

Teen Drug Use Declines; New Problems Arise

By Laurie Atwater

Ourteens

There is growing concern in Lexington over the lack of community services targeted at adolescents and teens. Recent incidents of "rowdy" behavior in the Center by Lexington students on an early release day only underscore the need for teen services in Lexington.

In this issue of the *Colonial Times* we take a look at teens and their safety and well-being in Lexington. From alcohol and drugs to academic pressure, our kids face a complicated and competitive world that is not about to slow down.

The amount of information they are exposed to is immense, the amount of freedom they have is unprecedented and the amount of stress they deal with—whether it is related to getting in to a good college, the job market or global terrorism—is unrelenting.

As one of the largest class of freshmen in Lexington's history, if not the largest prepares to enter the high school, it is more necessary than ever for the community to mobilize around these issues and do everything possible for our youngest members.

It takes communication. It takes commitment. It takes a village as they say, and it is true. These days we demand measurable outcomes before we are moved to act. However when it comes to the safety of our children, we must measure outcomes one child at a time. Each time the community tables these initiatives another group of teens is underserved. A huge wave is entering Lexington High School. We have spent a considerable amount of time, energy and money as a community building and preparing for their arrival. Let's strengthen our efforts to set them up for success—not failure.



an increased risk for teens of ending up in a car driven by someone who has been drinking. The incidence of LHS students riding in cars driven by someone who has been drinking is up in 2002 from 28.7 percent to 30.1 percent. This combined with 50.7% self-reported alcohol use is a recipe for disaster.

Marijuana

Although the survey shows Drug Use

In 2002, 26.6% of LHS students reported using marijuana in the past 30 days. This is down from 32.8% in 1995.

In 2002, 12.2% of LHS students reported using serious drugs at least once in 12 months (LSD, ecstasy, heroin, etc.). This is down from 20.6% in 1995.

that marijuana use has gone down from 1995, the availability and popularity of marijuana on the Lexington High School campus was confirmed in focus groups. The YRBS report states that: "marijuana is *the most popular drug* at LHS. It is easy to get (especially at school) and is widely used. Any student would know who to buy pot from."

The survey also shows that many teens perceive marijuana use as less harmful to their health than cigarette smoking. Additionally, many teens think they can drive perfectly well after they have used marijuana. Julie Fenn who is one of the members of the Drug Prevention Program for Lexington schools comments that drinking teens will often appoint a friend who has "just been smoking pot" as the designated driver.

"I was very surprised that teens felt marijuana is safer than cigarettes," says Stephen Ralston, Assistant Principal at the

Results from the Lexington Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Results from the survey administered in Lexington 2002 show that drug use by Lexington teens has gone down steadily since 1995.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) has been administered at Lexington High School every other year since 1995 by the Department of Education. The survey is anonymous and questions students about alcohol and drug use as well as sexual and self-destructive behavior. After the 2002 surveys were administered, focus groups were conducted with LHS sophomores and juniors students to contextualize the results.

These results show an encouraging trend in drug use—trends that are being echoed in national studies from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) National Survey on Drug Use & Health (NSDUH) and the Partnership for a Drug free America Tracking Study (PATS)

conducted by Roper ASW, Inc.

Usage is down and perception of the seriousness of usage is up. Teens, health educators, public safety officers and parents should be heartened by the results—things are going in the right direction.

Alcohol

2002 Survey results on Alcohol Use

50.6 percent of LHS students reported have consumed alcohol in the past 30 days
29.3 percent of LHS students reported binge drinking (5 drinks in a row) in the last 30 days.
23.3 percent of LHS students began drinking before age 13.
69.1% of LHS students believe that drinking alcohol at parties is very serious or moderately serious.

Although alcohol use has fluctuated in Lexington, it is on the rise again.

Alcohol use has increased in the past two years.

The degree of alcohol use by minor teens remains disturbingly high. Societal acceptance of alcohol and its availability make it the toughest substance problem to address.

For many teens this early exposure to alcohol will result in a lifelong struggle. Families who

Alcohol Use Past 7 years

# of days in past 30 have had at least alcoholic drink	1995	1999	2002
1-2 days	23.7%	19.4%	21.7%
3-5 days	13.4%	8.9%	13.5%
6-9 days	7.8%	7.2%	7.7%
10-19 days	4.5%	4.5%	5.5%
20-29 days	0.9%	0.5%	1.1%
All 30 days	0.9%	1.7%	1.1%

have experienced the devastation of addiction know that the early signs are often missed or ignored.

