Kids Voices Count

Listening to Delaware’s children talk about factors for success
KIDS COUNT in Delaware is dedicated to making our state a better place for kids. We want to focus the attention of Delaware’s policy makers, community leaders and parents on factors for success, to better understand how we can help children succeed.

Kids Voices Count provides the teen perspective on a success. This interviewing and writing project was undertaken as a volunteer effort by the journalism students at Milford High School, under the supervision of their teacher Czar Bloom. These young people spent several weeks during this school year interviewing their peers and middle school students in Middletown, Milford and Seaford on the subject of success. The interviews were conducted with no adults present.

They are pleased to present their thoughts on an issue that deeply impacts their lives and the well-being of their friends and their families.

Note: The names of the teen interviewers and photos are real, however, to protect confidentiality, the names of the interviewees are fictitious and their photos are not included. All interview excerpts are edited only for order of presentation. The words are those of the teen journalists themselves as submitted to KIDS COUNT.
The Milford High School journalism staff received the honor of writing for KIDS COUNT in Delaware in November. We worked very hard to interview students and help produce a fine product.

In mid-February we were able to attend a conference at Brandywine High School with U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley, Governor Thomas R. Carper, and U.S. Representative Michael Castle. They discussed Delaware’s educational policies and system. They all believed that the key to success was education. After the exciting meeting with the public officials, we traveled to the Middletown Boys and Girls Club where the students were eager to tell us their opinions on personal and educational success.

After the trip to Middletown Boys and Girls Club, we went to the Lower Sussex Boys and Girls Club in Seaford where we talked with more students about their feelings on the same issues. Later, we added interviews with older teens from our home school, Milford High. Almost everyone we interviewed agreed that the most important thing that needed to be accomplished in order to succeed was to do well in school. Even students that had succeeded in sports and music agreed.

In addition to our findings, The Search Institute, a national research institute, studied several keys to success. Many of the results the Search Institute found complemented our research. In fact, four factors stood above the rest:

- Support from family, neighbors, friends and other adults.
- Boundaries and expectations so that students know what is and is not expected of them.
- Commitment to learning in school and outside.
- Positive identity or a strong sense of their own self-worth.

After the travels to the different schools, we have learned that no one key exists for success, yet different keys come together to open the door to everyone’s individualized success.

Forty Developmental Assets for Youth

Extensive research led the Search Institute to identify the essential building blocks of adolescent development. In 1990, the institute identified 30 external and internal “developmental assets” that all youth need to grow up healthy, competent, and caring. Through experience, ongoing examination of youth development literature, and conversations with practitioners and other experts, the institute has refined and strengthened the asset framework. In 1996, the institute released studies of youth...that measure an expanded framework of 40 assets.

These forty assets are described throughout this publication.

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Lana, age 16

The first interview I conducted was with “Lana,” a African-American 16-year-old female who lives in Milford. She defined success as accomplishing what one sets out to do and being satisfied with it.

Lana believes she has succeeded in her social life, scholastics, and sports, especially track.

The factors for success that Lana named are family support, service to others, high expectations, caring, reading for pleasure, responsibility, peaceful conflict/resolution, and resistance skills.

These responses were typical among my interviewees, but what set Lana aside from the others was that she believed positive family communication and a religious community are important aspects that help people become successful.

What I found out was that people’s own beliefs and values, in Lana’s case it would be religion, are important to whether or not one succeeds. This following quote illustrates this theory:

“One person with a belief is equal to a force of ninety-nine who only have interests.”

— Anonymous

External Assets
- Support
- Positive family communication
- Other adult relationships
- Caring neighborhood
- Caring school climate
- Parent involvement in schooling
- Community values youth
- Youth as resources
- Service to others
- Safety

Boundaries and Expectations
- Family boundaries
- School boundaries
- Neighborhood boundaries
- Adult role models
- Positive peer influence
- High expectations
- Creative activities
- Youth programs
- Religious community
- Time at home

Internal Assets
- Commitment to Learning
- Achievement motivation
- School engagement
- High expectations
- Constructive Use of Time
- Creative activities
- Youth as resources
- Service to others
- Safety
- Boundaries and Expectations
- Family support
- Positive family communication
- Other adult relationships
- Caring neighborhood
- Caring school climate
- Parent involvement in schooling
- Community values youth
- Youth as resources
- Service to others
- Safety
- Boundaries and Expectations
- Family boundaries
- School boundaries
- Neighborhood boundaries
- Adult role models
- Positive peer influence
- High expectations
- Creative activities
- Youth programs
- Religious community
- Time at home

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**Sarah, age 17**

My second interview I held was with “Sarah,” a white 17-year-old female who lives in Milford. Sarah says success comes when people know that they have accomplished a lot of what they wanted and they are happy with what they’ve done with their life.

