ABSTRACT

The overall purpose of this study is to describe the ways in which one school contributes to the healthy development of its students by providing an account of external developmental assets from the perspective of students and key staff informants. Specific goals of this study are: (a) to identify the principles and programs as well as the human and ancillary resources at one school whose explicit mission is to embed contexts and courses that contribute positively to the healthy development of young people; and (b) to compare perceptions among stakeholders about the external developmental assets of the school. This study gives voice to students and professionals to describe the extent to which they believe that a school’s vision, program, and resources can impact the healthy development of young people. Researchers and theorists have encouraged academics to pursue qualitative research as an important step in elucidating the meaning of developmental assets in programs for young people, particularly in schools (Mahoney, Lafferty, & Nutter, 2003; Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007; Scales et al., 2000), because, to date, developmental assets research has primarily focused on a quantitative inventory to assess youth resiliency and the efficacy of risk prevention programs. This case study contributes to the growing body of Canadian research on healthy youth development. The perceptions and ideas of participants could add to further understanding about healthy youth development, developmental assets, and the needs of learners in other educational settings.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who contributed directly and indirectly to this research, and I am grateful for the opportunity to acknowledge them. I am indebted to Dr. Lynda Colgan, whose understanding of my personal situation made the accomplishment of this research possible. Her feedback, rich insights, patience, and guidance during my studies have made this thesis possible. Lynda mobilized me, and I am thankful for her endless warmth of heart and generosity.

I also thank Dr. John Freeman, my dedicated and scrupulous committee member. You challenged me, you supported me, you were candid with me, and you took me under your wing. I would not have learned as much as I have without your guidance.

This work could not have been done without the openness and willingness of the students and staff I interviewed. You are the backbone of this thesis. Thank you for offering your voices and reflections.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my husband Pete, my daughter Addison, and my son Brennon to whom I owe so much. Pete, your unwavering support and love for me kept me going; you provide an example to others for how to be a truly good person who infinitely reaches and inspires young people.

Thank you to Sarah Andras whose friendship and thoughtful care of my children made the completion of this thesis possible. Thank you Chris for your great note-taking! Finally, I am so grateful to my parents. You believed in me throughout my studies, even when I was having a difficult time believing in myself. Mitch and Lou-Lou, thank you for always being there; you are both an inspiration to me. This one’s for you Bobo!
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I have supported students in a variety of roles throughout my educational career thus far. Having worked as a social sciences and outdoor education teacher, academic advisor, guidance counsellor, coach, and residential Head of House, I have been exposed to a diverse range of student issues related to personal health concerns. Early in my career, I was assisting in a female residence in the wake of the suicide of a young woman that occurred on campus. Supporting students in the aftermath of this crisis was extremely challenging for all staff at the school, and in working with students in varying capacities, my confidence was shaken.

Over the past 10 years I have had adolescents approach me with significant issues related to their health: eating disorders, harassment, bullying, suicide ideation, questions about sexuality, date rape, depression, divorce, and more. I often feel ill equipped to help these students, but I have learned that a listening ear is most supportive. Thankfully, I have worked in Canadian and International school settings that have reliable networks for supporting adolescents. I have been able to turn to school Deans, fellow colleagues, Heads of School, doctors, psychologists, and nurses as part of my professional resource base.

Four years ago I attended a Residential Conference in Boston, Massachusetts organized by The Association of Boarding Schools (TABS). My colleague and I were the only two Canadians, among over 200 participants. During one of the sessions titled Designing the Residential Curriculum, the
lecture hall was packed. In fact, they had moved the room selection to allow for everyone who was interested to attend. Members of the audience became entrenched in a heated discussion about what topics should be included in the themes of a residential curriculum. Most were emphatic that it should exclusively address issues of health. In my own naivety, I raised my hand and asked “Why would a residential curriculum need to focus on health issues when the health curriculum in classes would cover that information?” There was a hush in the room; some people sighed, and I recall that one person grunted sarcastically. The speaker stepped forward, and asked everyone in the room (approximately 70 people representing over 30 schools) to raise their hand if they had a health curriculum at their school. My colleague and I were the only individuals in the room to raise our hands. The speaker responded, “Well, you must be our Canadian participants,” after which everyone laughed. This moment has resonated with me for two reasons; one, because I had neglected to recall and account for the mainstream American curriculum and its absence of comprehensive health education, and two, because it encouraged me to learn more about how educators impact the healthy development of young people. Ultimately, I sought to immerse myself in the voices of students and staff at one school, to describe the extent to which a school’s vision, program, and resources impact the healthy development of young people.

**Rationale**

Research on adolescent health and wellbeing has focused on the characteristics of programs, settings, and relationships that contribute to the
healthy development of young people (Benson, 2003; Lerner, 2004; Lerner & Benson, 2003; Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2006; Scales, Benson, & Mannes, 2006). These studies have had a twofold goal: to identify factors that help young people to develop into healthy, caring, and responsible individuals and to guide empirical research related to positive youth development (Benson, 1997; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). At the centre of the research is an assets model: external assets such as a caring school environment and internal assets such as a positive view of one’s future (see Appendix A for a complete list of the 40 developmental assets for adolescents). It is widely accepted that schools can enhance both external and internal assets and are a platform for influencing student health and wellbeing (Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002; Boyce, Roche, & King, 2008; McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002; Scales et al., 2000; St. Leger, Kolbe, Lee, McCall, & Young, 2007). However, there is a need to further explore school settings where young people’s development and wellbeing appear to be supported in positive ways (St. Leger et al., 2007; Saab, 2009).

Researchers and theorists have encouraged academics to pursue qualitative research as an important step in elucidating the meaning of developmental assets in programs for young people, particularly in schools (Mahoney, Lafferty, & Nutter, 2003; Scales et al., 2000; Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007), because, to date, developmental assets research has focused primarily on a quantitative inventory to assess youth resiliency and the efficacy of risk prevention programs. One notable exception is a study by Canadian researcher Saab (2009) who, through a rich qualitative case study, explored the manner by which schools influence student health and wellbeing. Saab’s approach has
provided a platform and inspiration for this proposed study. Through cross-case analysis, this study compared and contrasted the personal assessments by students and staff of one school’s external developmental assets. By so doing, this case study should contribute to the growing body of Canadian research on healthy youth development. The perceptions and ideas of participants could add to further understanding about healthy youth development, developmental assets, and the needs of learners in other educational settings.

**Purpose**

The overall purpose of this study is to describe the ways in which one school contributes to the healthy development of its students by providing an account of external developmental assets from the perspective of students and key staff informants. Specific goals of this study are: (a) to identify the principles and programs as well as the human and ancillary resources at one school whose explicit mission is to embed contexts and courses that contribute positively to the healthy development of young people; and (b) to compare perceptions among stakeholders about the external developmental assets of the school. This study intends to give voice to students and professionals to describe the extent to which they believe that a school’s vision, program, and resources can impact the healthy development of young people.

**Definition of Key Terms**

Here, I provide the reader with some definitions of key terms used in this thesis. I begin by explaining how I intend to use the terms ‘healthy development’
and ‘developmental assets’ in the context of this thesis, and then provide a
glossary of terminology to clarify terms for the reader.

Healthy development is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of
meanings, and overlaps with other fields, such as youth development. In this study
I use the term ‘healthy development’ to refer to the development of health and
wellbeing in adolescents occurring in an educational setting. The World Health
Organization (WHO) acknowledges that health is a resource for everyday living
and not just the absence of disease. Young people’s health encompasses their
physical, social, and emotional wellbeing. Healthy development includes factors
that influence young people’s health behaviours and outcomes. Knowledge about
the factors that influence healthy development is essential to health promotion in
schools.

The Search Institute has identified developmental assets as the building
blocks of healthy development. In this research, I use developmental assets to
refer to the positive experiences and qualities that help influence adolescent
development in a school setting. Developmental assets promote adolescents
growing up healthy, caring, and responsible.

Table 1 provides the reader with some additional definitions relevant to
this thesis.