According to the Lexington YRBS, alcohol use grows with each year that a teen drinks.

Along with alcohol use comes

Clarke Middle School. Ralston attended a workshop conducted by Julie Fenn and her colleague Beth Mintz. Ralston points out that attitudes around drinking and driving have been shaped by media campaigns that stress very negative outcomes and he feels that the dangers of smoking marijuana have not received the same attention.

National Statistics
Teen Prescription Drug Abuse

Lifetime non-medical pain reliever prevalence among youths aged 12 to 17 increased from 2001 (9.6 percent) to 2002 (11.2 percent), continuing an increasing trend from 1989 (1.2 percent). Among young adults aged 18 to 25, the rate increased from 19.4 percent in 2001 to 22.1 percent in 2002. The young adult rate had been 6.8 percent in 1992. **2002 NSDUH Results**

Lifetime non-medical use of stimulants increased steadily from 1990 to 2002 for youths aged 12 to 17 (0.7 to 4.3 percent). For young adults aged 18 to 25, rates declined from 1981 to 1994 (from 10.9 to 5.9 percent), then increased to 10.8 percent in 2002. Rates increased between 2001 and 2002 for both youths (3.8 to 4.3 percent) and young adults (10.2 to 10.8 percent). **2002 NSDUH Results**

Prescription drug abuse

A disturbing nationwide trend that is not reported in the Lexington YRBS study (there are currently no questions on the survey around this type of drug use) is the illicit use of painkillers and stimulants by teens.

Emergency room visits resulting from abuse of narcotic pain relievers have jumped 63 percent since 1995 according to the federal drug control office. The problem is so wide spread that President Bush announced a series of initiatives to track the sale of these drugs and the Director of NIDA published a warning letter to parents.

This is a trend that both Fenn and Mintz are seeing at Lexington High School.

Opiate painkillers (which have been the drugs of choice for teens) are highly addictive and can also be easily distributed to other students. Prescription drugs have become more widely prescribed, but they can fatally depress respiration if they are abused. Kids who combine opiates with

alcohol are in real danger.

High school seniors nationwide reported using Vicodin (10.5 percent) and OxyContin (4.5%)—both opiates. Vicodin is now the 2nd most used illegal drug behind marijuana. Julie Fenn advises parents to “lock up their medicine cabinets.”

Lexington teens—competition, stress and depression

19.8% of LHS students reported considering suicide in the past 12 months; 11.5% reported that they made a suicide plan.

Several other significant areas for concern in the Lexington YRBS survey involve stress related to “academic competition” and “body image.”

“Teens who regularly feel depressed are less inclined than other teens to describe themselves positively on several key measures such as popularity, adaptability



Lexington teens volunteer for Drug Prevention Initiatives. from left to right: Susanna Tracy, Mark Goodman, Emily Fenn, Abby Pisegna, Nick Pisegna and Brian Johnson (see story page 6)

Causes for stress & depression in affluent suburban teens

- Achievement pressures
- Excessive perfectionism and fear of failure
- Isolation from parents

Academic competition and eating disorders

In 2002 85.5 % of LHS students felt that academic competition was very serious (63.3%) or moderately serious (17.2%). These figures have increased since 1999 when they were 73.6% overall or 51.3% and 22.3% respectively.

In 2002 64% of LHS students believe that eating disorders are very serious or moderately serious while only 38.6 felt the same in the 1999 survey.

these children have an increased vulnerability to anxiety and depression—both of which have been linked to increased substance abuse and other “self-medicating” behaviors.

“Stress and pressure is big in Lexington,” says Beth Mintz. “I wouldn’t identify one group as the primary group that’s using across all lines of kids,” she adds.

In the *Teens Today* study, across all groups, *schoolwork/grades and the busy factor* (defined as: “all the things I have to do” on the survey) are contributing factors to teen stress.

“One of the key findings of our site-based council survey [conducted two years ago] that concerned both parents and children,” comments Joan Zahka, PTSA President at Clarke Middle School, “was managing time effectively—students being able to achieve academic goals with so many other things on their plate. This over-scheduling issue leaves parents and teens finding that they can’t organize their time well,” Zahka said.

Teens and “Sense of Self”

The early *Teens Today* research yielded three profiles of teen decision-making: *Avoiders, Experimenters and Repeaters*.