She believes she has succeeded in her social life and school, as well as her music. Sarah, who plays the clarinet, excels in the Milford High School band.

Sarah thinks that achievement, motivation, personal power, a sense of purpose, and planning and decision making are important ingredients to a successful life.

In contrast with other interviewees, Sarah believed adult role models and a positive peer influence impacted the possibilities for a successful life. She also believed that the absolute key factor for success is knowledge.

This following quote explains Sarah’s feeling about success:

“If there is any one secret to success, it lies in the ability to get the other person’s point of view and see things from his angle as well as from your own.”

— Henry Ford

**Bob, age 16**

The third and final interview I conducted was with a 16-year-old white male who lives in Milford. “Bob” says success comes when people have accomplished all goals and achieved everything they have wanted to do.

Bob wasn’t really comfortable naming his accomplishments because of his age, but he did say he thinks he’s succeeded in his band as a guitar player.

He believes that the key factors for success include living in a caring environment, safety, boundaries in family and school life, creative activities, equality and social justice, and self-esteem. He also thinks that to be successful one needs to be a persistent, diligent worker. Overall, though, he thinks that time equals success.

This following quote explains how Bob feels about success:

“It takes twenty years to make an overnight success.”

— Eddie Cantor
Erin, age 13

Success is when you make it in the world.

Q: What do you define as success?
A: When you make it in the world.

Q: What would you like to do as your future career?
A: I want to be a doctor.

Q: What have you done to prepare for this occupation?
A: Foster care classes have helped me prepare.

Q: Have your parents helped you prepare?
A: No, I do think parents help you though.

Q: Do you plan on going to college?
A: Yes, I think I’ll be able to go through the education.

Hillary, age 14

Q: How do you define success?
A: Accomplishing goals you set for yourself and achieving your dreams.

Q: How have you succeeded in life so far?
A: I play the clarinet and I made it into Junior All-State band. I’m also on the list for Wilmington Charter School. This year I brought my math grades up.

Q: What are your future career goals?
A: A marine biologist, because I like to travel and see the finer points in life.

Q: Who has been most supportive of you in achieving your goals?
A: My mom has been really supportive. She always tells me even if you don’t get what you want in the beginning, it’ll work out.

Q: Do you think that parent support is important in a young persons success?
A: It depends on how parents treat or encourage you. Some could care less. My parents are supportive.

Q: Do you think you need to be smart in order to succeed?
A: Not necessarily, it depends on what you want to succeed at.
**Amanda, age 13**

I think college is essential.

- **Q** What do you define as success?
- **A** Completing your education and getting the job you want.

- **Q** What job would you like to have in the future?
- **A** I would like to be a teacher or a doctor.

- **Q** What have you done to prepare for these occupations?
- **A** I’ve talked to my family and teachers about it.

- **Q** Have your parents helped you prepare?
- **A** My parents have taught me CPR and life saving skills.

- **Q** Do you plan on going to college?
- **A** Yes, I think college is essential.

**Sandra, age 15**

Success is when you are loyal to what you are doing. Doing and being whatever you want to.

- **Q** How do you define success?
- **A** When you are loyal to what you are doing. Doing and being whatever you want to.

- **Q** How have you achieved success?
- **A** Last week I had a chance to design a poster for a community event. I really like art.

- **Q** What are your future career goals?
- **A** I would like to be a fashion designer, because I like different types of clothes and different outfits. I’d like to make new stuff, for new generations.

- **Q** Who supports you the most to achieve your goals?
- **A** My mom, she tells me what I’m doing right or wrong.

- **Q** Do you think parental support is important in order to succeed?
- **A** Yes, because if you have parent support, you can really strive.

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**External Assets**

**Boundaries and Expectations**

- **Family boundaries** - Family has clear rules and consequences, and monitors the young person’s whereabouts.

- **School boundaries** - School provides clear rules and consequences.

- **Neighborhood boundaries** - Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people’s behavior.

- **Adult role models** - Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.

- **Positive peer influence** - Young person’s best friends model responsible behavior.

- **High expectations** - Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

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Lucy, age 13

I set goals and make sure
I keep my priorities in order.

Q What is success?
A Success means achieving one’s goals after setting those goals early on in life.

Q How do you achieve these goals?
A I concentrate my hardest and try my best.