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1 Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health
Conference, New York, 19 June to 22 July 1946.
### Table 1

**Terms and Definitions**

<table>
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<th>Term</th>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehensive School Health (CSH)</td>
<td>An internationally recognized framework for supporting improvements in students’ educational outcomes while addressing school health in a planned, integrated and holistic way. (<a href="http://eng.jcsh-cces.ca/index.php?option=com_content&amp;view=article&amp;id=40&amp;Itemid=62">from Joint Consortium for School Health</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Promoting Schools (HPS)</td>
<td>Schools that promote the physical, social, spiritual, mental, and emotional health and wellbeing of students and staff (World Health Organization).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Youth Development (PYD)</td>
<td>PYD considers the strengths of youth and values the contributions they can make toward healthy development by maximising these strengths by providing appropriate environmental supports and resources. The greater the number of protective factors (e.g., perceived school connectedness) present in the lives of youth, the lower the chance youth will engage in negative, health-compromising behaviour (Zullig, Ward, King, Patton, &amp; Murray, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Assets Framework</td>
<td>A measurement framework for PYD originally developed and piloted by the Search Institute. It includes 40 internal and external assets that can be enhanced or established in youth.</td>
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### Overview of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. This first chapter included the autobiographical signature and introduced the rationale, as well as described the purpose of the study with a section on the definition of terms. The second chapter includes an overview of the conceptual framework and a review of the literature about my topic to establish a background and explanation for my research interests. In the third chapter I outline the methodology I followed to address the purpose of my research. Chapter 4 is a presentation of the data in which the reader is immersed into the words of students and staff. Each case study is described, culminating in the identification of themes that emerge from the data. A
discussion of the findings and limitations of the study are found in Chapter 5. This final chapter summarizes the findings of the study, discusses implications for future research, and includes my final thoughts.
CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the healthy development of young people is vast. Comprehensive school health (CSH) provided a platform and conceptual framework for this study. In this literature review I overview CSH and then focus on positive youth development (PYD) and developmental assets research to set the context for my own study.

Conceptual Framework

Schools are one example of a formative influence on adolescents (Samdal, 1998). Samdal (1998) argues that “the school can both be a risk and a resource for the development of students’ health behaviours and general health” (p. 383). The idea of schools as settings for promoting the health and wellbeing of young people evolved in the 1980s, and has been promoted globally ever since (Lister-Sharp, Chapman, Stewart-Brown, & Sowden, 1999; Mukoma & Flisher, 2004; Nutbeam, 1998). Health promoting schools (HPS) became conceptualized by the World Health Organization (WHO, 1996) in the mid 1990s. According to the WHO, HPS acknowledge their role in promoting the physical, social, spiritual, mental, and emotional health and wellbeing of students and staff. Canadian educators may be more familiar with terms such as Comprehensive School Health (CSH) (Ronson & MacDougall, 2004), Healthy Living (Ministry of Education, 2006), or the Living School (Shain, 2005); however, these designations are largely synonymous and equivalent to HPS and reflect the consistent move towards a
concept of health promotion, beyond the traditional interventions abundant in physical and health education curricula, or public health services across North America.

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) in collaboration with the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition (OHSC) promotes a vision that every child and young person in Ontario will be educated in a healthy school. OPHA defines a healthy school as a setting that promotes the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of the whole school community and constantly strengthens its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning, and working (from Ontario Public Health Association website; http://www.opha.on.ca/our_voice/collaborations/ohsc.shtml, 2009). OPHA and the OHSC are affiliated with the Canadian Association for School Health, which has embraced Comprehensive School Health (CSH) with its holistic approach to the healthy development of young people. The Joint Consortium for School Health defines CSH as “an internationally recognized framework for supporting improvements in students’ educational outcomes while addressing school health in a planned, integrated and holistic way” (Joint Consortium for School Health; http://eng.jcsh-cces.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=40&Itemid=62, 2010).

The four key pillars of CSH include the social and physical environment, teaching and learning, healthy school policy, and partnerships and services (Joint Consortium for School Health; http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=40&Itemid=62, 2011). Social environment includes the quality of relationships between staff and students, as well as the emotional wellbeing of students. The physical
environment includes sanitation and buildings, play space, and grounds. Teaching and learning refers to the resources, activities, and curriculum to help improve student health and wellbeing. Healthy school policy refers to management practices, decision-making processes, and policies that promote health and wellbeing. Partnerships include connections between schools and students’ families, supportive working environments, and collaborations with the health sector. Finally, services refer to the community and school-based services that support and promote student and staff health and wellbeing. Regardless of the specific language and terminology used, it is clear that the principles on which CSH and HPS are based has deep roots in the World Health Organization’s Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986).

In a World Health Organization study, Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (2008), researchers aimed “to contribute to new insight and increased understanding with regards to the health, wellbeing, and health behaviours of young people (aged 11 to 15 years) and their social settings and conditions, especially school environment” (p. ix). Researchers involved with this study clearly indicated that contexts, or settings and conditions, are important for young people’s health (Boyce et al., 2008). The current study aims to explore the developmental assets for adolescents in the unique context of an independent, residential school setting that promotes health and wellbeing. Rena Upitis, a professor at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, has commented that what students learn when they are in a boarding school situation “is a different form of living in community, that you just can’t learn when you’re not in boarding” (from
Research has established a connection between schooling and student health primarily through quantitative methodology. McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002) found increasing evidence that, when adolescents feel cared for by people at their school and feel part of their school, they are less likely to use substances, engage in violence, or initiate sexual activity at an early age. McNeely et al. used The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) as data for their study, which included 71,515 students in 127 schools. School administrators were also given a self-administered questionnaire about school policies and teacher characteristics. McNeely et al. concluded that positive classroom management climates, participation in extracurricular activities, tolerant disciplinary policies, and small school size were associated positively with higher school connectedness. For example, survey results showed that students in smaller schools felt more attached to school. McNeely et al. (2002) point to an integral component of student health and wellbeing, which is a student’s need to feel like he or she belongs and is cared for at the school. McNeely et al. remind educators and administrators of the importance of identifying and promoting school attributes and policies that correspond to the developmental needs of students.

Research is beginning to unearth the particular ways in which schools can influence student health and wellbeing through varied methodology. Saab (2009) explored the influence of Canadian schools on student health and wellbeing through a qualitative case study approach. Saab found that schools that embrace...
the Health Promoting School (HPS) approach and work to improve the emotional and physical wellbeing of students support students’ overall learning. Saab’s findings produced an implementation model for HPS and emphasized key areas that need to be addressed in schools to improve the health and learning of students. Saab completed two case studies in two schools identified as schools that were health promoting to describe the characteristics that make a school successful at achieving better student health and wellbeing from the perspectives of teachers, staff, administrators, and students. Saab completed semi-structured interviews with school principals and key informants; focus group interviews with teachers and students; and school observations. Data were collected from four female key informants, three female administrators, one male administrator, eight female teachers, two male teachers, and 24 Grade 6-8 students. Saab’s study acknowledged that there are challenges in determining what data to collect and what constitutes success at a health promoting school and emphasized that any research effort that explores the elements of health promoting schools is essential in improving the lives of young people. Unfortunately, the data Saab (2009) collected through group interviews with elementary students were unusable, and student voices were absent in the analysis. Saab indicated that there are few studies that explore how schools influence student health. My research asks students and staff to share their perspectives about the ways in which their school context influences student health positively.

**Literature Review**

In this literature review I describe Positive Youth Development (PYD) and developmental assets, in order to provide the reader with an understanding of
these frameworks for my research. I review research on PYD and developmental assets, and finally focus on school use of the research to set the context for my own study.

**Positive Youth Development (PYD)**

A wave of current research is beginning to focus on the characteristics of programs, settings, and relationships that contribute to healthy development (Benson, 2003; Lerner, 2004; Lerner & Benson, 2003; Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2006; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). This field of research is referred to as positive youth development (PYD). A measurement framework for PYD is the Developmental Assets Framework developed and used by the Search Institute (Benson, 1997; Leffert et al., 1998; Scales & Leffert, 1999). The convincing data on Developmental Assets demonstrate that the greater the number of assets (protective factors) in the lives of young people, the lower the chance that youth will engage in negative, health-compromising behavior.

