



# **BROOKFIELD CARES**

Promoting social and emotional wellness in our community.

## **Brookfield Cares Annual Report: 2020**

### **Background**

The purpose of this report is to inform the public about Brookfield Cares and its efforts to address public health concerns. Our focus has been and remains the health and welfare of the community as a whole.

Brookfield Cares is a 501c3) organization, which enables us to solicit funds to allow us to expand the work that is being done in the community.

### **Mission**

Our mission is clear:

*Brookfield Cares is a community based organization dedicated to promoting awareness and education by focusing on the impact of substance abuse, depression, suicide, and other public health concerns.*

We continue to work hard to reach the entire community on issues that have an impact on our daily lives including addiction, drug and alcohol use and abuse, anxiety and depression, eating disorders, suicide, mental health issues, smoking/vaping, and bullying. In this regard we make an attempt to work with all factions of the community through their representation on the coalition. We have initiated a variety of programs to further our mission and goals. The more our community can be informed and engaged, the healthier our community will become.

### **2020 Programs and Actions**

Brookfield Cares continues its involvement in educating all members of the community concerning substance abuse, mental health issues, and other health

related concerns. This year, our efforts were both guided and impacted by the many mitigating factors surrounding the coronavirus pandemic. A considerable increase in adverse mental health conditions, substance use, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts has been directly associated with the stressors surrounding the pandemic. In addition, outreach to address these alarming trends requires a substantial change in process due to social distancing constraints.

Brookfield Cares produced and distributed an updated “Parent’s Guide to Helping Your Child Succeed”. This 32-page booklet provides communication and results from the 2019 Student Attitudes and Behaviors Survey. Valuable information and resources for help are included for many of the challenges our youth face: alcohol and drug use, bullying, mental health and suicide prevention, and COVID-19 stressors. To ensure each parent had ready access to these resources, and because the pre-pandemic means of distribution were not possible, Brookfield Cares sent each household in the school district a copy of the guide. The booklet was additionally provided to each staff member in the district, and is available at the Town Hall, library, police station, YMCA, and local physician offices.

To further address mental health concerns in our younger students, a copy of “Gizmo’s Pawsome Guide to Mental Health” was provided to each teacher, psychologist, and social worker at Center and Huckleberry Hill Elementary Schools.

In light of the many significant events of the past year, including COVID-19 and the national movement to address racism, the Brookfield Cares website has been updated to include many resources on these critical and timely issues. In addition, a social media/communication presence was reestablished via Facebook and Mailchimp.

In conjunction with the Western Connecticut Coalition, Brookfield Cares hosted a virtual QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Training session. This evidence-based program teaches laypeople to recognize and respond to signs of crisis. Sixteen community members representing youth groups, religious organizations, college mental health organizations, nonprofit groups, and local government were trained and certified in life-saving suicide prevention skills.

Brookfield Cares continues its support of the Parent Support Network of Brookfield. This family-driven, parent-led group provides parents who are concerned about their child’s mental health and well-being the opportunity to give and receive valuable peer connection.

A new initiative was launched to provide education and helplines to our preteen and teenage students. Acrylic sign holders were installed on the 83 bathroom stall doors in Whisconier Middle School and Brookfield High School. Posters focusing on mental health issues, the adverse effects of vaping, substance abuse, suicide prevention, and other health concerns will be displayed, and periodically replaced, in the sign holders. The initial posters provide information regarding the harm of vaping, and messaging to encourage students to seek help for mental health issues.

## Search Institute Surveys

In order to gain a better understanding of students’ attitudes and actions relating to at-risk behaviors, Brookfield Cares and the Brookfield Public Schools surveyed students in grades 7-12 in November 2019. The surveys are designed to provide quantifiable input that helps us:

- Focus on developmental assets: the strengths, supports, and skills that young people need to overcome challenges.
- Measure intangible qualities that really matter for youth development and education.
- Provide easy-to-understand, actionable information results that can help engage others and increase impact in the lives of young people.
- Bring young people’s own perspectives and experiences to planning.

We thank our students for participating in this survey, and the school administration for their continued support in these efforts. Below are the strongest and the weakest developmental assets, as reported by our youth.<sup>1</sup>

Strongest Developmental Assets		
Developmental Asset	Definition	Percent Reporting
School Engagement	<i>Young person is actively engaged in learning.</i>	82%
Family Support	<i>Family life provides high levels of love and support.</i>	79%

<sup>1</sup> Search Institute, “Developmental Assets: A Profile of Your Youth: Executive Summary and Complete Survey Report – Brookfield High School and Whisconier Middle School,” February 2019.

Integrity	<i>Young person acts on convictions and stands up for his or her beliefs.</i>	79%
Responsibility	<i>Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.</i>	76%
Positive Peer Influence	<i>Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.</i>	75%
Achievement Motivation	<i>Young person is motivated to do well in school.</i>	75%
<b>Weakest Developmental Assets</b>		
<b>Developmental Asset</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Percent Reporting</b>
Reading for Pleasure	<i>Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.</i>	12%
Creative Activities	<i>Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.</i>	18%
Community Values Youth	<i>Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.</i>	22%
Parent Involvement in Schooling	<i>Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.</i>	23%
Caring School Climate	<i>School provides a caring, encouraging climate.</i>	27%

While the Developmental Assets provide important feedback on attitudes, the survey also provides information on the behaviors of our students.

- Alcohol continues to be the number one drug of choice (11% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders and 44% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders report past 30-day use – 16% of all students have rode once or more in the last year with a driver who had been drinking).
- Marijuana continues to be viewed by students as less dangerous than other substances with less parental disapproval choice (2.5% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders and 24% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders report past 30-day use).
- For the first time, the 2019 survey included questions involving vaping. 17.8% of high school students report vaping in the past 30 days, and of those students, 8.5% indicate vaping marijuana. 65.2 % of high school students report that it is “very easy” to “sort of easy” to obtain electronic cigarettes or other vaping devices.
- We need to be continually mindful of suicide risk of students (26% of high school students are frequently depressed and/or have attempted suicide).
- 50% of our 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders say they have less than 1 hour per day of adult supervision after school.
- Onset of alcohol use can start as early as 10-11 years of age.

Brookfield Cares, partnering closely with the community, continues working to improve awareness of at-risk behaviors, provide education and outreach on related issues, and reduce the perceived stigma related to behavior and mental health issues. As we face these challenges we look forward to – in fact we need – cooperation and collaboration with all constituent groups, including parents, the schools, town government, clergy, the medical community, seniors, and more. With the community’s support, understanding, and involvement, we can achieve our goals.