Q Who is important in helping you achieve success?
A My friends, family, and teachers.

Q What are your future plans?
A To stay in school and eventually go to college and law school.

Q How do you plan on achieving success?
A I set goals and make sure I keep my priorities in order.

Kim, age 12

My parents come to school functions
and help me study.

Q How do you define success?
A Something you work hard to achieve.

Q How have you achieved success?
A Playing sports. I’ve played softball for two years with Parks and Rec.
I’m planning on playing it in high school too.

Q What are your future career goals?
A I would like to be an attorney.

Q Do your parents help you achieve your goals?
A Yes, for sports they practice with me. They come to school functions and help me study.

Q Do you think that parents are vital to a child’s success?
A Yes, they need to encourage them to do what’s right and follow their dreams.

Q Do you think you have to be smart to succeed?
A No, sometimes you have to know things, but sometimes it’s just talent.
Patrick, age 14

At home I ask my parents or other family members for advice. Church also gives me a sense of direction and it provides mentors for me.

Q What do you want to do in the future that you think will make you successful?
A I want to become an animator, participate in theater, or enter the Baptist ministry.

Q What do you do for guidance or support?
A I go to teachers or other faculty when I seek advice in my schoolwork. At home I ask my parents or other family members for advice. Church also gives me a sense of direction and it provides mentors for me.

Q Do you think kids now go to the wrong places for support or guidance?
A I think too many kids idolize sports figures.

Q Do you plan to go to college?
A Yes, I don’t know where, but I’d like to go to a smaller college where I can get more individual attention.

Q Is schooling a major part of success?
A Yes, it helps kids choose what they’re interested in and good at.

Q Do you consider yourself a hard worker, and if so, how much of a help has that been for you?
A I think I work hard, I’m capable of doing difficult work and doing well.
Raymond, age 13

Most teenagers don’t have any direction in life.

I stay organized and study hard. I talk to teachers when I have problems so I can always stay on top of the work.

Q: What for you would be success?
A: Becoming a pilot.

Q: Who has helped you achieve success so far?
A: School has helped me decide what I want to do and how I can do it.

Q: What is the major part of your education right now?
A: I go to a Vo-Tech school, so I’m trying to focus on technical skills.

Q: Would you like to go to college?
A: Yes, I’d like to go to a small college where I can get a good education so I can get a good job.

Q: Do you think kids now have a good idea of how to achieve success?
A: No, most teenagers don’t have any direction in life.

Q: What do you do to get good grades?
A: I stay organized and study hard. I talk to teachers when I have problems so I can always stay on top of the work.

Alice, age 13

Q: How do you define success?
A: Accomplishing goals.

Q: How have you achieved success in life?
A: I’ve been making good grades and I play basketball.

Q: What are your future career goals?
A: Pediatrician.

Q: What have you done to start achieving your future goals?
A: I went on the Internet and I talk to doctors about their jobs.

Q: Do you think that parent support is important in a young person’s success?
A: Yes because they teach kids they can do anything.

Q: Do you think you have to be smart to succeed?
A: No, lots of not so smart people are really famous and have done what they wanted to do.
Samantha, age 14

With hard work, there’s nothing you can’t be successful at.

Q: What would you like to do when you get out of school?
A: I want to play professional soccer or be a singer.

Q: What will you have to do to be successful in soccer or singing?
A: I practice both a lot, but I will have to work harder at them as I get older.

Q: What do you do to be successful?
A: I set priorities and finish work with as much effort as I can.

Q: What have you done so far that makes you think you can be a soccer player or singer?
A: I’m in chorus at school, but I’ve only been able to play soccer at home.

Q: What are your beliefs on success?
A: With hard work, there’s nothing you can’t be successful at.

Jennifer, age 14

All parents need to help their kids.

Q: What do you want to do when you get out of school?
A: I want to be an obstetrician.

Q: How have you been successful so far?
A: I’ve gotten good grades and I’m planning to go to college.

Q: How do you organize yourself to be successful?
A: I make goals and reach them.

Q: Have you thought about where you’ll go to college?
A: Yes, I want to go to a major Division I college.

Q: Is your family supportive?
A: Yes they help me a lot. All parents need to help their kids.

Q: Do you rely on your friends to help you achieve success?
A: I rely on my friends a lot.
Laura, age 12

I want to be a pediatrician because I see sick children on television. It makes me want to try to help them.

Q: How do you define success?
A: The ability to do something well.

Q: How have you achieved success?
A: I’ve succeeded in math. I’m good at math, I pay attention, and it’s easy for me.

