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40 Developmental Assets: A Research Analysis: Healthy Youth Committee & Fairmont's Youth Surveys

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40 Developmental Assets

A research analysis

Healthy Youth Committee & Fairmont's Youth Surveys

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Introduction/Literature Review

This writer teamed together with the Healthy Youth Committee of Fairmont, Minnesota. The Healthy Youth Committee is a committee comprised of about 15 various community professionals who want to make a positive change for the youth of Fairmont. The committee includes court administrations staff, police chief, probation officers, teachers, non-profit employees, and social worker. The Healthy Youth Committee requested the Search Institute to complete the 40 Developmental Assets survey *Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors* with the youth in Fairmont, in 1997, 2002, and 2011. 40 Developmental Assets is a research-based framework that identifies basic building blocks of human development and in both cross-sectional, and longitudinal studies it has been found that assets affect youth outcomes. The Search Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota has surveyed nearly three million youth about how they experience the 40 Developmental Assets. The 40 Assets are split into two categories, External (networks of support, opportunities, and people that stimulate and nurture positive development in youth) and Internal (a young person's own comments, values, and competencies), and in each of these categories there are four sub-categories including, Support, Empowerment, Boundaries & Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, and Positive Identity (Search Institute, 2011). The Search Institute has found that the more assets kids have the better. For example, youth with high asset levels are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors including, but not limited to; violence, sexual activity, drug use, and suicide. Since data had already been collected, this writer used the data set to complete a secondary analysis focused on the strong and weak assets the youth portrayed in their surveys.

Methodology

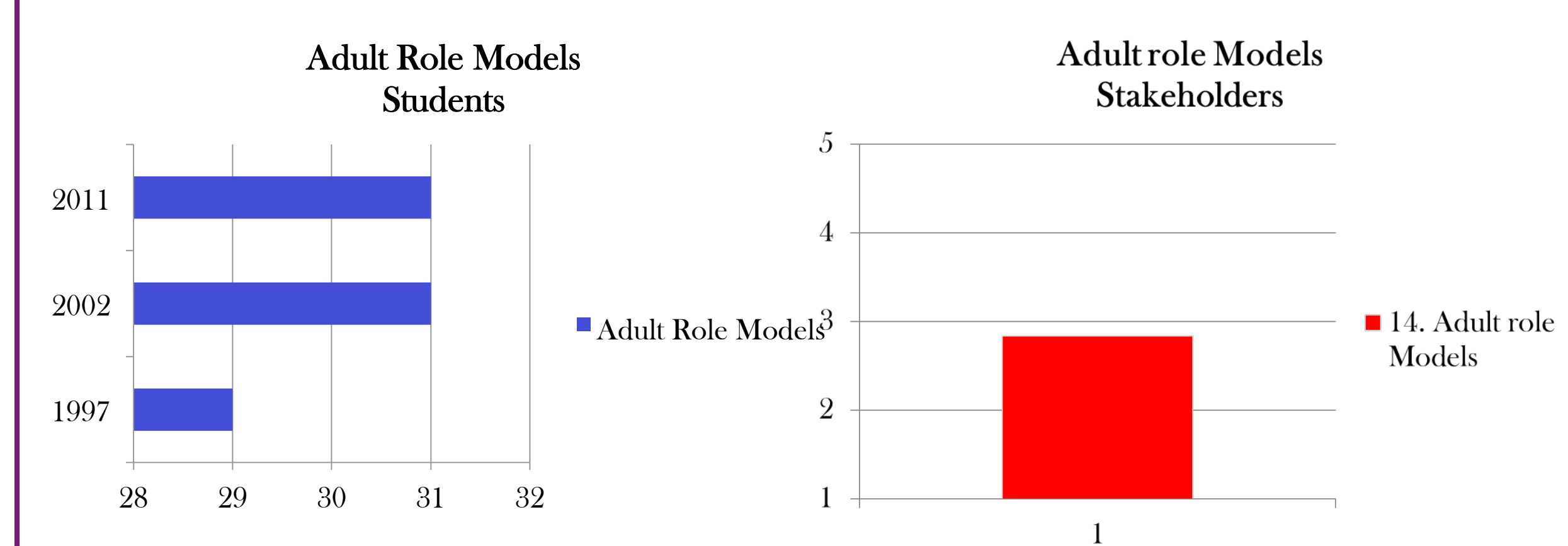
- In 1997, 2002, and 2011 the Healthy Youth Committee of Fairmont, requested the Search Institute to complete *Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors* surveys to youth (whose parents gave parental consent) to measure the 40 Developmental Assets of the youth of Fairmont area. Standardized administration procedures were provided to school staff by Search Institute to enhance the quality of data. To ensure complete student anonymity, no names or identification numbers were used.
- Each year the survey was given several checks were made on individual survey responses and within each survey "group" surveys were eliminated due to inconsistent responses, missing data on 40 or more items, and reports of unrealistically high levels of alcohol or other drug use. The Search Institute grouped responses by gender, grade, and group, and printed final reports for each year.
- The Healthy Youth Committee received these reports with numbers and some percentages of the response the youth gave, and a some suggestions to build assets. However, they needed someone to take these reports and compare them, and analyze what is or is not consistent and assist with ideas on improving the assets of youth in the Fairmont area. This writer then took this on as her capstone project. The Healthy Youth wanted more of a community approach and gathered/invited a group of community professionals, and citizen's to view this data and pledge to assist with asset building.
- This writer created a survey on surveymonkey.com to administer to the stakeholders (approximately 40-50 people). This writer wanted to obtain the opinions of the stakeholders involved, in regards to the 40 Developmental Assets. Due to the layout of survey monkey this writer split the 40 assets by External and Internal assets (20 questions) in each category. The first page had the first ten external assets and the stakeholders were asked to rank in their opinion, how well Fairmont utilizes the first 10 External assets using the following Likert scale. 1= Extremely Poor, 2= Below Average, 3= Average, 4= Above Average, and 5= Excellent. 24 out of 41 stakeholders responded.
- This writer then compiled the results from the stakeholders into graphs and compared and analyzed responses to the youth's responses. The stakeholders and the Healthy Youth Committee came up with four asset areas they wanted to work on. This writer compared the results, and four asset areas and placed them into a power point for the HY Committee and stakeholders to view, this writer then e-mailed it out to the HY Committee and stakeholders.