Research has had a major focus on negative associations with adolescent development, such as risk behaviour or substance use and abuse. Scales, Benson, Leffert, and Blyth (2000) state, “empirically, the territory of positive developmental outcomes, as contrasted with that of risk behaviours, has been less explored” (p. 27). Research on PYD explores the individual, social, and environmental characteristics that promote healthy development (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1999, 2002; Larson, 2000; Lerner et al., 2004, 2006; Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2006). Damon (2004) argues that this “new approach envisions young people as resources rather than problems for society” (p. 15). Since the PYD field is relatively new, there are
varied opinions about how to define the particular characteristics of positive youth development programs (Gavin et al., 2010). The field of PYD is compelling for educators concerned about the healthy development of young people. PYD takes the research one step further, acknowledging not only the factors that influence the healthy development of young people, but also the reciprocal positive contribution of young people to their community or environment.

**Positive Youth Development (PYD) Research**

Theories of PYD predict multifaceted growth from a sustained, engaging experience in an environment of supports and opportunities. Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, and Henderson (2007) found that a camp experience can improve a young person’s development because of the social encounters, new activities, independence, and leadership opportunities provided by enthusiastic and caring staff. Thurber et al. (2007) sampled 3,395 families from 80 different day and residential camps before and after a one-week period, through customized questionnaires. In addition to the questionnaires that parents and children completed, observational checklists from camp counsellors were collected, as well as data on the camp’s program and structure from senior staff and camp directors. Thurber et al.’s study was descriptive, naturalistic, and longitudinal. Significant limitations were inherent in this study, including a predisposition for positive outcomes simply because most parents had researched and selected a camp that fit the needs of their son/daughter. Additionally, children who attend camp are generally of a higher socio-economic status (SES), and children of higher SES are generally experiencing more positive outcomes (Larson, 2000). Also, Thurber et al. were unable to compare data across camps because of the variance in program
type and duration. A comparison of the data could have led to a greater understanding about what particular structures, programs, and personnel contributed to positive outcomes. Thurber et al. (2007) suggested a need for future research to unveil the qualitative and structural aspects of camp most associated with children’s development.

Lerner et al.’s (2006) study contributed empirical evidence to the literature on PYD. Lerner et al. utilized the “Five Cs” of positive youth development as the theoretical framework for their study (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner, 2004; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Roth et al., 1998). The Five Cs were established through a literature review, and assessed in a pilot study surveying 339 youth on their ability to understand the definition of the Five Cs. Lerner et al. (2006) present the Five Cs as attributes of competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (or compassion), as a construct to “capture the essence of to-be-developed indicators on the numerous mental, behavioural, and social-relational elements that could comprise positive youth development” (p. 8). Ultimately, Lerner et al. wanted to find out if empirical evidence could be found for the Five Cs of PYD as well as a sixth C - contribution, and to describe the individual and ecological assets of community-based youth development programs.

The aim of Lerner et al.’s (2006) longitudinal study was to understand what propels a young person along a healthy developmental path. The study followed 1,700 fifth graders through their adolescence, and 1,117 of their parents (mainly mothers, 82.5%) in 40 cities or towns, across 13 states. Lerner et al. used the Selection, Optimization, and Compensation (SOC) questionnaire (Freund &
Baltes, 2002) to assess youth participation in activities and organizations. Additional measures were a Student Questionnaire (SQ) to investigate the Cs of PYD, and a Parent Questionnaire (PQ) investigating items about the parents and the child such as age, sex, health status, and educational level. Across all these questionnaires, measures were combined to identify a model that maximized goodness-of-fit with the theory about the Five Cs. Some limitations in this study included a self-report component, a need for cross-validation, and a need to know more than self-reports of activities for young people, but for how long and for what duration. Lerner at al. indicate that they also would have liked to have enhanced their level of triangulation with additional means.

**Developmental Assets**

The Search Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota, has conducted a plethora of research and reviewed the literature exploring healthy youth development. Studies by researchers at the Search Institute have produced a framework for healthy youth development, known as developmental assets (Benson, 1997). The Search Institute deems developmental assets to be the building blocks of healthy development. In the late 1990s, the developmental assets framework was referred to as a “new set of benchmarks for adolescent development” and “a taxonomy of developmental targets” (Leffert et al., 1998, p. 209). The developmental assets framework has provided a platform from which research is beginning to explore the factors that protect, and contribute to, the healthy development of young people.

The developmental assets framework is grounded in several empirical studies of child and adolescent development. The framework includes a series of
40 assets that are divided into two categories, internal and external. Internal assets influence the skills, character, and values needed for strong character (Mahoney, Lafferty, & Nutter, 2003). The 20 internal assets include four categories: commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. A specific example of an internal asset is ‘sense of purpose’ included in the category ‘positive identity.’ External assets include the social interactions and experiences that contribute to youth development (Mahoney, Lafferty, & Nutter, 2003). The 20 external assets include characteristics sorted into four categories: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. A specific example of an external asset is ‘a caring school environment’ included in the category of ‘support.’

The developmental assets framework “conceptualizes, names, and promotes core elements of human development known to enhance health and wellbeing” (Leffert et al., 1998, p. 209). Studies by the Search Institute, using the framework of developmental assets, argue that, when young people have an increased number of development assets, risk behaviour decreases, and youth are more likely to achieve positive outcomes (Aspy et al., 2004; Atkins, Oman, Vesely, Aspy, & McLeroy, 2002; Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Leffert, Benson, Scales, et al., 1998; Perkins, Luster, & Jank, 2002; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000; Vesely et al., 2004). Assets research has primarily linked deficits in developmental assets to negative outcomes such as risk behaviours (Benson, 2003; Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1999).

The primary source of data for the developmental assets framework is the Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviours (PSL-AB) survey. The survey
is a self-report instrument for Grade 6 to Grade 12 students, and has been used since 1994. Scales and Leffert (1999, 2004) carried out an extensive review and synthesis of the scientific literature related to the 40 developmental assets and asset categories to affirm empirical support for this applied framework. In looking at 1,200 sources, they state that there is broad support for the framework and its asset categories, yet they acknowledge some categories have less support than others. For example, a smaller base of empirical studies supports the empowerment and positive values categories (Leffert et al., 1998, p. 212). They also acknowledge that some assets were selected using criteria other than a review of pre-existing empirical studies (Leffert et al., p. 213). Overall, encouragement for a more in-depth measurement of adolescent perceptions on particular assets and asset categories is indicated.

Other researchers in the field have raised concerns about the efforts of the Search Institute. For example, Price and Drake (Scales, 1999) indicated that the institute’s studies were not nationally representative, that other important assets were not being measured or acknowledged, and that the methodology itself had inadequacies. Scales (1999) did not overly dispute the criticisms of the Search Institute research and developmental assets framework but rather defended aspects of the developmental assets framework formation and welcomed open debate and criticism to help affirm and encourage more in-depth research in the field of developmental assets.

**Developmental Assets Research**

Leffert et al. (1998) carried out research using the 40 developmental assets to measure and predict risk behaviour among adolescents. Their data supported
that assets can provide protection from involvement in risk behaviours for young people. For example, the assets of positive peer influence and restraint were important predictors related to lower alcohol and substance abuse risk patterns among participants. The sample for the study involved 99,462 youth in Grades 6 through 12. Students were surveyed between 1996 and 1997 in public and alternative schools in U.S. cities. Schools self-selected into the study, and the participants were mainly Caucasian, representing 86% of respondents. Leffert et al. acknowledged that their sample was not nationally representative.

Additionally, despite using a variety of standardized and well-validated instruments from previous national state surveys, their data were reported in binary variables or single-item measures. Information and variability measures are not as clear in binary reporting, where participants select only one of two options, yet the researchers decided on this method to bring clarity to the public communication of the results over measurement precision of the data. Leffert et al. (1998) admit that they “sacrificed some aspects of precision” (p. 225) and that more research is needed to deepen the understanding of the relationship among the varying assets, and that additional research to confirm the findings from the self-reporting of youth would also be beneficial.