These three dimensions were correlated this year with 2002 study results that surveyed attitudes relating to: identity formation, relating to peers and becoming independent.

A composite profile of low, medium and high “sense of self” teens was developed from these dimensions and added to the established “risk” profiles. This information really begins to round out our understanding of kids who

to change, susceptibility to negative peer influences, and attractiveness,” according to *Teens Today*, a series of studies conducted on behalf of SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions), Liberty Mutual as well as various research firms including Roper and Atlantic Research (in Boston).

Privileged, but Pressured? A Study of Affluent Youth, is a study that was undertaken in 2002 by Suniya S. Luther and Bronwyn Becker of Columbia University. The study looks specifically at suburban kids in an affluent northeast suburb like Lexington and reveals that real problems exist for suburban children that are not as evident in the results from nationwide studies.

This study reports rates of depression in girls that were **twice that** of the normative sample and anxiety that was higher in both boys and girls. This “unusually high internalizing” is associated with stress and depression.

Children of affluent parents are often **assumed** to be at “low risk” for engaging in dangerous behavior because of their privileged life.

But this study found that

engage in risky behavior and how we can help them.

The good news is that the vast majority of teens have a high or medium “sense of self.” “Most teens are happy, but schoolwork, busy schedules, and relationships are stress factors,” the survey reveals. However the findings show that “about one in eight teens is at greater risk of engaging in potentially destructive decision-making because of low sense of self.”

Teen “sense of self” is profoundly influenced by: peer relationships, body image, academic achievement and parental relationships. Teens who have limited successes in one or multiple areas are at risk. Girls have particular issues around body image that make them vulnerable to eating disorders as well as substance abuse. However, it is frightening how close the external behavior of high, medium and low “sense of self” teens can be:

“On the surface, the three decision types may look indistinguishable to parents, teachers, or even friends. Teen drug and alcohol Experimenters and Repeaters are just as likely as Substance Avoiders to have jobs after school or on weekends. Moreover, there are no significant differences in the proportions of teens across the three substance abuse decision types who participate in varsity or junior varsity sports, honor society, volunteer work or church religious groups.”

This echoes what Julie Fenn and Beth Mintz, Drug Educators for the Lexington School Department, see at Lexington schools. “As a result of kids being bright, competent and functional, they can get away with using [drugs or alcohol] until it really becomes a problem. That is what is so sad to me,” says Julie Fenn.

Beth Mintz warns that is not always enough to pay attention to whether your teen is doing all right in school. “Kids are bright, they’re from good families, we think that they can’t possibly be involved with drugs.”



Parents and teens gather at the Parent/Teens Dialogue

Parental influence

It's Normal To Experiment; I Can't Control Them Anymore

Data from *Teens Today* shows that a teen’s relationship with his or her parents has an important impact on their “sense of self.” Of teens with a high “sense of self,” 92.5 percent indicate that they feel “respected by their parents.” Among those with low “sense of self,” only 7.7 percent feel respected by their parents.

Sixty-two percent of the high “sense of self” group report that their relationship with their parents makes them “feel good about themselves” while only 39.8 percent of low “sense of self” teens say their parents make them feel good about themselves. *Privileged But Pressured* probes below the surface of parental influence to reveal that suburban students feel that acceptance by both parents and peers is inextricably linked to their accomplishments, not who they are as people. This exacerbates anxiety around failure. Suburban students in the study report “isolation from adults” and low closeness to parents.

“One thing that constantly comes up in parent meetings,” Fenn says with frustration, “is that parents feel powerless once kids go to the high school. They feel that they can no longer parent

them—that they can’t be held accountable.”

Parents surveyed for the *Teens Today* study believe that there is “nothing that they can do” to keep teens from making dangerous decisions. “Only one in three teenagers (32 percent) report learning a lot about the risks of drugs at home,” according to the **PATS** study. Fifty-three percent of parents surveyed feel drinking is a part of growing up and their teens will do it no matter what.

However, responses from the teens paint a dramatically different picture. *Teens Today* research shows clearly that the so-called parental “myth of inevitability” (that kids will drink no matter what they as parents do) is simply not true.

