

# **Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth®: Livingston**

*An Affiliate of the Livingston Township Vision 20/20 Committee*

**Presented to:  
The Livingston Town Council  
December 19, 2005**

## **INTRODUCTION**

On April 1, 2003 a senior at Livingston High School took his own life. This marked the second teen suicide to shake the community inside a year. In the aftermath of the shock, grief, and shared vulnerability that ensued, members of the Livingston community sought to make meaning from this tragedy by seeking to better understand and address the forces in our community that may contribute to a culture that would lead two young people to commit suicide.

A diverse group of community leaders representing religious groups, the counseling staffs of the Livingston Public Schools, members of the Livingston School Board and the Livingston Town Council, the Livingston Parent / Teacher Council, LMAC, and the Livingston Police Department began meeting at the beginning of May 2003.

## **CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES**

The group, then known as the Livingston Healthy Community Culture Committee, outlined a number of objectives for its work. The first main objective was to assess the strengths and assets one finds in Livingston that promote physical, emotional, and spiritual health for young people in our community. Additionally, we sought to evaluate the challenges and forces in the community that contribute to an unhealthy environment for young people in town. Necessarily, our evaluation was based on informal assessment and anecdotal evidence, but the committee tried to achieve consensus opinions based on the diversity of the people represented in the group, and we sought to include in our discussions representatives from various constituencies in the community.

After this period of informal assessment and evaluation, the HCCC's second main objective was to identify a number of challenges that we sought to address with concrete recommendations we hoped would begin a process toward improving the communal environment in which our youth engage and to help young people in town to develop a stronger skill-set for coping with the pressures and forces they face. The final report reflected our deliberations surrounding the first objective, and offered recommendations that emerged from the second.

Despite some of the important challenges that were outlined in this report, the overriding sense of the HCCC was that Livingston is a community with a great foundation for healthy community culture, and is privileged to have citizens and professionals in the community who care so deeply for the town's health. Much that

Livingston seeks to do as a town promotes healthy culture, and ought to be applauded and reinforced.

Full content of the Committee's March 29, 2004 report is available at:  
[www.livingstonnj.org/HCHY](http://www.livingstonnj.org/HCHY)

Upon the release of the HCCC Report and a Public Forum held in June 2004, the stigma revolving around teen depression and suicide had been challenged and the silence had been broken. The reactions at that time included discomfort and finger-pointing. The hope was that as we continued, community members could move from the assignment of blame to the acceptance of responsibility on both individual and institutional levels, listening to each other by allowing, creating, and developing opportunities for dialogue. A continued effort by the HCCC sought to coordinate Livingston resources, and benefit from a network of other communities, agencies, and institutions. The composition of the Committee members continues to evolve from a shared belief that by including representatives from the schools, municipality, youth, senior citizens, medical and mental health resources, parents, businesses, recreational organizations, and philanthropic organizations, a sense of community and shared responsibility would drive the future efforts of the HCCC. The committee is fervent in its belief that young people **must** be actively engaged in the process of investigating, adopting, and facilitating a workable framework for these continuing efforts. A complete list of Committee members follows in Addendum A.

As the HCCC investigated tried-and-true Community Development initiatives, we discovered a research-based model developed by the Search Institute, a Minneapolis-based research non-profit. Based on significant data about how young people survive and thrive, the Search Institute presents evidence and casts a vision for ***“creating healthy, strong communities by engaging adults to help young people experience stronger webs of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity”***. Serving as the framework, these eight areas of strength encompass the “40 Developmental Assets”, a comprehensive list of positive characteristics and experiences that all young people (and indeed all individuals) need to succeed. The Search Institute's findings support an approach to positive youth development that challenges us to focus on developing healthier community conditions rather than reacting to symptoms once they appear. By doing so, it has been shown that we can effectively reduce the incidence of multiple problems at the same time, including substance abuse, depression, suicide, promiscuity, antisocial behavior, violence and school problems.

In order to effectively incorporate these theories into the fabric of Livingston's community culture, the Committee seeks:

1. To cultivate community readiness, energy, and commitment
2. To build community capacity in order to build Developmental Assets.

Specifically, we envision paradigmatic culture shifts in attitudes and behaviors such as:

1. From youth as objects to youth as actors/participants/resources
2. From deficit language to asset language
3. From some children and youth to all children and youth
4. From early childhood focus to the broad developmental perspective
5. From age segregation to intergenerational integration
6. From self-interest to shared responsibility
7. From focus on programs to focus on relationships
8. From a fragmented agenda to a unifying vision
9. From conflicting signals to consistent messages
10. From efficiency to essential and conscious redundancy
11. From civic disengagement to engagement.