Arguing for a need for both risk reduction and asset building in youth, Scales (1999) reviewed some interesting aspects of the Search Institute’s early research. These studies revealed that the average young person had less than 18 of the 40 assets, and that, as he or she became older, even fewer assets were present. A further finding was that only 8% of youth were asset-rich, i.e., having between 31 and 40 assets overall. In terms of gender, girls generally had more assets than
boys. Overall, if assets were higher, then risk behaviour patterns were generally lower. In terms of the methodology of the developmental assets framework itself, and the reliability of the asset items, Scales admitted that the research needed improvement. For example, 13 of the 40 assets were only measured by one item, and 19 of the remaining 27 assets had alpha reliabilities in the .60s - .80s, with a few even lower. Scales explained that, when assets were measured across multiple contexts or measured by one item, then there was a gap between getting information on a broad ranging scope and getting information about specific aspects. To address issues with their methodology and research, the Search Institute took the approach of content (measuring variables that research said were important), construct (determining if enough dimensions were being explored and if the accuracy of current dimensions was being captured), and predictive validity (looking at how well the framework could explain youth outcomes). A qualitative research approach could also have been an option to address issues with the survey and complement findings.

Quantitative methodology features prominently in developmental assets research. Scales et al. (2000) completed an assessment of thriving among 6,000 youth participating in a 1999-2000 Search Institute, Profiles of Life-Attitudes and Behaviours (PSL-AB) survey of developmental assets. This quantitative study found that spending time in youth programs was a key developmental asset to promote thriving or positive outcomes in adolescents. In response to their results, Scales et al. (2000) ask what are other indicators of adolescent thriving or desirable positive developmental outcomes, and how could they be measured. Scales et al. (2000) acknowledge that it would be beneficial to examine more
about developmental assets in predicting specific outcomes, and that there is a substantial amount of unexplained indirect influence relating developmental assets to positive outcomes. Perhaps a qualitative research approach could paint a clearer picture.

In a similar quantitative, survey approach, Chew, Osseck, Raygor, Eldridge-Houser, and Cox (2010) carried out research on young people in a youth juvenile facility. Chew et al. (2010) used the Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) created by the Search Institute for students at risk. Sixty-two residents of the youth facility filled out the DAP survey during their intake interviews. Chew et al. found that most respondents reported lacking known protective assets. Chew et al. relied on self-report measures, and their sample size and location of the study meant that they were not able to generalize results to a larger or more diverse population. The findings of Chew et al. confirm previous conclusions about developmental assets, i.e., quantitative data consistently find that, when young people are lacking in developmental assets, their healthy development can be compromised. However, qualitative methodology can provide an opportunity to allow young people to provide researchers with their perceptions and descriptions about the particular developmental assets and supports that are of most benefit, and why.

Overall, it is clear that PYD and developmental assets research is dominated by quantitative methodology. Efforts to measure assets among young people have been carried out with some success. An overwhelming conclusion of PYD and developmental assets research demonstrates that the greater number of protective factors present in the lives of young people, the lower the risk that
young people will engage in health-compromising behaviour. Researchers
undertaking studies on PYD and developmental assets, however, could benefit
from varied methodology and descriptive qualitative data.

**School Use of PYD and Developmental Assets Research**

Schools as settings that promote health and wellbeing parallel tenets of a
developmental assets approach. Scales (1999) states,

> Those working in school health can have a direct impact on about one-half
> the assets, and an indirect effect on most of the rest. School health
> professionals may be in the best position of all to help create a caring
> school climate, ensure that there are plentiful after-school programs with
> lots of physical activity for all children, ensure that young people develop
> good planning and decision-making skills, provide opportunities for youth
to contribute service and help others, and, if they enjoy the support of
confident administrators who neither gratuitously invite nor shrink from
controversy, deal with many of the values we identify as assets. (pp. 118-119)

In his statement, Scales outlines his hopes and concrete examples for the assets
approach.

In the past decade researchers have begun to explore methods of building
developmental assets in schools. Asset-rich schools are places where young
people are cared for, valued, empathized with, and appreciated (Aspy et al., 2004;
Edwards, Mumford, Shillingford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007).

In a recent study, Zullig, Ward, King, Patton, and Murray (2009) carried
out a quantitative study assessing developmental assets measures on college
students to help guide health promotion efforts. The purpose of their study was to
assess the reliability and validity of eight developmental asset measures, and
demonstrate the potential for PYD as a worthwhile endeavour for colleges to
undertake as youth transition to post-secondary education. Zullig et al. were
interested in college students because they are a group exposed to unique pressures, dealing with adjusting to life away from home and high academic pressures (Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, & Alisat, 2000; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). In February 2005, 1,000 students ages 18 or older were randomly selected from a university’s e-mail database. Zullig et al. used web-survey methods, with three surveys occurring over a 2-week period. Five hundred forty questions were responded to by participants. The gender difference between respondents was weighted, in that 67% who responded were female. Additionally, 86% of students attending the university were Caucasian, thus not nationally representative of the U.S. population. To complete data analysis, the sample was randomly split and one group of data produced an exploratory sample, and the other produced a confirmatory sample. Zullig et al. used structural equation modelling in measuring development in both sample groups. Overall, they determined validity and reliability in their analysis, and discussed implications for a research move toward a more consistent approach on youth development in emerging adults, particularly PYD approaches that focus on opportunities and supports for students. However, Zullig et al. stated that future research is needed to explain the validity of developmental assets measures in emerging young adults. While my research does not seek to explain the validity of quantitative measures of developmental assets, it explores what constitutes developmental assets for students at one school.

Qualitative research methodology has primarily been used in PYD and assets research to evaluate or assess the effectiveness of PYD or asset-building programs. For example, Mahoney, Lafferty, and Nutter (2003) carried out a PYD program evaluation through eight focus group interviews with 69 participants
representing administrators, teachers, and counsellors across three school districts in Ohio. Mahoney et al. found that participants universally preferred an asset-building school environment over the typical school environment. The study also explored some key barriers to an asset-building approach in schools such as time, staff turnover, and mind-set. Mahoney et al. did not include student participants in their focus groups, and their views and input might have provided student perceptions about the particular aspects of asset-building in schools most pertinent to them.

Similarly, Shek and Sun (2008) contributed a qualitative cross-case analysis of PYD programs in Kowloon, Hong Kong Islands, and the New Territories. Seven schools were invited to participate from among 207 schools implementing the Project P.A.T.H.S. (Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social Programmes), a program intended to promote positive youth development in secondary school students. School principals and program implementers participated in questionnaires, as well as individual and focus group interviews. The framework for this study revolved around an integration of the literature revealing five general factors affecting the outcome of PYD programs in schools: the five Ps (policy, people, program, process, and place). Shek and Sun’s main observation was that participants generally had positive perceptions about the program, and that the passion and dedication of school leaders and program implementers were decisive factors in program success. Shek and Sun refer to students as respondents, but there is a lack of clarity in the participants’ outline and methodology section about the specific numbers of respondents involved or their role at each school. In the conclusion, Shek and Sun (2008) state that a
limitation in their study was that “findings were based on the responses of principals, vice-principals, teachers, and social workers” (p. 1081). Shek and Sun also indicate that their findings were limited to seven cases, and that longitudinal collection of similar data would be enriching. The voices of students in this particular study are unreported.

Gavin, Catalano, David-Ferdon, Gloppen, and Markham (2010) carried out a systematic literature review of published data to identify and describe PYD programs that improve adolescent sexual and reproductive health. Gavin et al. (2010) conclude that PYD programs can promote adolescent health and should be a part of an approach to promoting adolescent health in schools. Gavin et al. encourage additional research before any specific program characteristics can be suggested. They suggest that PYD programs provide young people with the motivation and confidence necessary for making healthy choices. The authors confirm that there are varied definitions about the characteristics of PYD in schools. There is a significant opportunity for further research to complement and add to the current research on developmental assets and positive youth development.

