



Capturing the **VOICES**



A COMMUNITY REPORT OF
POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY'S YOUTH
ATTITUDES, OPINIONS, AND NEEDS

This community report reflected more than anything else, **young people in Pottawattamie County want to be heard.**

That is the overarching theme of “Capturing the Voices”, a county-wide youth assessment funded by the Iowa West Foundation, conducted with assistance from Promise Partners—Pottawattamie County’s Alliance for Youth and the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship.

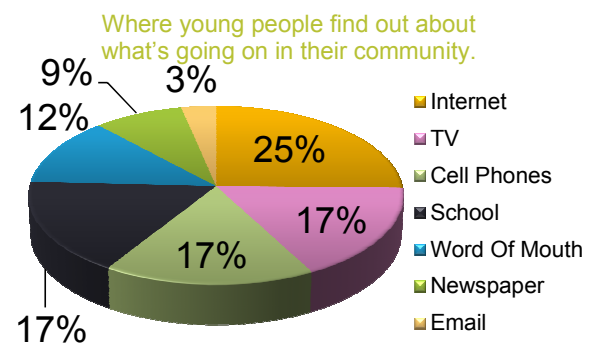


In the Spring of 2011 a survey was conducted of nearly 2,400 young people ages 11 through 24 in Pottawattamie County, Iowa to find their attitudes, opinions, and needs.

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SPENDING THEIR TIME

When young people were asked how they spend their time in activities, the highest rankings went to social networking sites, cell phones/texting, watching television, and streaming radio/video. Relatively few spent much time playing video games, reading, or participating in arts or music. A fair number spent some time weekly in outdoor activities or sports/athletics. About half said they helped with at least one hour or more doing chores around the house or farm, whereas only a quarter reported working six or more hours a week at a job. Among metro youth, more than 40% reported doing no homework at all or less than one hour per week, compared to nearly 30% of rural youth.

Not surprisingly, the pervasiveness of social media was confirmed loudly. Youth said they get most of their information, in priority order, from these sources: Internet, TV, cell phones, school, and word of mouth. Unlike older generations, they don’t read newspapers. Youth-serving organizations in separate focus groups said young people don’t respond to e-mail. If you want to reach them, it takes Facebook or a text message.



WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT TODAY

Community Strengths:

- Small, close-knit community, yet close to the city
- Midwest friendliness
- Beautiful parks and open nature space

Community Weaknesses & Things of Concern:

- Drug and alcohol use among adults and youth
- Bullies, fighting, and crime
- Lack of entertainment
- Lack of employment opportunities
- Appearance of the community

With a number of young people accessing area programs, services, clubs, and facilities, young people gauged these at average or below. Youth were often cited saying there is a lack of youth input on service provision and delivery.

Youth in Pottawattamie County are saying....

- 16% report there are people in their home with a serious alcohol or drug problem.
- 33% first drank alcohol (more than a few sips) before the age of 17.
- 37% have been bullied by being called names, teased, or made fun of while at school.
- 6% have been threatened by someone with a weapon while on school property.
- 20% say there are lots of fights, crime, and illegal drugs in their neighborhood.

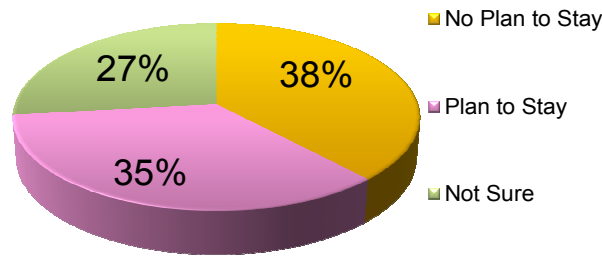
Data from the 2010 Iowa Youth Survey.
Sponsored by the Iowa Department of Public Health.
www.iowayouthsurvey.org

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT TOMORROW

71% of young people surveyed said they planned to attend college or technical school. When they are ready to settle down, 34% said they planned to stay in the area, while 37% said they probably would leave.

When asked to rank factors that were important to them in creating an ideal community in which to live, the highest ratings went to job opportunities, housing, college access programs, more colleges and universities, and more recreational opportunities. At the bottom of the rankings were restaurants, shopping centers, organized mentoring of youth, vocational training, and art or culture venues/activities.

Plans after high school or college.



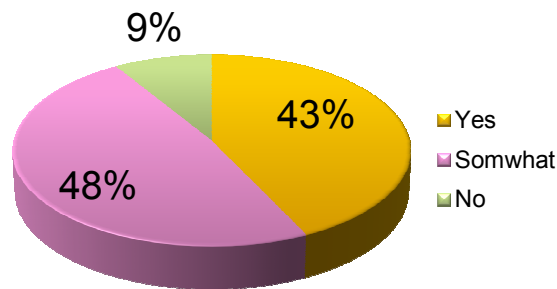
WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

Young people repeatedly that **they want to be more engaged in their communities** and more involved with adults who could act as role models. They said that something should be done to help newcomers feel more welcome. Additionally, more opportunities should be available to become aware of the rich history and heritage in Pottawattamie County.

Among the many ideas offered by young people:

- Youth input and representation in local government and city planning, and community development.
- More student input on school issues.
- Young people planning community events along side adults.
- Student-led boards in schools.
- Student-led research on community projects.
- Time for students to speak with community and school officials.

Youth's feeling as though their community provides what they need to be successful in the future.



The assessment included a survey of 2,349 young people ages 11 through 24 (approximately 10% of the total county's youth population). Another 55 youth participated in five focus groups.

Among survey respondents, more than 90% were age 11 to 18. Two-thirds live in Council Bluffs and one-third in rural Pottawattamie County. Survey respondents were evenly divided between males and females. Of those surveyed, 80% described themselves as White/Caucasian, 9% as Hispanic/Latino, 6% as American Indian or Alaskan, 5% as Black/African-American. When asked who they lived with, 49% said with both parents and 19% with a single parent.

For the most part, surveys were completed on-line. A youth leadership team, referred to as the "Street Team", assisted in development of the project and made special efforts to track down youth in out-of-the way places, including a few who said they were homeless.

"We want to feel our opinion is valued."

"There should be more opportunities for young people to get involved in the community."

"I like the history of my community."

"There are too many people who drink, smoke, and use drugs."

"Close knit farming community—small, safe, quiet and peaceful."

"More community involved activities for youth and adults alike."

"I like the friendly people."

"There needs to be more jobs for the community"

"There's peaceful places and beautiful parks."

"There's a lot of crime and drama."

"The way our city looks (is what I like least)."