With a shared belief that the “Asset-Building” model is an effective vehicle for this level of substantive change, the Committee has registered with the Search Institute as the “Healthy Community\*Healthy Youth Initiative of Livingston” – our HCHY. We have joined over 600 communities throughout the United States, Canada, and Australia in forging a pathway to healthy community development. As Livingston moves from becoming open to change and understanding the possibilities of change, it is now time to organize for change. Only then can we begin to make systemic progress and ensure that change becomes a way of life for our community.

To realize this vision, the HCHY has partnered with Livingston Township’s Vision 20/20 Committee, serving as its Youth Subcommittee. An HCHY Advisory Board will convene in January, 2006 including members of the existing HCHY and a Town Council liaison. Initiating this collaboration, the following focus groups have been established:

### **Best Practices**

Purpose: to identify and investigate successful community development initiatives

### **Community Resources**

Purpose: to develop a visual map of current resources; develop an effective communication network; expand HCHY membership; identify opportunities for intergenerational connections and dialogue.

### **Community Standards**

Purpose: to identify shared community values and beliefs; to develop the HCHY Vision Statement

### **Mentoring**

Purpose: to develop a community youth mentoring program

### **Strong Families**

Purpose: to develop and expand opportunities which allow Livingston families to succeed; intentionally creating "*strong youth, strong families, strong community*" (YMCA)

**Youth/Teen Centers**

Purpose: to identify and develop action plans and viable proposals for community youth/teen centers and a skate park

**Townwide Community Resource Coordinator**

Purpose: to define the role, develop a job description, and create a funding proposal

The progress of the Healthy Community•Healthy Youth Initiative of Livingston® will be reported regularly to the community at large and methods of evaluating the efficacy of its efforts will be developed in conjunction with the Action Plans.

For the Livingston Municipal Budget Year 2006, the HCHY proposes the creation of a new position entitled HCHY Executive Coordinator of Livingston Youth Community Resources. Funded through the Livingston Town Council along with potential future grant monies, the Executive Coordinator would provide needed services identified by the HCHY in the attached proposal. The job would be effective immediately upon Town Council approval and would continue as outlined in the formal proposal, attached as Addendum B.

## ADDENDUM A

### **HCHY: Livingston Membership Roster as of December 2005**

Ackermann, Jeffrey	LHS 2010
Ackermann, Martha	WE Tribune Reporter, Townwide Safety
Agajanov, Natalia	LHS 2010
Alekel, Rhoda	LCSW
Alpert, Melissa	LHS 06
Beckerman, Robin	HCHY/UWNE
Bier, Trudy	PT Council
Bishop, Jeffrey	20/20 (Open Space)
Boni, Kris	YMCA
Bonito, Margret	HCHY/LCSW
Boudreau, Jeffrey	LHS 09
Buxenbaum, Kim	HCHY/LHSPsychologist
Cafone, John	LHS English Supervisor
Chan, Stephanie	LHS '06
Chirls, Pam	LMAC/PTCouncil
Cimbol, Sharon	PT Council
Cislo, Heidi	PT Council
Costa, Roger	HCHY/United Way
Denker, Jill	Parent
Denker, Marisa	LHS 2010
DePasquale, Joe	HCHY/Pastor
Dietrich, Harry	HCHY?LHS SAC
Dyner, Ellen	Parent
Eisenberg, Jeffrey	LHS 06
Emert, Rebecca	LHS Sp Ed Teacher
Emiliani, Angela	LHS 09
Emiliani, Molly	Parent
Epstein, Betsey	Parent Volunteer
Erdman, Jennifer	LHS '01/Teacher
Evans, Debbie	HCHY/LCSW
Feigenberg, Barbara	PT Council
	Parent/Intentional
Fein, Bruce	Development
Flores, Helen	Exec Dir WE YMCA
Gegner, Steve	LYCS Director
Gerson, Kathy	Parent Volunteer
Glassman, Lauren	Human Services Coor
Granatir, Bonnie	HCHY Chair/BOE
Gugger, Gisela	LHS Teacher
Gurien, Harriet	HCHY/LCSW
Harrison, Steven	LHS 08
Hecht, Jane	LMAC Director
Heller, Sylvia	Parent/JFS
Kanarek, Kirby	Parent/Community