**Setting**

In research similar to the context for this study, Watt (2003) found that small schools and private schools may actually be detrimental to adolescents’ mental health. Watt used the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health data collected between 1994 and 1995 on approximately 13,000 adolescents attending school. Watt looked at the variables of suicidality, depression, and violence in relation to school characteristics. Information was collected in this
national study through surveys of adolescents, parents, and school administrators. In contrast to the findings of McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002), Watt (2003) reported that the small schools and private schools within the study had higher levels of depression and a greater likelihood of attempted suicide for male students. Watt stated that there was need for additional studies to confirm the findings of the study, and for further research to explore factors associated with emotional strains represented in adolescents attending small schools and private schools.

Affluent youth are potentially at risk for emotional troubles and substance use (Blum et al., 2000; Bogard, 2005; Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000; Luthar & D-Avanzo, 1999; Way, Strauber, Nakkula, & London, 1994), suggesting a need for further research on affluent adolescents who are potentially at risk for maladjustment. Moreover, Bogard (2005) notes that, “it is important to study all populations of youth not only to learn about the strengths and weaknesses unique to each, but also to inform psychology about human development” (p. 282). The purpose of this study builds on PYD and developmental assets research, and helps to describe the factors that protect, and contribute to, the healthy development of young people in a school. The study involves affluent youth attending an independent, co-educational, residential school in rural Ontario.

**Summary**

Quantitative and survey-dominated approaches pervade PYD and developmental assets research. Researchers have consistently stated the need for additional and varied research in exploring youth development. Mahoney,
Lafferty, and Nutter (2003) stated that there were advantages in linking qualitative and quantitative methods after conducting focus groups with school staff assessing PYD programs in schools. Scales, Benson, Leffert, and Blyth (2000) suggested that research studies needed to be designed to collect a variety of data to add richness to the groundwork for empirical studies on developmental assets, PYD, and thriving among adolescents. Shek and Sun (2008) recommended future qualitative research based on student input. Thurber et al. (2007) similarly called for future research to unveil the qualitative and structural aspects of camp most associated with children’s development. The vision of the school context proposed for this study parallels the goals of a camp experience, where policies and programs are designed to be positive and growth is promoted through challenging young people and encouraging them to take healthy risks, while immersing students in a powerful social context (Gregg & Hansen-Stamp, 2005). Furthermore, studies to date generally agree that continued research and varied methodology will add richness to the field of PYD and developmental assets.

This study can add a new dimension as complementary research that examines developmental assets and the healthy development of young people through qualitative means. Interviews with students and staff at one school help deepen an understanding of the developmental assets framework, explore the role of schools, and potentially offer new insights about the healthy development of young people.
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

In this chapter I delineate the method I used to achieve the goal for this study. I include a rationale for using a qualitative approach, specifically the case study and cross-case analysis as a research strategy, and outline the context of this study. I also describe my case and participant selection, as well as my data sources and analysis methods.

Overview of the Research

Rationale for the Qualitative Approach

According to Patton (2002), qualitative inquiry is aimed at “studying issues in depth and detail” (p. 14) to gain a deeper understanding of a culture, an experience, or a phenomenon. I chose to use a qualitative approach to examine my topic because I was interested in finding out more about how students and staff made sense of their experiences, as viewed through the lens of external developmental assets in a school setting.

This case study set out to describe the ways in which one school contributed to the healthy development of its students by providing an account of its external developmental assets from the perspectives of students and key staff members. Stake (1995) identified several key criteria in determining the appropriate selection of a case for research. The most important criterion is selecting a case that can “maximize what we learn” (Stake, 1995, p. 4). I chose to select a case study approach as a research strategy to help me fully answer my research questions. I chose a case that had significant depth and was rich in
information, which provided me with ample opportunity to collect a significant body of data for analysis. Case study and cross-case analysis were the methodological framework for this study (Stake, 2006). There were two distinct but interrelated groups involved: the students and the staff. It was necessary to compare perceptions in this study, and cross-case procedures also served as a form of validation (Stake, 2006). Stake (2006) stated that it is “important to seek out and present multiple perspectives on activities and issues, discovering and portraying the different views” (p. vi). This study aimed to capture the experience of participants and contribute a qualitative assessment of the developmental assets of a school.

Patton (2002) pointed out that we utilize interview strategies to find out things that we cannot directly observe (p. 340). Individual interviews with key staff informants aimed to help establish staff perspectives on the vision, programs, and resources targeted at supporting the healthy development of students at the school. Interviews captured the perceptions and experiences of individuals. The purpose of interviewing allowed me to “enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

Focus groups were used in this study to gain insights from young people about the ways in which they believed their school contributed to the healthy development of students. Patton (2002) stated the objective of a focus group “is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others” (p. 386). Krueger and Casey (2000) were clear that the “intent of the focus group is to promote self-disclosure among participants” to explore what people think and feel (p. 7). Krueger and Casey
(2000) further suggested the use of focus groups when a researcher wants ideas to emerge from the group. I agree with Krueger and Casey’s (2000) statement that “a group possesses the capacity to become more than the sum of its parts, to exhibit a synergy that individuals alone don’t possess” (p. 24). Participants of the focus groups were intended to be information-rich, and all were stakeholders in the experience being explored. Banister and Begoray (2004) found that non-structured focus groups teamed with structured strategies generated a non-threatening environment in which participants co-created an understanding of their own experiences. The authors suggested that health care and educational contexts consider the use of such a strategy (p. 481). Focus groups have been used in the development of meaningful and effective health promotion programs (Heary & Hennesy, 2002). Krueger and Casey (2000) stated that “focus groups offer considerable potential for discovering how young people think about issues, programs and opportunities” (p. 155). This study pursued the use of focus groups to capture student voices in exploring and describing the developmental assets of an independent school setting that promoted the healthy development of students.

**Context**

This inquiry took place in an independent, co-educational, day and residential school in rural, south eastern Ontario. I chose the school context because of my 10 years of experience working at the school as a social sciences and outdoor education teacher, health educator, academic advisor, guidance counsellor, coach, and residential Head of House. I no longer work at the school by choice.
The school is a member of the Canadian Association of Independent Schools (CAIS)/Canadian Educational Standards Institute (CESI), a membership association that accredits elementary and secondary schools that offer a Canadian curriculum. The school philosophy was embedded in the school mission statement, “to challenge and enable students to reach their individual potential in mind, body, and spirit,” which reflected founding ideals. On the school website, a quote from one parent captured the vision of the school:

[school name] is not only a school, it is a lifestyle. It nurtures the whole student in an unpretentious, understated environment. It has allowed our children to embrace all facets of life, self-exploration, and knowledge while at the same time establishing strong values and self-confidence.

Students attending the school were immersed in a rigorous academic, co-curricular, and athletic program.

Role of the Researcher

Since I recently worked full-time at the school as a guidance counsellor, the staff and students involved in the study were familiar to me. Collegial and caring student and staff relationships worked to my benefit in this study. This study was not political in nature, nor did it aim to be a program evaluation; instead it gave voice to young people and professionals who described the extent to which a school’s vision, program, and resources impacted the healthy development of young people.

I was able to run individual interviews with key staff informants on the school campus, in private offices and homes. I was known to some staff members as a former colleague, and this familiarity allowed for increased comfort during interviews. I was able to run student focus groups on campus, in private meeting
rooms and classrooms, which helped elicit open discussions. In terms of the student participants of focus groups, I was known to them either as a former teacher, guidance counsellor, or residential Head of House. This familiarity allowed for increased comfort during the focus group sessions. The research was viewed within the school as an academic and practical undertaking for my personal graduate work and for the school.

**Data Collection**

**Participant Selection**

Participants in this study were Grade 12 students (n=19), and six staff members from the school. To provide the reader with a full, rich description of the context of the case and experiences of the participants, I employed a number of data collection strategies, including interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis. Yin (2003) identified the use of multiple sources of evidence as the key to data collection in case study research. Patton (2002) indicated that “multiple methods of data collection and analysis provide more grist for the research mill” (pp. 555-556).

