

Facing Our Challenges Together

BARRINGTON YOUTH ARE A unique breed. Despite our differences, we are all bound by our ability to relate to each other as teenagers. But somewhere we lost that connection. We often walk through our school's hallways without even acknowledging those we pass. A school like Barrington High School sometimes seems too big. Many teenagers are doing great things, and we should take pride in each other. We must not only cherish our successes, but rebuild a sense of community. We get so caught up in our lives that we may not treat each other with the compassion we need. Our unresolved conflicts create underlying issues in our culture that run deeper than partying and friendships. The only way to truly understand one another, even ourselves, is through our experiences. These are some of the challenges we face today. These are our stories.

Many groups at school, like athletes, have conflicts. A female lacrosse player went home after open gyms cleaning bloody knuckles and knees when girls were too aggressive with their sticks during scrimmages. The fierce competition for varsity sports exposed her to another side of the girls she was once so close to. "I was crying to my mom on the phone saying this is not what I wanted. The way the girls treated me hurt me so badly, that it made me quit something that was a part of my life," she said.

Some members of the boys' cross country team endure badgering and contempt. Many runners tolerate students throwing insults, even while they train in town. One runner joined the team four years ago to help the guys form a supportive group of friends. But as a freshman, he was confronted with mistreatment from some members of the most prominent team in school. A small group of football players hassled runners in the locker room, even compelling some runners to consider quitting their sport. "People have changed [clothes] at the track, because they didn't feel safe in the locker room," he said. "I've gone home crying to my mom and dad. I love cross country, but sometimes it didn't seem worth it." Stepping

up as a senior, he finally told the football and cross country coaches. They worked together to ease the tension. However, the taunting recurs occasionally, and he still feels a sense of antagonism between some individuals.

Sometimes, it doesn't seem like we attend the same high school. Unfortunately, some people are treated differently based on where we live in the Barrington area. People in Carpentersville tolerate unfair stereotypes of the town. For three girls in Carpentersville, the jokes aren't so innocent. They have met people who really think the town is dangerous. Students have even assumed the girls live in one area or another based on their races. The girls think that students create misconceptions of Carpentersville because it has a different outer appearance than Barrington. But the girls know that some teenagers in Carpentersville contribute to the falsehoods by exaggerating rumors about gangs and gun violence. The girls think that those people want to portray an image of strength by making their peers think they live in a rough area. There are misunderstandings between Carpentersville and Barrington that run both ways. These issues have created an unspoken rift between them and built a virtual wall between towns that are 10 minutes apart.

Some of us leave these issues unresolved. Instead, we rely on our friends and family as a support system. We have bonds with our friends from the uncanny way we just "get" each other. We are often content with just hanging out. "One night, we just bought a lot of ice cream and drove to a park," said one boy. "We sat in the back of my truck watching the stars, talking, and eating Ben and Jerry's." We have so much compassion for our friends that they are often the source of our frustration or sadness. One guy struggles to keep up with his best friend's good grades. A girl lost her best friend since second grade when she started partying. She pleaded for their relationship to return to normal, but they are no longer friends. "My best friend is gone, and it hurts a lot. I don't think she understands how much it hurts, and it still hurts."

PHOTO: SUSAN MCCONNELL



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However, our parents have the greatest impact on our lives. Many of us first approach our parents for advice. Distant relationships with them sting us the most. One boy's inability to connect with his dad creates family tension. "I have a hard time telling him anything about my life. I do not know why but it is hard for me to trust him," he said. One girl looks out for her hard-working parents. She has anxiety about their unhealthy lifestyle, especially her unemployed father. Though we sometimes seem to disregard our parents, they undeniably shape who we are.

We often ask ourselves if our high school years are really supposed to be the best years of our lives. Many of us are disenchanted with our stressful culture and feelings of isolation. But the challenges we meet make us stronger people. They show how valuable our relationships are. We must also honor our bond as Barrington High School students. There's a lot for us to be proud of. We are lucky to have dreams of our future, to find out what's out there. To discover who we are. 