“The results of this survey shatter this myth of inevitability and show that parents who communicate with their teens, in general and about destructive decisions, have a positive influence on the decisions that teens make.” *Teens Today Results*

One of the things that most frustrates Fenn and Mintz is the ease with which most parents accept the idea that it’s normal for teens to experiment with alcohol and drugs. “It’s such a strong message we send to kids—

that it’s normal—that it’s what they are supposed to be doing as teenagers,” Fenn says. “And the whole thing with alcohol in our society—parents accept that it’s part of growing up—a rite of passage—to go out and get drunk,” Mintz adds.

Among the three decision-making types, *Avoiders* (those who regularly avoid substance use) were much more likely to want to live up to parental expectations. This shows parents still exercise influence once their teens go on to high school.

It’s communication and the manner of communication between parents and kids that really makes a difference.

Addressing the communication challenge

According to the *Teens Today* findings, teens prefer to discuss tricky and/or sensitive issues more casually during general conversation with their parents. They tend to withdraw when parents escalate conversations about school, friends, grades, drugs and alcohol and especially sex. Parents who do not have enough relaxed time to interact casually with their teens, cannot create communication opportunities.

Ironically most parents surveyed (80%) felt that they DO bring these subjects up regularly in normal conversation while only 46% of teens agree. The information gap can lead to shocking disparities:

“The research also reveals multiple disconnects between parent’s perceptions and teen reality. Teens are very concerned about drinking and driving while 93% of parents surveyed indicated that they felt their teen “never” engaged in drinking and driving. 70% of parents surveyed believe that their teens did not drink at all.” *Teens Today Results*

These are the types of issues that Fenn and Mintz hope to address in the *Parent /Teen Dialogues* that they are starting in the Lexington schools to help

parents understand that they CAN make a difference if they can get the ball rolling with open communication.

The first *Parent/Teen Dialogue* was held at Clarke Middle School on March 3rd in the school cafeteria. About thirty parents and twenty-four teens were at the workshop. This is the first time they have held such a meeting and they were happy with the response.

Joan Zahka, Lexington resident, Mom and head of the Clarke Middle School PTSA attended the meeting with her daughter Adrienne. "It's was great beginning, but we didn't have enough time," she said enthusiastically. "We were just getting warmed up!" Joan also co-hosts morning coffee meetings at Clarke for parents with the guidance department and feels that "there is a real hunger for communication" among parents of teens.

At the workshop teens and parents sat together in small discussion groups and discussed a list of potential hot topics of communication like school grades, friends, drugs, sex and money. The student facilitators role-played some not-so-successful (but typical) conversations and elicited feedback from the group. Many parents could identify with the common communication traps and pitfalls. Suggestions and ideas were exchanged in a friendly atmosphere.

"Having a bond with your child is the best way to enforce consequences," says Beth Mintz. "It really does fall to the parents," says Julie Fenn. Ultimately, they are the ones who must take the ball and run with it."

Moving forward as parents & as a community

Now that School Resource Officers (SROs) are no longer on duty in Lexington schools and the health curriculum (which includes drug education) has undergone cuts, there is concern among many in the community that the progress that has been made on drug prevention as evidenced by

the 2002 YRBS results, may be compromised and some kids may fall through the cracks.

Stephen Ralston, Assistant Principal at the Clarke Middle School in Lexington says that they have "definitely missed" the SRO at Clarke. "It was great to have Kristen (Kristen French of the Lexington Police Department who is now assigned to Minuteman H.S. was the SRO for Clarke and Diamond Middle Schools) here. Her presence and her ability to connect with the students was important. Students would come up to her in the halls and ask questions—she related well to them." Ralston is in hopes that the position will be reinstated next year.

All research shows that teens need to feel good about themselves to avoid making dangerous decisions. Low "sense of self" teens are more likely to drink, experiment with drugs and end up engaging in sexual activity.

Many factors contribute to a teen's sense of self, including academic success and a feeling of control over their activities and schedules, satisfying relationships with their friends, a good body image and communication with parents.

Busy suburban parents have different sets of concerns. "Most kids say that they are using between the time they get home from school and around 7:00 when their parents get home," adds Mintz. "Kids have an enormous amount of freedom."

Vigilance over teen burnout is extremely important, adequate relaxed family time is necessary to provide opportunities for talking.

"When a kid gets in trouble, it's very important to let them know that your opinion of them will be lower," says Fenn. If it gets to the point that your kids don't care about anything, you really have to step up and say 'all bets are off...things are going to be different around here until I know you are safe.'"