**Staff Participants.** Key informants “are particularly knowledgeable about their inquiry setting and articulate about their knowledge” (Patton, 2002, p. 321). Key staff members helped provide an account of what was happening, and why, in terms of the healthy development of students at the school. I sought permission from the Head of School to invite 36 staff members representing administration, outdoor education and health teachers, the residential team, and the health centre (see Appendix B Chart of Administrative Structure) to participate in individual interviews (see Appendix C Recruitment Email for Staff Interviews). All six staff members who
volunteered were selected to participate, using purposive sampling as a guide. Purposive sampling allowed for information-rich cases to shed light on the questions under study (Patton, 2002). Two staff members were selected to represent administration and policy makers at the school. Two staff members were selected to represent male and female residential staff. A third female staff member represented outdoor education and health teachers. The fourth female staff member selected represented the health centre staff. These six individuals provided data from the perspective of administrators, classroom teachers, and coaches/extracurricular activity leaders, residential program staff, and nurses and counsellors at the health centre, and were involved in both formal and informal curriculum related to health and wellbeing. The staff members selected also had to meet the criterion of even gender distribution; thus the two staff from administration included a male and a female, and the two staff from residential life included a male and a female. Finally, during the synthesis of the discussion chapter, it became clear that the addition of job titles and position descriptors to some staff pseudonyms would enhance the readability of the study as well as add to explanations about the structures and support in place at the school.

Staff members interviewed were then sent an email of information and an additional consent form (see Appendix D for Email of Information and Additional Consent Form for Staff Interviews).

Student Participants. There were four focus groups of Grade 12 students for this study. The first focus group included six female residential students. The second focus group included three male residential students. The third focus group included six female day students. The fourth focus group included four male day students. Grade 12 students were senior students with a leadership role, nearing graduation, and generally with a career of more than one year at the
school. Interviewing Grade 12 students through focus groups provided information-rich responses. The students were divided into focus groups by gender and attendance (i.e., whether or not student was a day student or residential student). Including a range of residential students and day students allowed for comparison of experience as it related to context.

I sought permission from the Head of School to attend one of the Grade 12 student meetings, which occurred bi-weekly, to share the purpose and goals of the study (see Appendix E: Recruitment Announcement for Grade 12 Students). All Grade 12 students were invited to participate in the study at this meeting. Details about the focus group interviews, timing, and recording of the data were reviewed. Following the meeting, a staff member then distributed Letters of Information and Consent (see Appendix F: Letter of Information and Consent for Students) electronically, through the Grade 12 email list. If a student wished to participate in focus group interviews, he or she was asked to follow the instructions in the Letter of Information and Consent and email me. Then I asked the Head of School to send Letters of Information and Consent to the parents/guardians of students who expressed interest in participating in the study (see Appendix G: Letter of Information and Consent for Parent/Guardian). Parents/Guardians who provided consent for their son/daughter to participate followed instructions in the Letter of Information and Consent, and notified the researcher by email, and sent consent by regular mail through the school reception office. Once parent/guardian consent was received, I began the process of selecting the students for focus groups who met the criteria. The students were asked to bring their consent forms to the focus group. Additional copies of the
consent forms were available on the day of the focus group to accommodate any students who had forgotten to bring signed consent forms with them.

Procedure

*Interviews with Staff.* Interviews were a direct means of collecting information about participants related to their perceptions, experiences, and opinions. Six key staff informants were invited through a Letter of Information in email, to participate in semi-structured interviews (see Appendix H for Letter of Information and Consent for Staff). I conducted individual interviews with these six key staff informants in offices at the school (see Appendix I for Interview Questions). In collaboration with my graduate supervisory committee, and with direct reference to the 20 external assets developed by the Search Institute, I developed questions for the qualitative interviews. At the start of the interview, staff members were asked to review a list of external assets and identify the items that they felt were most influential. During interviews, I asked staff questions about the ways in which they strove to maximize the healthy development of students, to identify the people to whom and resources to which students turn for support, and to describe some of the specific programs used to promote the health and wellbeing of students.

Interviews ranged from approximately 45 minutes in length to 75 minutes, and were transcribed verbatim from audio-recordings. A combined approach of conversational interview strategy and standardized open-ended interview strategy was used. A combined strategy allowed for flexibility and the exploration of certain subjects in greater depth (Patton, 2002).
Focus Group Interviews with Students. I moderated four focus group interviews with Grade 12 students, divided by gender and attendance (i.e., whether or not student was a day student or residential student), to explore the external developmental assets at the school under study (see Appendix J for Focus Group Interview Questions). I chose to divide the student focus groups by gender and attendance to promote homogeneity (Heary & Hennesey, 2002; Kitzinger, 2000; Peterson-Sweeney, 2005), and allow for comparison in data analysis. The focus groups were approximately 60 minutes in length, and were transcribed verbatim from audio-recordings. The questions for student interviews were also derived with direct reference to the 20 external assets developed by the Search Institute. During focus groups I asked the students questions about those experiences at Hillside College that enhanced their health and wellbeing, and the sources of support to which they turned. Other questions were designed to elicit descriptions of the specific programs used at the school to promote the health and wellbeing of students.

The experiences of students and staff were examined to capture and identify both similarities and differences in their interpretation of what constituted developmental assets and healthy development. Accounting for multiple experiences and viewpoints aimed to aid in trustworthiness.

Document Collection. According to Patton (2002), documents are valuable to a researcher because they provide insight into “things that cannot be observed” (p. 293). Documents can be a source of information about how programs are developed and the events that have taken place and decisions that were made before the research began (Patton, 2002). In this study, school documents
included the School Life Guide and information published on the school website. I collected all documents from the school website.

**Data Analysis**

Transcribed focus group interviews and individual interviews, and school documents were the source of primary data for coding and memo writing. For the purpose of reliability, initial transcriptions of the focus group interviews and individual interviews were sent to the participants for comment and clarification of any discrepancies one month after their participation. Participants were also invited to respond voluntarily to follow-up emails if they wanted to talk further or explain something in greater detail. None of the participants sent follow-up emails or raised concerns about transcribed interviews. Staff and student voices and perceptions were compared through cross-case analysis to gain insights about the ways in which the school contributed to the healthy development of young people. Since the focus groups were multi-category design (i.e., different groupings by attendance and gender division), it was necessary to compare and contrast the transcripts of each group.

In the analysis of interview data and documents, I used a process known as “open coding” (Patton, 2002, p. 453), whereby codes emerge from the data rather than in comparison to a set of predetermined themes or codes. This is a key characteristic of inductive analysis. This method of analysis allows the ideas and topics that are most important to the participants to emerge. I looked to Patton (2002), Corbin and Strauss (2008), and LeCompte (2000) for strategies in coding, writing memos, and diagramming to discover categories and better understand
their relationships. To analyze interview data, I followed the procedure outlined by Patton (2002) for content analysis. Beginning with the transcripts, I read through each in its entirety. I then used short descriptors to note ideas, topics, or words that emerged repeatedly, and highlighted relevant passages from the transcripts. I next grouped the descriptors into categories to identify common themes or patterns. Core meanings were found through content analysis of interview transcripts, and pattern analysis helped me delve into ways in which the findings related to current bodies of literature and the conceptual framework for this study. Coding categories also focused on participant responses, and how they related to the Developmental Assets framework (Appendix A). LeCompte and Shensul (1999) explained that the first stage of coding is usually a loose kind of counting exercise during which the investigator codes the data according to content, taking note of the frequency of certain phrases, ideas, events, activities, or behaviours occurring in the data. Analysis for this study began inductively and moved to a deductive process. The initial coding process was repeated several times, especially when new codes or themes were identified.

Each data set required a specific type of analysis. The primary method of data collection was interviews. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts totaled 511 pages, 267 pages from individual staff interviews and 244 pages from student focus group interviews. To analyze the interviews, I began with the student interviews and coded them using low inference descriptors for recurring words or topics. I then applied the same process to staff interviews. The interviews and codes were then reviewed by my committee to further reduce researcher bias. After initial coding of the interview, I
reviewed the codes and collapsed them into categories, and finally arranged these categories into themes according to the ways in which they related to the purpose of my research. All quotes from interviews are referred to by the staff or student code and pseudonym. For example FDFG, Linda, refers to the female day students’ focus group, participant Linda’s remarks. Finally, I compared and contrasted themes emerging from the staff interviews with those emerging from the student focus group interviews.