Karpas, Alan	Vision 20/20 Chair
Karpas, Eric	LHS 08
Katz, David	HCHY Chair/Mayor
Kirschner, Harriet	LWV
Klapal, Joy	LPD
Koerwer, Michelle	LHS 2010
Leiwant, Michael	LHS 09
Ligot, Claire	Parent
Lindner, Debbie	LMAC Director
Mahon, Tali	LHS 09
Martian, Rev Daniel	Pastor
Mazzarella, Joyce	Youth Coordinator
Mazzarella, Julia	Dir of Guidance
Numark, Jeffrey	LHS 08
Pantoliano, Letizia	Ass't Supt
Pearlson, Adam	LHS 2010
Pogach, Gail	LHS Math Teacher
Rehm, Robert	President, Livingston Jr Lancers
Rosenson, Eric	LAX League
Rotem, Michael	LHS 08
Schinelli, Matt	Adaptive PE
Schlossberg, Rebecca	LHS '03
Simko, Katie	LHS 2011
Simko, Kim	Parent Volunteer
Shah, Smita	Parent Volunteer
Spaltro, Sal	LHS 09
Tully, Alexandra	LHS 2011
Ubaldi, Andrea	Youth Coordinator
Vossler, Richard	HCHY/Pastor
Waldron, Beth	HCHY/Parent
Wasserman, Sue	Parent
Wirt, Jennifer	MPMS VP
Wofsy, Barbara	HCHY/ Middle Sch SAC
Xu, Shendi	LHS 06

## ADDENDUM B

### Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth®: Livingston *An Affiliate of the Livingston Township Vision 20/20 Committee*

#### HCHY Executive Coordinator of Livingston Youth Community Resources

##### Job Description

##### ROLE:

- To foster coordination and collaboration between Livingston's established institutions, organizations, clubs, leagues, youth, adults, and families.
- To gather and disseminate pertinent information via a communication chain:  
*Community ? HCHY ? HCHY Subcommittees ? Executive Coordinator ? HCHY Board ? Vision 20/20 ? Community*

##### DUTIES:

- **Spearhead the HCHY's Asset-Building Community Development Initiative**
  - Continually investigate and implement Best Practices
  - Partner with other community initiatives when appropriate
  - Collaboratively identify community standards and needs
- **Serve as staff liaison to the HCHY**
  - Schedule, organize, and maintain minutes of HCHY meetings
  - Filter all activities through the lens of the HCHY recommendations
  - Report to the HCHY Advisory Board and the Vision 20/20 Committee
- **Actively engage in Community Outreach**
  - Maintain ongoing communication with all community sectors including Town Council, BOE and School Personnel, Clergy, Youth Members, Senior Citizens, Vision 20/20, Police Department, PT Council, LMAC, Jewish Family Services, LYCS, United Way, YMCA, Business community, Health Care Providers, Mental Health Association of Essex County, Recreation Department, Welfare Department, SAGE Committee, Athletic Leagues
  - Create efforts to identify and engage marginal community organizations
  - Assist organizations with event programming to ensure success
  - Actively promote activities within the community
- **Develop and manage a Community Calendar**
  - Create a web-based calendar encompassing all activities
  - Establish a workable communication network between the organizations and the HCHY for regular and accurate calendar input.
- **Identify and market existing community resources**
  - Investigate and implement resource referrals via brochures, websites, TV34, West Essex Tribune, and a 2-1-1 system.

**QUALITIES OF THE IDEAL CANDIDATE:**

- **Demonstrated ability to build relationships**
- **Knowledge of the community**
- **Broad-based connections within the community**
- **Demonstrated ability to navigate political situations**
- **Excellent written and verbal communication skills**
- **Ability to work from home with computer access**
- **Highly organized**
- **Flexible**
- **Creative**
- **Accessible**

**INITIAL COMMITMENT:**

**Hours per week: 20**  
**Weeks per year: 40**  
**Hourly rate: \$25**

**Annual subtotal: \$20,000**

**Estimated expenses: \$5,000**

Includes: postage, telephone, stationery, copy/fax fees, travel, computer supplies, miscellaneous initiative resources, and meeting refreshments.

**Total estimated financial commitment for 2006 = \$25,000**

Ideally, the Executive Coordinator would be able to work from their home or their personal office, thereby eliminating the need for additional (and currently scarce) municipal office space.

It is recommended that, if approved, the position be posted for public consideration. Resumes would be screened, candidates would be interviewed, and the finalist hired by members of the HCHY Advisory Board in collaboration with the Town Council and Township Manager

Upon demonstrated success of the HCHY Executive Coordinator position, expanded funding opportunities could be sought through grant sources.