New Programs Enhance Youth Development
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The Washington County Archway Partnership recognized the need for addressing social issues affecting youth development in the community and worked with local organizations to establish two new initiatives including the creation of a Teen Maze and revamping the Washington County Chamber of Commerce Youth Leadership (WCYL) program.

The Teen Maze is an interactive experience that allows high school students to understand the consequences of negative and positive decision making within a controlled environment. It addresses real life issues including alcohol and substance abuse, peer pressure, safe dating, teen parenting, legal trouble, abstinences, drugs and death. The Maze illustrates how each life decision can (positively or negatively) impact an individual’s life both in the present and the future.

Washington County Archway Professional Kim David collaborated with the Washington County Family Connection and Communities in Schools to implement the Teen Maze in 2013 as an effort to address the social pressures that teenagers face in Washington County on a daily basis.

Data from the students showed positive results. After participating in the 2013 simulation, 76 percent of students said that they were very satisfied with the experience and 97 percent found it to be very interesting.

Open discussion about sexual behaviors can be uncomfortable, but the Teen Maze breaks these barriers through indirect teaching methods. As a result, a significant number of students learned something about sexual behavior that was previously unknown, and 77 percent of students revealed that the Maze changed their mind about having sex in the future. The Maze also featured a realistic drunk driving accident simulation that led to 94 percent of students stating that they would not ride in a car with someone who has been drinking.

The Teen Maze has received consistent positive feedback from many different outlets and will continue to be an annual program. Roy Jackson of Washington County Family Connections says, “At the top of our list is high school completion and teen pregnancy issues.” The impact of the Teen Maze directly affects these and other issues facing today’s youth in the Sandersville-Washington County community.

The second initiative designed to encourage positive action in local youth was to update the WCYL curriculum with new activities and modules from the UGA J.W. Fanning Institute’s Youth Leadership Program. The Fanning Institute worked with WCYL to enhance three sessions of the current program including Know Your Community, Community Service Project Development and Leadership Lab/Campus Visit.

The WCYL program helps youth develop leadership skills by allowing students to experience through hands-on activities and real-life leadership opportunities. The objectives are designed to build skills starting with the individual, moving to group and team processes, and ending with community involvement.

These two programs cultivate an environment conducive to productivity and development, allowing for students to explore the benefits of leadership and learn important skills to use in the future. Since their inception, these initiatives have only grown in size and popularity. The continuation of these programs will encourage better decision making and leadership among the Washington County area youth.

Advancing Community Priorities
The Washington County Archway Partnership identified the need for enhancing positive youth opportunities in the area. These two programs have contributed to a better understanding of responsibility and decision making in local youth.