

Preparing *Teens* for Success

Today's teens face unprecedented challenges. United Way of Dutchess County prepares teens for success by supporting character-building programs that teach life-skills, help teens avoid pitfalls like crime and pregnancy, and equip them for a healthy and productive adulthood.

United Way of Dutchess County demonstrated its commitment to teens last year by investing in dozens of innovative youth programs, and entering partnerships with government, education and businesses to multiply United Way's impact. The goal is to build positive habits in teens and empower them to achieve their goals.

Through its partnership with county government on the Dutchess County Children's Services Council, United Way in 1999 helped develop a landmark First Status Report for Children, Youth and Families. This snapshot of current conditions sets a community agenda for young people, with a clear set of progress indicators that will guide the work of agencies, youth groups, parents and others. Additional

efforts this year will focus on youth violence and substance abuse prevention through collaborations with the Mental Health Association and Dutchess County Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse.

United Way, working with the Children's Services Council last year, also helped the Wappingers Central School District secure a \$30,000 mentoring grant from the GAP

Foundation. United Way worked with school officials to

design a program that pairs junior high students with older teens to promote academic success and ease the transition to high school.

United Way is one of a number of agencies currently working with a Youth Asset Team to build essential youth development resources, like strong families, safe places and healthy lifestyles. This Youth Asset Team will make 22 seed grants of \$1,000 to local communities for youth programming this year.

United Way prepares teens for success by helping them build a strong academic foundation. Here, a student at Haviland Middle School in Hyde Park uses a computer to sharpen his language skills. United Way wrote a grant that resulted in a \$39,000 technology donation by IBM to the school. The equipment is being used to prepare a 21st Century Pilot Teaching Team to integrate technology with traditional subjects.

KATHY McLAUGHLIN / POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL



Impact on teens

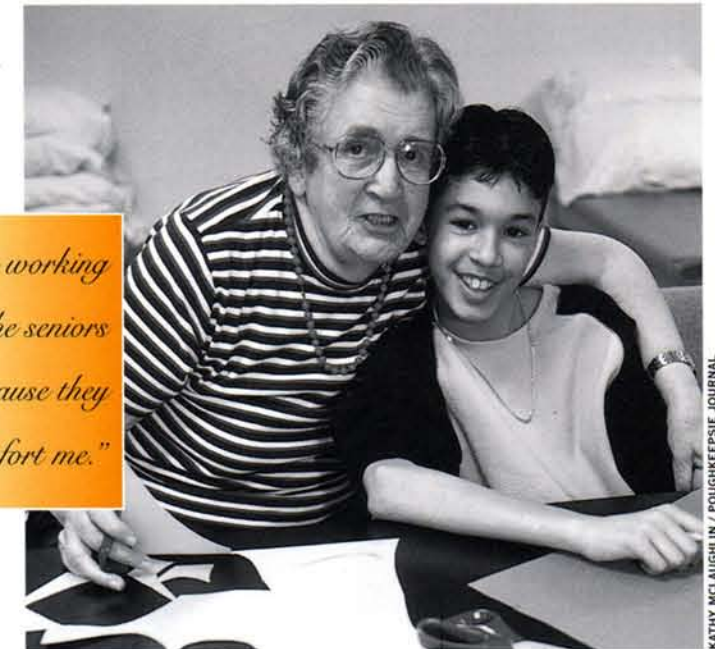
❖ Of 250 students attending a youth education and development program last year, 77 improved their study skills in math and English, 39 raised their grades in core subjects from F to C+ and 15 improved their grades in core subjects from C to B.

❖ 532 elementary school children did their homework after school while their parents were at work.

❖ 54 inner-city middle and high school students joined 14 adult volunteers on six outdoor adventures where they got to hike, cross country ski and snow tube.

❖ 182 teens received their babysitting certification and gained the assurance they could handle small emergencies and make smart decisions for children in their care.

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Bridging the Generation Gap

Every week, 14-year-old Ralph Torres gets a ride from school to the Fishkill Health Related Center where he shares crafts, games and conversation with a group of seniors at the retirement community.

The seniors say they reap the greatest rewards from the relationship. But Ralph, an eighth grader at Rombout Middle School in Beacon, insists he benefits most. "I like working with the seniors because they comfort me," he said. "What I get out of it is better social skills and they tell me what Beacon was like in the past."

Ralph is part of a United Way-funded program called Health Unites Generations (HUGs), run by the Beacon Health Resource Center, a satellite of Hudson River Health Care. The program helps teens connect with older adults and become more engaged in their community. At the same time, HUGs eases isolation for seniors and shatters stereotypes that perpetuate the generation gap.

"The kids realize that the seniors have a lot of knowledge to offer," said HUGs Supervisor Marshall Miller. "They tell war stories and talk about the history of the area. And the seniors realize there are caring teens.

Ralph, 14, and his senior friend Helen, 78, share a hug at a United Way-funded intergenerational program that boosts teens' social skills and eases isolation for seniors.

Along with visiting nursing homes, the youth also provide weekly "telephone reassurance" to 35 homebound seniors. Before being paired with seniors, the teens receive training in communication and sensitivity to issues facing the elderly such as bearing loss and lack of mobility.

"It's great having him here," said Helen, 78, a resident of the Fishkill Health Related Facility who became fast friends with Ralph. "He's uplifted me."