Q: What are your future career goals?
A: I want to be a pediatrician.

Q: What made you choose that career?
A: When I see sick children on television. It makes me want to try to help them.

Q: Do you think parental support is important in success?
A: Yes, because they help you, but no, because they can get bossy.

Michael, age 14

I want to be a doctor so I can make a lot of money.

Q: How do you define success?
A: By the amount of money you make.

Q: What do you want to do when you grow up?
A: I want to be a doctor so I can make a lot of money.

Q: Is college important to achieving success?
A: It is to me because it will help me in my career.

Q: Do you have any plans for how to achieve success?
A: I’m going to go to a big college and medical school.

Q: Who is helpful in your achievements?
A: Family is important for support in what you want to do, but friends also help by giving you a chance to relax and escape from pressure.

Internal Assets
Positive Values

Caring – Young person places high value on helping other people.

Equality and social justice – Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.

Integrity – Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.

Honesty – Young person “tells the truth even when it is not easy.”

Responsibility – Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.

Restraint – Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.

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Tania, age 16
Teens give in to pressure to do things that distract them.

Q: How do you define success?
   A: Education and money

Q: What do you want to do when you get out of school?
   A: I want to become a masseuse.

Q: Is your family encouraging of you?
   A: They support me in whatever I do.

Q: Have you done anything so far to help you achieve your goals?
   A: I haven’t taken any massage classes yet, but I plan to.

Q: How do you plan on achieving success?
   A: I just do the best I can in everything everyday.

Q: Do teens have a difficult time succeeding usually?
   A: Yes, because they give into pressure to do things that distract them.

Q: Who should teens rely on for support?
   A: Family and friends.

Marianna, age 13
Even if you have a strong will, you still need parents to help and support you.

Q: How do you define success?
   A: Doing something that you’ve set as a long or short term goal and being able to feel good about it.

Q: How have you achieved success?
   A: I can sing well and I can bring that to the world. I wanted to have a solo in chorus and I did. I have passed every year, so that shows success. I’m smarter than I let on to be.

Q: How long have you been working on achieving success?
   A: In singing, since I was 5 or 6. I just sing all the time.

Q: What are your future career goals?
   A: I’m too young to know; but maybe a singer, actress, or photographer. I like kids, so maybe I’ll start a daycare.

Q: Have your parents encouraged you?
   A: My parents have encouraged me since I was three.

Q: Is parental support important?
   A: Yes, because even if you have a strong will, you still need parents to help and support you.
Jerry, age 13

I worry about how the real world will be very tough when I get out of school.

Q What do you want to do when you grow up?
A Become a policeman or an environmentalist.

Q Why those choices?
A I think America needs help in the law and court system. I also lived on a farm so I learned to appreciate nature.

Q Have you thought about where you want to go to college?
A I’d like to go to a small college because big ones are a waste of money.

Q How do you think you will succeed?
A By doing my best.

Q What do teens need to do to prepare for their future?
A Save money for college and get good grades.

Q Do you ever worry about how difficult your future may be?
A I worry about how the real world will be very tough when I get out of school.

Q Who is the most supportive of you?
A My mom.

Q What problems do most teens face as obstacles?
A Lack of support from those who should help them.

Shirley, age 13

I’m going to work really hard and set my goals.

Q What is success?
A Having a good house with money and a husband.

Q Can you define some of your successes?
A I’ve passed every grade and I have a large loving family.

Q What are your future goals?
A I want to go to college and become a photographer.

Q How will you achieve those goals?
A I’m going to work really hard and set my goals.
Ben, age 12

Q What is success?
A Achieving your goals.

Q Can you define some of your successes?
A Playing basketball.

Q What is your future goal?
A Becoming a professional basketball player.

Q How will you achieve this goal?
A Practice.

Justin, age 15

Kids need someone to listen to them.

Q What do you want to be when you grow up?
A A school counselor.

Q Why?
A I want to talk to kids. I think I could help them. Kids need someone to listen to them.

Q Do you depend on your parents?
A Yes.

Q What does it take to be successful?
A Hard work and reaching hard for your goals. Be the best in everything you can. If you want something bad enough, you’ll work hard enough to get it.

Q Is school helpful?
A Yes, I love school. I like to go and be with my friends.

Mary, age 13

Q What is success?
A What you want to be and what you achieve when you get older.

Q Can you define some of your successes?
A I’m doing a lot better in school than I did last year.

Q What are your future goals?
A Go to a vo-tech school and possibly college, too. I want to be a veterinarian.