You can't rely on teachers to know all the problems. Teachers are handling hundreds of teens. Additionally, the zero tolerance

policy of Lexington High School concerning drug and alcohol use keeps students who may be having problems from seeking help from school personnel who are obligated to report them.

Fenn and Mintz also point out that it is also important for teens to feel valued in their community. "Teens feel disenfranchised in Lexington. There's nothing to do on weekends...they feel unwanted in the Center, the bowling alley is closed...there is no inexpensive place to get a sandwich," Fenn says. "I don't think that many of the kids feel included or wanted in the community. We hear it all the time."

"When you're talking about the community and what the community can do in terms of supporting and creating more positive relationships with the teens in this town," says Julie Fenn, "I like to ask every adult to think about their own response when they see teens on the street, in a store or in a restaurant. If each of them takes a minute to make eye contact and smile—I guarantee that it would make a difference."

Lexington teens work with fifth graders to educate about drug use

By Laurie Atwater



At Bridge School teens discuss substance abuse prevention with fifth graders in Mr. Swanton's class (left) and Mr. Garland's class (right).

"Research continues to confirm...that delaying the initiation of drinking by youth contributes to reductions in future alcohol problems, including alcohol dependence; binge drinking; and alcohol-associated traffic crashes, injuries, fatalities, and violence."

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

Lexington resident and Licensed Social Worker (LCSW) Julie Fenn along with former Lexington resident Beth Mintz LCSW have been working in the Lexington Public Schools Drug Prevention Program for the past three years.

Education around drug and alcohol use is key to keeping our kids safe. It is easy to turn away from these issues until they hit home.

The two women run peer mentoring programs, faculty development workshops and most recently, parent/teen groups to help supplement the prevention program taught as part of the health curriculum in the schools. They are funded by a federal grant unearthed by the resourceful Lexington grant writer, Elaine Sterzin.

Fenn and Mintz know that delaying "risky behaviors" or halting them all together is the key to keeping Lexington kids safe, happy and productive. Since many kids have their first experience with substances in middle school, they have targeted the fifth grade—the critical transition year from elementary school to middle school—with a program designed to get kids thinking about strategies for making healthy decisions.

Alcohol prevention messages do work. Rates of past year alcohol and illicit drug use were lower for youths who had seen or heard drug public service messages or received information at school in the past

year according to the NHDSA study: *School Experiences and Substance Use Among Youths*.

Lexington's Drug Prevention program is a peer-mentoring program conducted in each of the elementary schools. Mintz and Fenn recruit teens from the middle schools and the high school and train them as presenters.

The students have fun preparing as a group to present to the 5th graders or the parents. "I get along with everyone in my group. I like meeting new friends," says Alex Sullivan a teen presenter and 8th grader at Clarke Middle School. Alex enjoys doing the presentations to the 5th graders. "I like the fact that I feels like I'm helping someone out when I get home—like I did something that night," he says.

"A lot of people [student presenters] have some negative feelings going in. It's really actually kind of fun when you get up to talk...it's hard to explain, but you have this good feeling inside that you've done something to help someone out and maybe if they do get pressured they'll look back and think of you," said Sullivan.

Alex also took part in the Parent/Teen Dialogue night and actually had a good time. "I liked the Parent/Teen dialogue night because it really helped me out in ways that I could use in my life and I felt that I was able to be helpful to the parents," he said.

Alex feels that communication is important between parents and teens. "Most kids will have the time," he says, "If they have the time to sit at their computer and play games or chat on AOL they have the time to talk with their parents, but I think that the parents have a lot of work to get done so they don't always have time. They also don't have the relationship," he concludes.

"Last year eighth graders and high school students were blown away by what the fifth graders knew. Teachers were surprised, too," says Julie Fenn. But Fenn was not surprised. "Kids have more communication through TV, the internet and instant messaging now," she says. "Information travels like that," she smiles and snaps her fingers.

During the mentoring sessions kids are asked about what drugs they are familiar with and what they perceive as the harmful effects of drug use. The older student presenters relate their own experiences and ask questions of the fifth graders.

While leading the sessions at the Bridge School the poise of the older students was a sweet counterpoint to the naive curiosity of the fifth graders. Initially the kids are pretty shy, but by the end of the session they are full of questions about middle school and all of the things that they have heard.

"It's something that they never get to talk about" so they get a little silly," says Alex Sullivan.

Clearly the younger students feel anxious about the transition and the older teens offer them a comforting mix of experience and empathy.