Rigorous methods were used in this study so that misinterpretations could be recognized, minimized, and eliminated (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Patton, 2002). I used individual interviews and focus group interviews, which provided different types of insights into student and staff experiences and allowed me a more complete view of their perceptions. By employing these types of data collection I hoped to create an accurate representation of the context and culture of the case at hand. I also used triangulation of data sources and interpretation and analysis of data with qualitative techniques (coding of transcripts, cross-case analysis, identifying patterns and themes, application of literature and conceptual framework). I asked for review from participants and my thesis committee about how data were represented and categories were coded. Finally, I maintained a personal research journal to reduce bias and for consistent review of findings.

To preserve the voices of participants in this study, I have included verbatim accounts wherever possible. This technique reduces the potential for researcher bias. Audio recordings of interviews allowed participant voices to be accurately recorded. I found that my professional experience was an asset in
helping me understand how the healthy development of students is influenced in a school setting.
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

In this chapter I present the data collected for this study using the methods described in Chapter Three. The first section describes participant views on external developmental assets influencing the healthy development of young people. In the second section I describe external assets at Hillside College as identified by the views and perceptions of students’. These data were drawn from focus group interviews with residential students and day students, divided by gender. Finally, I present the ways in which staff describe the external developmental assets influencing student wellbeing, drawing on individual staff interviews and divided by gender.

External Assets

At the onset of each focus group session or individual interview, participants were asked to review a list of external assets and identify their choice for the top three most important external influences on young people. Participants were also asked to tell me about the three they chose and the reasons for these choices. The tabulated results of participant selections are identified below:
Table 2

*External Assets Identified by Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group (number of participants in group)</th>
<th>Female Staff (4)</th>
<th>Male Staff (2)</th>
<th>Total Staff (6)</th>
<th>Female Boarders (6)</th>
<th>Male Boarders (3)</th>
<th>Female Day (6)</th>
<th>Male Day (4)</th>
<th>Total Stu. (19)</th>
<th>TOTAL (25)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Support</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Relationships</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring School Climate</td>
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Every external asset given as an option, except for youth as resources, was recognized by at least one participant as among the three most important. A clear trend in analyzing the participant responses was that family support emerged as the most valuable external asset for the health and wellbeing of young people. Students spoke emphatically about the importance of a strong and supportive
family network. Linda, a day student, pointed out that “they’re there to support you and love you and really help you to grow as a person” (FDFG, Linda, p. 9). Parker, a male residential student, stated “my family has supported me a lot with everything that I’ve done … I don’t think anything would have been the same without them” (MRFG, Parker, p. 5). Jeff, a day student, added that family support is essential, “they give you values” (MDFG, Jeff, p. 5). Tim explained that, “if you don’t have your family backing you up and supporting you in everything you are doing, then you’re not really going to be getting anywhere if you have got no one to fall back on at all” (MDFG, Tim, pp. 4-5).

Staff members also identified family support as a predominant external asset. One male staff member stated that “kids need to know that they’re loved and … the family is strong and the values that are you know the seeds that you plant” (MS1, Cameron, p. 4). Dr. Dupont, a female Head of House, felt strongly about family support as “the family is the one that installs values, security, responsibility, expectations, on a child from the time they are very young, so that’s, I think, the basis for development” (FS1, Dupont, p. 4). Participants identified the importance of family support as a principal external asset for the wellbeing of adolescents.

Positive peer influence followed as the second most identified external asset by participants for the health and wellbeing of young people. Student explanations for choosing positive peer influence were varied. Jess, a female residential student, believed that “positive peer influence is really good because … a bit of competition is good because it will make you try to achieve your goals, try to work harder” (FRFG, Jess, p. 4). Katie, a day student, felt that “if you’re
hanging around with a certain group of people, you’re obviously going to … kind of go along with … most of the things that they are going to do” (FDFG, Katie, pp. 5-6). Mary, also a day student, felt that peers were a support network, and it was important “how your friends help you deal with different things or how they act at this age” (FDFG, Mary, p. 6).

Staff members also identified positive peer influence as the next most important external asset. Mr. Cameron hoped that “the peer influences that they’re sharing … are positive and healthy … their best friends tend to be more important in their minds at the time than their family” (MS1, Cameron, p. 5). Ms. King added that “peers have a huge influence over young people’s actions and choices, … the growth and the learning that takes place as a result of those relationships leads to better choices in the end and more problem-solving” (FS4, King, p. 5).

Youth programs and a caring school climate tied as the final external assets most identified by participants. Monika, a residential student, chose youth programs “because I find just when you get out and do sports or do plays or something like that, you meet new … people that you don’t normally speak to” (FRFG, Monika, p. 6). Jess identified youth programs because “it’s not good, in my opinion, to just think about school … what kept me sane all year was the fact that I had sports to turn to and that camaraderie and friendship that comes with that” (FRFG, Jess, p. 9). Sarah, a residential student, simply stated “it’s not all about marks, like, life isn’t strictly numbers, so it’s like … good for people to get out there and experience different things” (FRFG, Sarah, p. 10). Ms. King, a teacher, also valued “a supportive environment” that allows “kids to try new things and then push their boundaries and see what they are capable of” (FS4,
Among participants, a caring school climate tied with youth programs as a valued external asset. Krista, a female boarder, stated “when you know that everyone in school cares about you and how you’re doing, it makes you feel a lot more comfortable and it allows you to take more risks and really develop your sense of self and your personality” (FRFG, Krista, p. 9). Linda, a fellow boarder, added that a caring school climate “embodies everything that you need to have, you have the teachers that care a lot about you.” She also pointed out a caring school “can really change you as a person in a positive way” (FRFG, Linda, p. 9). For Rachel, a day student, a caring school climate was as simple as “when you’re having, like, a bad day, like, even like everyone says hi to each other and I could, like, make someone’s day, like, the one simple hi” (FDFG, Rachel, pp. 10-11).

Staff member Ms. Higgins highlighted the importance of a caring school climate:

We need to be caring, we need to be encouraging. And they are testing all, as adolescents, they are testing all the limits, they are developing their own identity, they are building a relationship with their peers. We need to provide a safe, caring environment. (FS3, Higgins, p. 10)

The importance of adult role models, school boundaries, and high expectations were also highlighted by participants. Male students included adult role models as one of their top external assets. Jeff, a day student, indicated that adult role models are “people that you look up to, so then you aspire to be like them.” For Jeff, adult role models have the power to change “your values and what you strive to do” (MDFG, Jeff, p. 4). Female staff selected school boundaries among their top external assets. Ms. Colton explained that students “need to know where the line is; even if they push it, they need to know where to
stop” (FS2, Colton, p. 4). Ms. Higgins agreed that school boundaries provide students “not just their physical safety, but probably their emotional safety and their social safety” (FS3, Higgins, p. 9). Finally, female students identified high expectations among their top external assets choices. Jane, a day student, stated “having high expectations makes you set goals for yourself” (FDFG, Jane, p. 7). Sarah, a female boarder, explained “when I have expectations put on me, I don’t want to fail, I don’t want to disappoint people” (FRFG, Sarah, p. 10). Adult role models, school boundaries, and high expectations were thus additional external assets that certain participants valued.

**Interview Results**

For the purpose of a rich and representative data analysis, I have broken down the interview analysis by each group and by gender. Focus group interviews provided students with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in a school setting that they felt had a positive impact on their health and wellbeing. Some insights became apparent immediately in interviews, while other insights took time and rereading of students’ words. Individual interviews afforded staff the opportunity to reflect on their perceptions about the programs and resources aimed at improving student health and wellbeing at Hillside.

When I reflected on student and staff words, it seemed to me that what they valued most about their school setting was the salient theme of caring relationships. Into this overarching theme, I have woven sub-themes important to female residential students, female day students, male residential students, male day students, female staff, and male staff respectively, relating to the overall theme of caring relationships. It appears from my research that there are specific
kinds of learning experiences and aspects of school settings that students and staff value for overall student health and wellbeing.
Female Residential Students

The initial focus group interview consisted of six female residential students who were talkative, animated, and excited to identify a variety of aspects inherent and unique to Hillside College that enhanced their overall health and wellbeing. The girls identified key programs and resources that they believed positively impacted their healthy development. I have grouped these key discussion points into three sub-themes: (a) residential environment, (b) program structure, and (c) small and comfortable school setting.