Q How will you achieve these goals?
A I’m going to have to be patient because it takes a lot of time to do that. I hope I achieve it.
**Eric, age 14**

Success is to live my life the way I want to.

**Q** What is success?
**A** To live my life the way I want to.

**Q** Can you define some of your successes?
**A** I was in the studio with Master P. Basketball is a big success of mine.

**Q** What are your future goals?
**A** Live in a big house with my wife and one kid. Become a record producer.

**Q** How will you achieve these goals?
**A** Go to college.

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**Brian and Mindy, age 13**

**Q** How do you define success?
**A** Brian: Stuff you do that you’re good at. Having a good outlook and doing good work.
**Mindy:** How well you do anything.

**Q** How have you achieved success so far in life?
**A** Brian: School and playing the piano.
**Mindy:** Cheerleading.

**Q** What are your future goals?
**A** Brian: Being a computer programmer, maybe a family. I don’t know if I want kids or not.
**Mindy:** College and a family. I want to be an interior decorator.

**Q** What have you done so far to achieve these goals?
**A** Brian: I signed up for the charter school, and I will go to college.
**Mindy:** I’m trying to make honor roll.

**Q** Is it necessary to be smart to succeed?
**A** Brian: You have to be smart in what you want to get involved in.
**Mindy:** Yes.

**Q** Are your parents supportive in trying to help you achieve your goals?
**A** Brian: I live with my grandparents. They’ve always supported me.
**Mindy:** Yes, very supportive.

**Q** Do you think parents should be involved in helping kids achieve goals?
**A** Brian: Yes.
**Mindy:** Yes.

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**Internal Assets**

**Positive Identity**

- **Personal power** - Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.”
- **Self-esteem** - Young person reports having high self-esteem.
- **Sense of purpose** - Young person reports that “my life has a purpose.”
- **Positive view of personal future** - Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

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Christine, age 13

Q: What helps you achieve success?
A: Skills and good grades.

Q: Do you need support from others to be successful?
A: Yes, because others can help you be whatever you want.

Q: Who helps you the most to achieve success?
A: My mom pushes me to get good grades.

Veronica, age 13

Success is being responsible and working well with people.

Q: What does it take to be successful?
A: Experience in what you’re interested in.

Q: What is success?
A: Being responsible and working well with people.

Q: Who helps you be successful?
A: My family because they teach me new things.

Jordan, age 14

Q: What is success?
A: To accomplish something.

Q: Can you define some of your successes?
A: I’ve won basketball championships.

Q: What are future goals?
A: Be a professional basketball player, go to college for engineering.

Q: How will you achieve these goals?
A: Work hard through all my years and try to get good grades.
What does it take to succeed?

Good grades and behavior help in achieving success. - Clara, 17

Responsibility and dedication are the keys to success. - Gina, 17

It takes determination and a level head. I think that anyone can succeed as long as they put their mind to it. - Eric, 18

I think you have to be determined with your goals that you want to achieve and for you to try really hard to do so. - Kasey, 13

I think that anyone can achieve their goals as long as they stick to the same ones and I think it takes hard work, good grades, and I think your parents have a lot to do with your success on how much they push you. - Dylan, 15
"When there's a will, there's a way."

When the Milford High School Jolly Roger staff members first became involved with KIDS COUNT, we didn’t know what to expect, but by following the aforementioned quote, everything turned out great.

The subject “Factors for Success” gave us a bit of a challenge, for we weren’t sure how much we would get out of it. But after several interviews and in-depth research, the staff realized that, in fact, teenagers and pre-teens are focused on what makes a successful person.

According to research, a few of the key ingredients to a successful life include family support and open communication, encouraging peers, self limitations, and focused goals.

Throughout this publication, articles from past issues of the Jolly Roger display teenage success stories which prove that to be successful people don’t have to be famous Hollywood actors or wealthy business people. A person can just be a normal human being that succeeds in sports, scholastics, fitness, and other various aspects of life. To be successful, a person has to have a good head on his or her shoulders with the determination to be focused on lifetime achievement.

From our interviews throughout the state, our staff discovered that teenagers in Delaware, even through various opinions, are aware of what makes a successful person.

In fact, this final quote brings the entire KIDS COUNT experience together and exemplifies to readers what success is purely based on:

"Some men succeed because they are destined to, but most men succeed because they are determined to."

— Anonymous

Special thanks to Czar Bloom, Millford High School English/ journalism teacher and faculty advisor to the Jolly Roger

Kids Voices Count