Currently in Lexington, this program being carried out by Fenn and Mintz is filling a critical void. Julie knows that it is not enough, however. "We have such a limited time with the students," she says in frustration. In many ways both women say the program is just as important for the teen presenters as the fifth graders.

"We've really worked hard with the students around understanding that if they are going to do these presentations, they are going to be forced to look at their own choices," Fenn says. The Lexington teens do a great job answering the fifth grader's questions about moving on to the middle school. They take on the mentoring role naturally and really seem to enjoy the interaction.

"I think that more people should start things like this for older grades like 6th and 7th and maybe even 8th," says Alex Sullivan.

Group Seeks Support For Youth Center

By Laurie Atwater

It has been many years since Lexington has had a gathering place for teens. Many neighboring communities support youth/teen centers including Brookline, Cambridge, Hingham, North Andover, Sudbury and Winchester.

In early 2003, an energetic group of concerned Lexingtonians got together privately to develop a plan. They called themselves the Belfry Center Organizing Committee. Their vision: to create a welcoming and nurturing space for the under served teen population in Lexington.

Precipitated by the introduction of the historically significant First Church of Christ Scientist on Forest Street (built in 1917; Willard Brown, the architect designed many of Lexington's prized properties) onto the real estate market, a core group of parents: Melissa Broderick, Tim Dugan, Ellie Baker, Adrian Leone, Ellen McDonald, Faith Parker, Lydia Swan and Joan Zahka began to brainstorm the possibility of creating a viable youth center at the church.

Unfortunately, last year's failed override dealt the project a blow and the property went under contract before the committee could develop community support and begin to raise funds for its purchase.

However, the group feels that the need for a safe gathering place for teens in Lexington is greater than ever. Without an appropriate space, kids get together in the

woods, the meadows, under bridges and any other place they can find. Lexington teens can often be heard complaining "there is no place to go in this town." Kids often meet up after school in each other's homes with no parental

Lexington teens can often be heard complaining "there is no place to go in this town."

-The Belfry Center Committee

supervision. It is a well documented fact (see story this page) that most teens use drugs and alcohol between the hours of 3 and 7PM after school while their parents are at work.

The Belfry Center Business Plan states, "Fundamental to the Center's mission will be a commitment to foster mutual respect between neighbors and generations, and to create a safe and inclusive community that enables personal and civic enrichment."

Currently the committee is exploring other options including the feasibility of the Hayden Recreation Centre expanding its service to adolescents and teens. Currently Hayden directs most of its programming to younger children. As a private organization they have no obligation to serve the broader community; they serve their membership and because their programming does not relate to teens they have a small percentage of members who are teens (exceptions include skaters and swimmers).

"The Hayden Centre does such an excellent job attracting younger children, it would be exciting to see what could be achieved if they determined to engage more of Lexington's under served teen population," committee member Ellen McDonald said recently.

If you have ideas to contribute or would like to join the effort to create a teen center in Lexington, contact Melissa Brodrick at 781-863-0878.

Selectmen approve youth council

By Laurie Atwater

The Board of Selectman in Lexington has authorized the formation of a special youth council to address youth-related services in the community.

Dawn McKenna, newly appointed Chairman of the Lexington Board of Selectmen is excited about the new initiative, "I believe that the Youth Services Council is a step in the right direction and we are hopeful that the community will support the Youth Services Coordinator position so that we can really begin to make some progress."

McKenna stresses the importance of the background work that was done by the Human Services Committee.

"The Human Services Committee did everything that the board asked them to do by talking and involving the school department in decision-making, by surveying professionals in social services that interact with the youth on a regular basis in the community, and by going to the various departments within the municipal side of the government. They have brought forth a program that has everybody's buy-in—that is in the collective judgment of all, the best way to address the needs of youth within the community."

Human Services Committee Chairman Robert Dentler states, "We've been in pursuit of something like this for 2 years in the town human services committee." His group has been working hard to address the requests of the Board of Selectmen and to put together various reports to support their goals. In one of their reports called "A Tale Of Four Towns: Youth Services in Arlington, Bedford, Watertown and Winchester," the Human Services Committee interviewed key personal from

each of the neighboring towns—all of which have youth programs with different service components. Among them: youth centers, coffee houses, peer counseling, crisis intervention and substance abuse prevention programs.

Coming off that research effort Dentler said, "We think it's time we catch up with our neighbors."

