



Staff photo by Tim Hawk

The Williamstown High School Peer-to-Peer group helps freshmen make the transition into high school.

Peer-to-Peer Project pairs seniors with incoming freshmen

By DANIELE CRUZ
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MONROE TWP. - Sex and drugs are commonly difficult topics for teenagers to discuss with parents and teachers.

The Peer-to-Peer Transition Project at Williamstown High School is a state-funded program that offers freshman students an opportunity to explore these and other topics concerning today's young generation with high school juniors and seniors through positive peer pressure.

"It's easy because we're young and we've ex-

perienced a lot so we can talk to them like their friends," said Camille Pritchett, an active 18-year-old facilitator at Williamstown High. "They are more comfortable around their peers, even though we're older. We've still experienced the same pressures."

In an effort to help incoming students make a smooth adjustment to a high school environment, four advisors from the high school were trained at the Princeton Center [for Leadership Training] and

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those teachers trained 28 high school upper classmen to become facilitators who interact with small groups of freshmen.

“The objective in running activities with the freshmen in small groups is to help them create a sense of belonging among the incoming freshman class and to help them express themselves in small group situations, learning problem-solving and decision-making,” said Lori Muffi, director of the state program that is organized and coordinated by the Princeton Center for Leadership Training. “And then it basically helps them balance academic and social responsibility by discussing transition issues that they encounter when they first go to high school.”

The transition project is funded jointly by the New Jersey Departments of Education and Health and Senior Services. Only high schools

that have middle schools in their district [with NJ Peer-to-Peer] are eligible and there are currently 26 high schools in the state that are enrolled in the program.

“They develop a bond,” said Kathleen Klemick, vice principal at Williamstown High and an advisor for the program. She added that the program not only instructs freshmen, but gives them someone to go to if they need guidance in solving a problem. “It’s someone the freshman can go to with a friendly face.”

The issues tackled by the students during work sessions are varied.

“We talk about what a freshman would encounter,” said Joe Lopez, an active 16-year-old junior and facilitator. He is in the engineering program and hopes to pursue an education in engineering in col-

lege. “Some of the issues are more serious, like drugs, alcohol or sex while others are about organization or managing time.”

“I think it’s had a really positive effect on the students this year,” said teacher and co-advisor for the project Dave Geyer. “The freshmen are given the opportunity to get together in small groups and at the very least talk about new issues they will face in high school that they probably didn’t encounter at the middle school level.”

Trying to get through to the younger students was the most difficult part of this new program, according to Lopez.

“Whether they take the advice or not, we present the information to the students,” he added.

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