Results

- Responses from all three years varied over the years, as numbers of youth, grades, and schools surveyed differed. Overall, the survey given in 2011, showed a higher number of assets as reported by the youth.
- There were 13 assets that were consistently low through-out the three years they were surveyed. These include Parent Involvement in Schooling, Caring School Climate, Other Adult Relationships, Positive Family Communication, Youth as Resources, Community Values Youth, Adult Role Models, Creative Activities, Reading for Pleasure, Cultural Competence, Planning and Decision Making, Self-Esteem, and Personal Power.
- The four assets the stakeholders and Healthy Youth Committee wanted to work on before seeing this writer's results are: Positive Adult Role Models, Planning and Decision Making, Positive Family Communication and Responsibility.
- The results from the survey taken by the stakeholders did not show positive belief that Fairmont Youth are given, use or have a majority of the 40 Developmental Assets. Using the five point Likert scale listed above, the stakeholders did not list any asset above a 3.2 which indicated Average.
- The largest differences between the youth and stakeholders responses were Caring School Climate, Community Values Youth, Service to Others, Adult Role Models, Creative Activities, and Self-Esteem (where youth rated these very low, and stakeholders rated this at an Average). Creative Activities was rated very low and decreased each year, the stakeholders rated it a 2.71, slightly above Below Average.

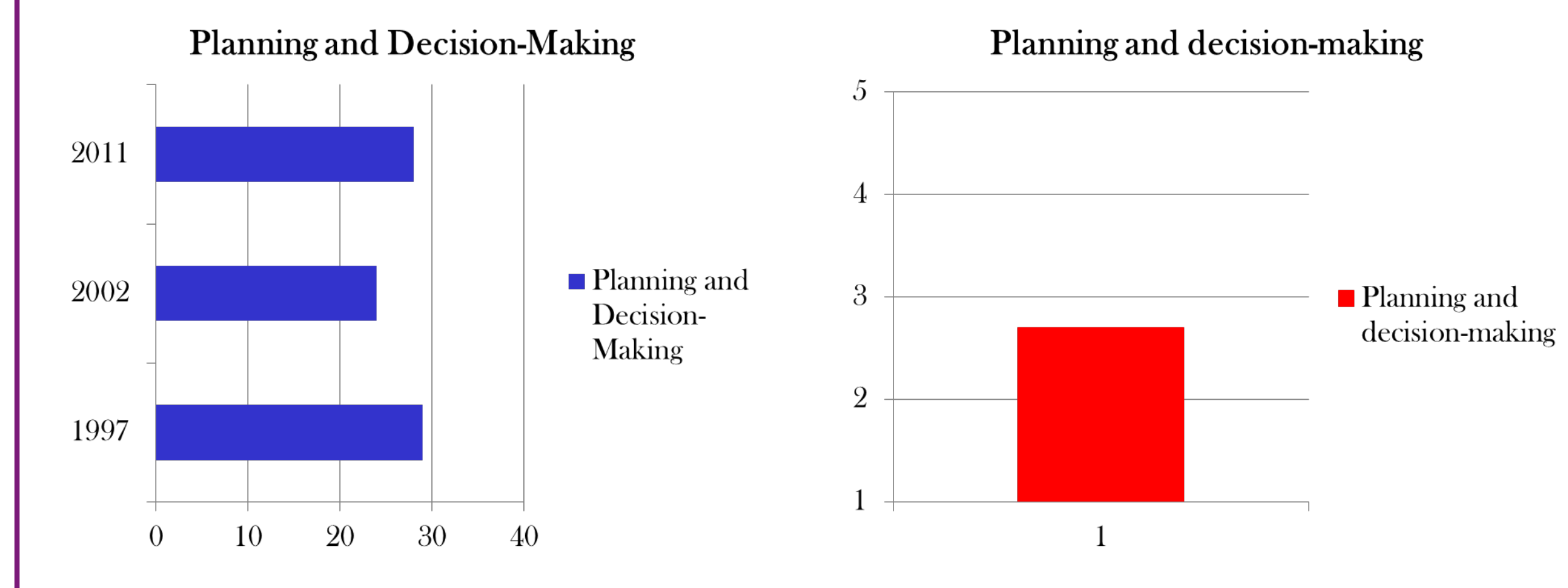
Positive Adult Role Models:

Students: 31%
 Stakeholders: 2.83% slightly below average



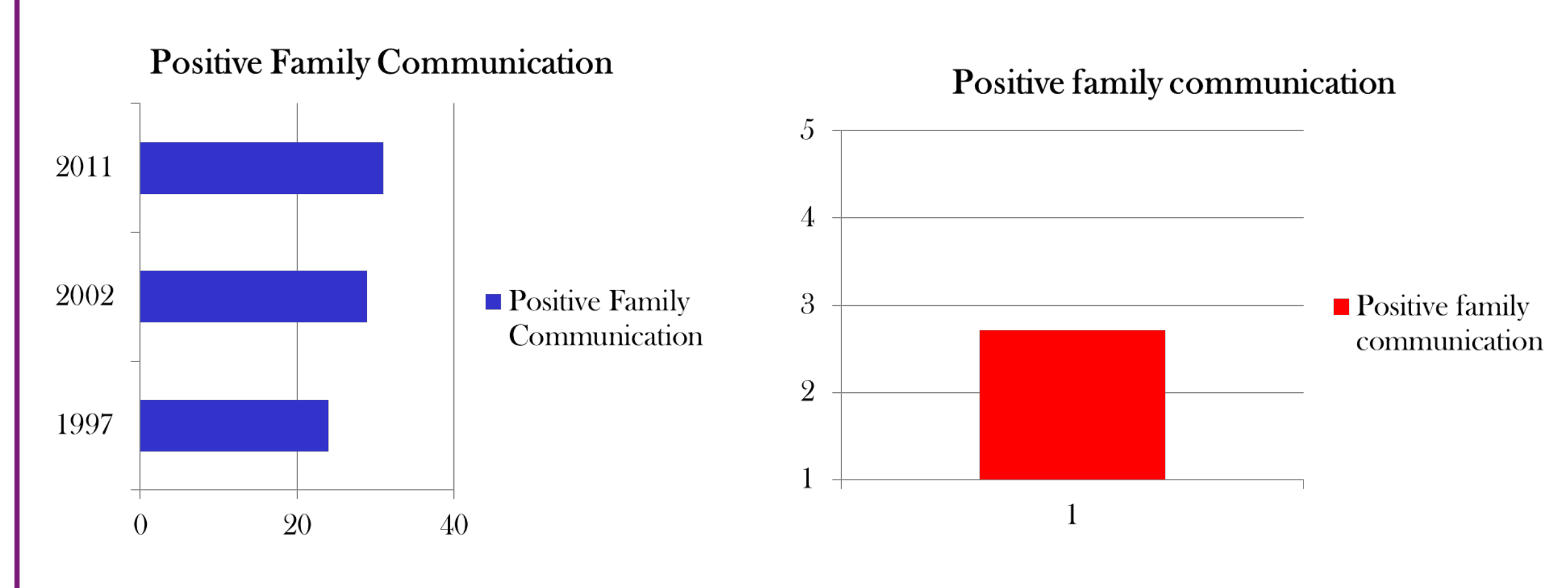
Planning and Decision Making:

Students: 29% and lower
 Stakeholders: 2.7 slightly above below average



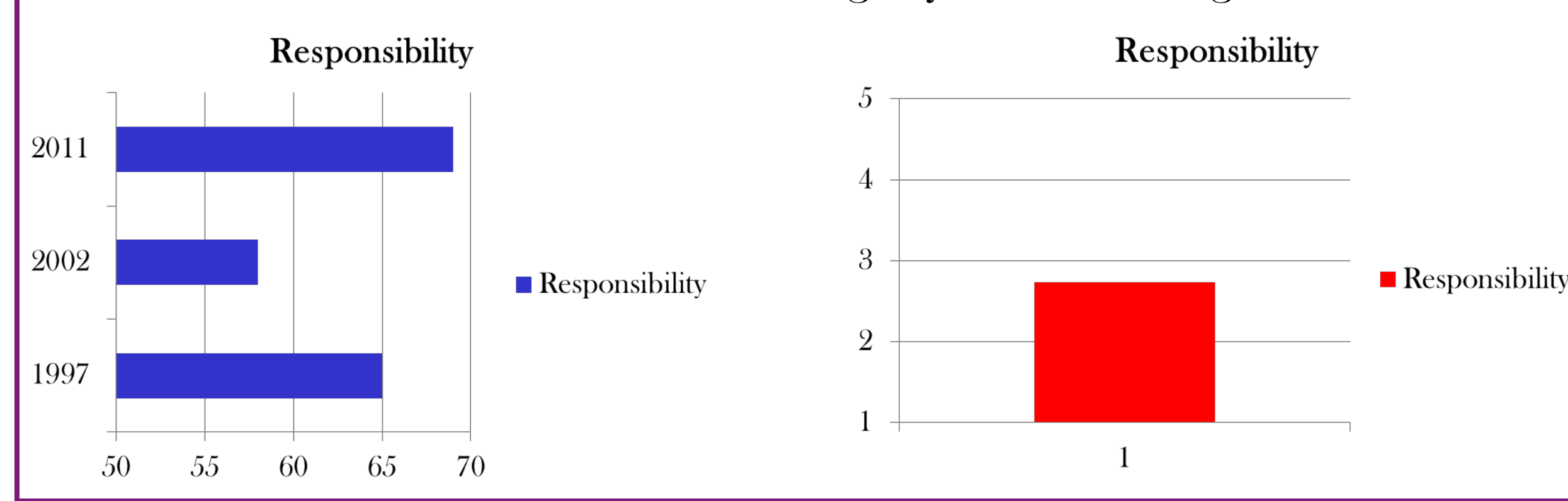
Positive Family Communications

Students: Highest 31%
 Stakeholders: 2.71 slightly above below average



Responsibility

Students: 69% highest in 2011
 Stakeholders: 2.73% slightly below average



Conclusions & Recommendations

- Assets are crucial for the healthy development of all youth, regardless of their community size, geographic region, gender, economic status, race, or ethnicity.
- The studies done by the Search Institute show compelling results that the number of Assets a youth has the less likely they are to engage in high-risk behaviors (violence, sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, and suicide) and more likely to engage in thriving behaviors (helping others, doing well in school, and taking on leadership roles).
- This writer recommends that the Healthy Youth Committee of Fairmont and the community begin by looking, and working at five assets in particular, including Adult Role Models, Planning and Decision Making, Community Values Youth, Cultural Competence, and the whole group of Positive Identity. Due to the data and analysis this writer completed, these are the lowest reported assets by the youth and should be addressed first.
- Communities can draw upon inherent strengths of youth and adults to increase assets in young people and do the following: Give adequate adult support through long-term, positive, intergenerational relationships, provide meaningful leadership and community involvement opportunities, engage young people in youth serving programs, provide consistent and well-defined behavioral boundaries, help youth connect to their community and create critical opportunities to develop social competencies and form positive values (Search Institute, 2011).
- This writer recommends applying for grants and advertising for donations to have this survey administered once every two years, and continue including grades 7,8,9,10,11, and 12. In doing this, the Healthy Youth Committee can analyze and compare results to, see if their actions have helped the youths assets grow. It would be measured by "catching" many of the same youth in more frequently given surveys. Now, it is imperative the community take action, and establish and work toward the goal of a higher average total number of assets that each of it's young people experience. Everyone; parents, grandparents, educators, neighbors, children, teenagers, youth workers, employers, health care providers, business people, religious leaders, coaches, mentors, and many others, can build Developmental Assets in youth.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths include:

- Analysis of assets for the Fairmont Youth that the Healthy Youth Committee and Stakeholders can begin with.
- The Healthy Youth Committee can attempt to begin giving the survey on a more consistent (i.e. every 3 years) basis and track their attempts/activities to raise assets.

Limitations:

- The survey was not given consistently enough to track the same youth to see if positive changes to the assets from the same youth are noticed.
- The youth and the stakeholders did not use the same survey, making responses slightly different.
- The number of youth, grades, and area schools differed in 2011.

Implications for Practice

Results show that social workers can and do have the ability and potential to add to the assets the youth they work with. Many of the assets work closely with the values and ethics of social work. Working together with the Healthy Youth Committee and the community is part of our duty. Social workers, and other community members should engage people as partners in the helping process and seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities (NASW, 2008).

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References

References are available from the author upon request.