Dentler adds, "When RePlace funding was discontinued due to the failed 2003 override, the

"We think it's time we catch up with our neighbors."

-Robert Dentler, Chairman, Lexington Human Services Committee

Youth Council initiative became "more urgent." He explains that Bill Kennedy, the Selectman's liaison to the Human Services, advocated for the no-cost piece

of the proposal—the council itself. The Selectmen approved it unanimously.

There is one catch, however. The funding for the coordinator position is contingent upon approval of the next override.

When asked about a Teen Center Dentler indicated that they had reviewed the Belfry Center plan and liked it. "We met with Ellen McDonald and Kim Dugan and we sent them an enthusiastic endorsement. It was an important try," he says, "and I don't think they're ready to give up yet."

The report to the Selectman from the Human Services Committee concludes, "From the largest town, Arlington, to the smallest, Bedford, substantial amounts of public funds are expended on the provision of youth services."

School Resource Officers and Lexington teens

A conversation with Detective Lieutenant Mark Corr of the Lexington Police Department

Interview conducted with Detective Lieutenant Mark Corr by Laurie Atwater of the CTM staff.

The following is a conversation with Detective Lieutenant Mark Corr of the Lexington Police Department. The Lieutenant responded to my call about the School Resource Officer program in the schools and how the department has dealt with the disruption in the program since last year's failed override.

Lieutenant Corr has been acting as a liaison to the schools since the reassignment of Dana Hamm.

Lt. Corr has also spoken at a professional development workshop attended by Lexington teachers and administrators.

Lt. Corr has twenty years of experience on the Lexington Police force and is a native of Lexington. He has a son in the Lexington school system, coaches little league and graduated from Lexington High School. He brings tremendous perspective, insight and knowledge of Lexington, to this conversation.



This program was designed with prevention, as it's first goal. The officers make themselves available daily to students, parents and staff. Much of each day is spent counseling kids through problems at home, school and in their personal relationships. School Resource Officer (SRO) page of the Lexington Police Web site.

CTM: What is the role of a School Resource Officer?

Lt. Corr: To be visible. Having somebody within the school system who is readily available and can be face-to-face with teachers, administrators and students really allows the lines of communication to open up. Not having these lines of communication will make some situations more difficult.

The person who is in the school is part officer, part faculty and part guest. To be able to balance all of those roles takes time. When a student is having a problem with alcohol or drugs, the Resource Officer is able to make themselves available, to be able to answer questions and potentially intervene if there is a situation.

CTM: How so?

Lt. Corr: A lot of our business is not law enforcement—it's problem solving and problem-prevention at the front end. Having an officer who has developed a relationship and is maintaining a relationship and maintaining channels of communications in the school is very helpful.

If there was an individual identified as having a drug or an alcohol problem at the high school for example, having an officer involved at the front-end where counseling can be involved and the lines of communication between parents, the student, the school and the police can be critical to identifying a measured response if a problem arises.

CTM: Is the drug problem escalating at the high school?

Lt. Corr: There are going to be cycles that are better or worse. I think that we are anticipating that there are a greater number of students presently in need of our assistance or intervention than we have had in awhile.

The drugs today have taken on a different complexity—they are purer, they are more potent, they are more dangerous. The marijuana of today

is nothing like it used to be. Different drugs have additives. There is some evidence that more students are abusing prescription drugs.

CTM: Do you think that parents should be alarmed?

When I started as a police officer 20 years ago, every weekend we were breaking up a keg party. Now that barely happens once a month. Our tolerance for it is lower and that's a good thing.

But it is within our community and we need to be aware of it. It does exist, has existed and will exist. What we need to do is come to an understanding of how we start shaping the messages—as a community, as parents. How do we want to cope with it?

CTM: Do you think most parents are aware of what is going on in Lexington?

Lt. Corr: I think that most parents would benefit from reviewing, or seeing or being informed about some of the problems that occur in the community. Living in Lexington we have good reason to believe that we are living in a safe and reliable community, but we need to be aware that sometimes things happen. We need to be attentive.

What can parents do?

Lt. Corr: Having faith in your kids and the way you are raising them is important, but blind faith in anything is not.

We should not be teaching children that they have unconditional approval. Trust and faith is something that we earn on a regular basis. That doesn't mean that we can't be giving our kids some guidance on alcohol and drugs and prescription drugs. There needs to be awareness.