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## “HELPING ADOLESCENTS AT RISK” – *Communities in the Year 2020*

What would communities be like in the year 2020, if they took full advantage of programs and services already available to help adolescents with multiple behavioral problems? Some communities are already moving in this direction.

- Communities would share a vision of what young people need in order to develop successfully. This vision would recognize the most common problems that threaten successful development of adolescents and rely on proven ways to prevent or treat these problems.
- These communities would have sophisticated systems for measuring how their children were doing; they would obtain data on prevalence of child and adolescent problems; and evidence of increases in particular problem behaviors would prompt them to take needed action.
- Relying on cost-effective policies and programs, the members of these communities would understand the value of choosing programs that have worked elsewhere.
- Behavioral scientists would play an important role in these communities—providing information the community needs to make good decisions and evaluating how well the community was achieving its goals.
- A national assessment system would be in place to define adolescent life, tracking both problems and positive aspects of youth development. The book’s authors propose such a system, called *Vital Signs*, which could be used by states and local communities.
- These communities would see reductions in poverty, child and spousal abuse, and unhealthy pregnancies. From early childhood through high school, young people would be taught effectively and acquire a lifelong love of learning. Tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs would not be accessible to young people and advertising and entertainment media would not glorify or promote their use. These are not fictional communities.
  - Vermont is already experiencing striking reductions in a wide variety of social indicators, including child abuse, high school drop outs, children without health insurance, teen births, mothers without prenatal care, and property care.
  - Communities in Kansas and Missouri have begun formally to adopt a policy that requires lawmakers to evaluate any regulation or ordinance in terms of its effects on young people.