighborhood Coffees 2008

- **ADULT LESSONS LEARNED**

- Teach values.
- Appreciate what we have.
- Re-focus on the important things to consider such as health and happiness.
- Try to take a step back when reacting to grades and first think of my child and not my own experiences.
- It's important to LISTEN and not judge my children.
- Channel stress to an area of interest.
- Have balance.
- Listen to others and be helpful.
- Provide sports and activities to help as a release.
- Don't stereotype or be judgmental.
- Equate success with fulfilling personal goals and achievements rather than finances.
- Hearing everyone's concerns and the community support was helpful and empowering.
- I realized that people other than myself view success in ways other than monetary.
- I came thinking that society's definition of success is not constructive but left thinking that it's more complex and that a balance is needed between hard work and finding what you love.
- I learned about high school reality.
- Stress starts much earlier than high school.

- **STRATEGIES FOR RAISING A STRESS-RESILIENT CHILD: FROM ADULTS FOR ADULTS**

- Foster a balance in family life. Be a parent and set limits
- Talk to and listen to them. They know what is part of their life. Try not to judge but guide.
- LISTEN. It's hard not to give an opinion
- Be good listeners. Understand the child's situation. Give time for discussion and help them make good decisions.
- Have conversations and listen to your children. Help them come up with ways to deal with stress
- It's okay to fail or not meet expectations sometimes.
- Pay attention to our kids. Be good role models. Love them for who they are and reward the small successes.
- Find a balance
- Try to teach children that life doesn't always go their way but most things aren't permanent. Teach them how to step back, see what they can fix, what they can't and how to move on.
- Be there
- Be a parent - don't succumb to "parent peer pressure"
- Teach your child that stress will always be there but we can manage it. Be realistic in our expectations.
- Be a good model and teach them to be wise, not only smart
- Begin talking honestly to kids at a young age about their feelings.
- Keep talking!
- Know your limits. Be comfortable with who you are.
- Develop better communication with your child.
- Communication, support, reasonable expectations.
- Communicate often.
- Don't push your children to do things that YOU think should be their goals.
- Give them options. Help them to find their strengths.
- Instill positive values and support them.
- Communication in the community is essential because when things aren't verbalized, it may seem that others don't think about them.
- Encourage well-roundedness.
- Talk, share, and learn together.
- Value your child as a family member.

# Neighborhood Coffees 2008

- **STRATEGIES FOR RAISING A STRESS-RESILIENT CHILD: FROM TEENS TO ADULTS**

- Be open and loving. Let your kids talk to you about the little things and don't pass judgment.
- Motivate him/her but be sure to let them know that they're allowed to make mistakes.
- Be adaptable
- Accept your child for who they truly are.
- Be open minded and accepting of your child.
- Read "Pushed to the Edge"
- Listen actively
- Be level headed.
- Provide choices and freedom to children
- Lessen the pressure when possible.
- Be supportive and compassionate to their issues.
- Emphasize health and happiness above all
- Accept who they are
- Offer guidance without force
- Channel talents
- Suggest activities

- **CLOSING THOUGHTS: RESULTS OF THE DEBRIEFING**

- Did attendees express interest in continuing dialogue? If so, in what direction/capacity?
  - People liked the relaxed format.
  - Kids were not intimidated and would like to continue.
  - People want to continue, the topic is secondary to just getting to know one another.
  - Let's continue sooner than later.
  - Keep topic emotionally safe so people will be comfortable attending.
  - Possibly elicit topics from the community through survey or online suggestion boxes.
- What other topics would be of interest going forward?
  - Continue with stress because we have only tapped a small part of the population.
  - A listening workshop between adults and teens (unrelated) to develop teen advisors to other parents.
  - Values and Behaviors related to Drugs and Alcohol Abuse.
  - The stress of transitions or changes in life.
  - Review subtopics of stress related to academics, athletics, social life, drugs and alcohol.

The HCHY Strong Families Committee has committed to organizing a follow-up series of Neighborhood Coffees tentatively scheduled during the week of November 10, 2008. The topic of this series will be planned and volunteers will be solicited over the summer months. To be involved in the planning of the fall series or to get more information about HCHY, Livingston's Healthy Community Healthy Youth Initiative, interested community members may contact Robin Beckerman at 973 535-1726 or by email [rgmz4@aol.com](mailto:rgmz4@aol.com) or visit the website at <http://www.livingstonnj.org/hchy.htm> .