

## It Does Take A Village

Over the past few months, we've been thinking about how you as parents can support and empower your children and provide them with the clear rules, high expectations and multiple opportunities (the external assets) they need so they, in turn, can develop the positive values and skills (the internal assets) essential to becoming caring, responsible, healthy adults. There is no question that strong healthy families play a critical role in building these assets, BUT families are not the only players. This month, I'd like to switch gears and talk about the positive powerful impact "other adults" can have on children and teens.

Thinking back, most of us can remember "other adults" - people other than our parents who were an important part of our lives. The other adult may have been an aunt or a neighbor or the parents of one of your friends. But whoever that person was, you knew you could count on him or her to "be there" for you, no matter what. Children and teens still need to have those other adults in their lives only now it may take a really deliberate and intentional effort on your part to make that happen. That's because, in our culture today, it simply is not "normal" to feel any responsibility for other people's children. And perhaps even more disturbing than this benign neglect is a culture of fear. Parents worry about their children's safety and children are taught to fear strangers. Adults are wary of approaching other people's children for fear of being misunderstood. There is good reason for this fear, but as Mary Pipher says in The Shelter of Each Other, "A culture in which children fear adults and adults are uneasy around children is an unhealthy and dangerous place."

Changing culture is an overwhelming task, but like all cultural changes it happens one person at a time. And we do have some common ground to build on. According to Grading Grown-Ups, a study done by Search Institute and Lutheran Brotherhood, the vast majority of Americans do believe it's important for adults to be involved in children's lives. The problem is despite that belief, most American adults do not follow through with any action. Basically each of us has to begin to really live what we so often say: "It does take a village to raise a child." As adults in Arlington, we have to work to make it an expectation - a normal behavior - that **all** adults are actively involved in the positive development of **all** the children. Given our unique demographics here in Arlington - seven adults for every child - we have the potential to have an *abundance of support* for each and every young person in Arlington. And it doesn't have to be complicated. It's really about making sure that children and teens are included in the everyday life of the community - that they're guided, connected and known in their own community.

So, as a parent, what can you do? Think about how you can ensure that your child does have other adults in his/her life. You could begin by:

- Asking your child who she sees as the other adults in her life and why she enjoys being with those adults.
- Thanking the other adults in your child's life for their involvement.
- Trying to be open to sharing your child with others.
- Trying not to be defensive if another adult corrects your child.

- Encouraging activities that include adults and children of all ages– neighborhood events, faith community socials, etc.
- Trying to find an adult who shares the same interest or hobby as your child.

You could also think about how **YOU** could be that other adult for some child. You could:

- Stay in touch with your nieces, nephews, cousins and other extended family through notes, e-mails or phone calls.
- Welcome your children's friends to your house and get to know them – really, they'll like it!
- Make an effort to develop one informal caring relationship with a child other than your own.
- If you have time, mentor a teen or child, or be a group leader or sponsor for an activity or club.
- Recognize and learn the names of the children in your neighborhood. Don't underestimate the power of being known!

From our Assets survey, we know only 42% of Arlington teens report having other adult relationships. As elementary parents, you can start now to make it an expectation, a normal part of life, for your child to have lots of other adults in his or her life. As your child becomes a teen, there may be times when your relationship hits some rough spots. Those are the times you'll be so glad your child has other adults. And those are the times some other young person will be so glad to have you in his life!