Residential Environment. All six female boarders pointed to the powerful impact of residential living on their health and wellbeing. The support network in place through residential living was valued, as Jess described, “you’re surrounded by people who you like really enjoy spending time with or who are there when you’re not having a good day and as you’re there to support them when they’re not having a good day” (FRFG, Jess, p. 13). Female boarders pointed primarily to the opportunity in residence to develop social skills such as learning to live with others.

Social relations in residence revealed themselves as a double-edged sword. The group discussed the strain of living and learning with others in a small residential community. Monika admitted, “I find boarding school very different than at home, like, you are again stuck with people who are at your school, like normally if you don’t like somebody you can just, like, go away and you never have to see them again” (FRFG, Monika, p. 13). Monika quickly acknowledged that “you learn how to deal with everybody” (FRFG, Monika, p. 13). Despite pointing out the challenge of learning to live with others, the girls demonstrated a
respect for the acquisition of social skills in learning to adapt to challenging situations in residence. As Susan stated, “you just have to, like I find you just have to, learn how to deal with certain people and you have to learn how to cope” (FRFG, Susan, p. 15).

A recurring thread throughout the interview was the affinity the girls felt for their Residential Heads of House. Krista declared, “I love my Head of House and feel I could pretty much talk to her about anything” (FRFG, Krista, p. 24). Heads of House are staff members who are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of students living in each individual residence. Five girls felt a strong connection with their Residential Head of House and residential assistants, and indicated that they would likely turn to these adults for advice or assistance. Susan explained, “my Head of House is great for that kind of thing, and she definitely understands, especially in a place like this, it can be a little crazy sometimes” (FRFG, Susan, p. 23). It became evident that the support network provided by residential staff was very influential on female boarding students’ health and wellbeing.

*Program Structure.* The focus group began with a general discussion about the vast array of opportunities and programs offered at Hillside. All the girls agreed that having a variety of programs, courses, and clubs among which to choose enhanced their health and well being. Initially Natasha pointed out that she valued the options and variety of programs available, “besides academics, there’s a lot more going on at this school, like the school events and the sports and all that” (FRFG, Natasha, p. 18). Krista spoke about the importance of achieving a balance at Hillside across her academic, athletic, and extra-curricular
involvement. Krista shared that feeling her happiest meant being busy and involved in a regular program or routine,

So when I’m going from like meetings at lunch to classes to sports to some, like, choir practice to like studying to like, umm like, playing around in the house with my friends and then, like, going to bed. (FRFG, Krista, p. 38)

Not every female boarder agreed that being busy and involved were completely positive. For two girls, feeling too busy and not being able to find balance was raised as a challenge. Sarah, for example, counteracted Krista’s statement, commenting,

Being really busy for me and going from meeting to meeting, like, class to class, working hard, sports, like, that doesn’t make me happy, like, that makes me feel like really stressed out and I get really anxious and I get really, like, unhappy and uncomfortable. (FRFG, Sarah, p. 39)

However, Sarah and her roommate Susan acknowledged that honing the skills of time management was a personal challenge, and they agreed that continuing to work at managing their time to carve out balanced days would be beneficial to their overall state of wellbeing. The overriding theme for the majority of girls was that being active, busy, and in a stimulating routine all contributed positively to their health and wellbeing.

Hillside College implements a mandatory athletic program. Students are expected to sign up for a sports team or activity each of the three school terms. Activities range from non-competitive fitness clubs or recreational tennis to tiered competitive teams such as hockey, rugby, and soccer. All six girls in the focus group agreed on the positive impact of mandatory athletics, not only as a support system but as a requirement for physical fitness and mental wellbeing. Krista pointed out, “I think sports have helped me as well they give you an outlet as well
as just another sort of support system because you know your team is always going to back you up” (FRFG, Krista, p. 12). Sarah emphasized that mandatory athletic programming “actually promotes, like, physical fitness and, like, physical umm health and wellbeing along with, like, health and competition, which I think is like -- like necessary in school” (FRFG, Sarah, p. 31).

The girls all acknowledged the benefits of physical activity engendered by athletic involvement, but also championed the supportive benefits of simply being a member of a sports team. As Sarah explained, “not only are you getting out there, you’re getting active, you’re doing your hour, hour and a half, two hour practice, like, most days of the week but you’re also, like, bonding with people on your team” (FRFG, Sarah, p. 31). Competition is considered a healthy and beneficial aspect of athletic involvement, as is being a part of a team or program where you have a role and responsibility.

The leadership program at Hillside was identified by the girls as beneficial. All Grade 12 students are assigned one or more leadership positions, ranging from student Head of Residence, to Discipline committee members, or Chair of the environmental club. Female boarding students viewed the responsibility of leadership positions and peer mentoring or role modelling as necessary elements contributing positively to their health and wellbeing. For some of the girls, acting in senior leadership roles in their residence and being role models impacted their behaviour in positive ways. Krista explained, “it makes me think twice about what I do when I, like, at any point, when I’m out on the weekend, when I’m here at school, my behaviour at school as well, and umm I think it’s really made me mature” (FRFG, Krista, p. 12). Other girls in the group
spoke about their role as seniors helping to organize events and communication within boarding houses, while others talked about the duty of simply being a senior student in Grade 12. For example, Monika explained that Grade 12s were the role models for the school. Krista summed up the sentiment of all of the girls, describing that the responsibility of leadership “makes you want to make better decisions” (FRFG, Krista, p. 11).

Aspects of the leadership program at Hillside also include a full credit leadership class composed of students selected from a competitive applicant pool in Grade 11. All Grade 12 students participate in a Grad Leadership Conference at the beginning of the school year, prior to the arrival of any other students. This three-day conference and ensuing four-day canoe trip were raised as essential ingredients to building confidence, trust, strong relationships, and leadership skills. Natasha pointed out that this conference gave students the time to discuss “how our year was going to look like and it was important that people will look up to us and that we are role models now, so I think those first days really helped us” (FRFG, Natasha, p. 55). Leadership experience was a shared and valued asset for wellbeing among the female residential student group.

**Small and Comfortable School Setting.** In various segments of the focus group interview the value of a small school community was an undeniable thread. Jess commented early on that, “Hillside prides itself on this whole atmosphere of community and trust and stuff like that, but as cliché as it is, I really think it’s a positive effect on teenagers” (FRFG, Jess, p. 13). The importance of a small school community was raised often. Sarah declared, “it’s such a small school and such a tight-knit community that I don’t want to be the one person not taking
advantage of how supportive the teachers are” (FRFG, Sarah, p. 19). The girls also felt that the small-school community contributed to fewer social boundaries. Jess stated, “we really promote inter-grade, you know, you know intermingling, interaction” (FRFG, Jess, p. 32). Jess explained that she thought this “is really cool because you get to know more people and more varieties of people and there’s not that sense of, I don’t know, seniority” (FRFG, Jess, p. 32). The level of comfort engendered by the small school population of Hillside provides a platform of close relationships and connectedness.

Concomitant with the engagement students felt in their small school community, there was an equally affirmative feeling about the importance of positive staff-student relations throughout the entire school. Sarah explained in the interview that the small community atmosphere and sense of expectation from all staff members had a positive effect on students,

It’s the small community here and the sense of, like, like, relationships that you have with, like, so many people that make me make healthy decisions and, like, good decisions and, like, not just screw off and not just, like, slack off. (FRFG, Sarah, p. 18)

The interest and consideration staff members demonstrated on any scale resonated with all the girls in the focus group interview. Each moment or interaction with a staff member mattered. For instance, Krista talked about Mr. Mowan, who is well-liked by students, “just because he takes the time out of his day to be like, hi, how are you doing, instead of just a quick little hi in the hall” (FRFG, Krista, p. 16). The girls felt layers of support from staff on all levels and felt strongly about the positive impact of those connections. Natasha conveyed her level of comfort when she explained how she considered “teachers, like, as friends just because I
could go and talk to them about anything” (FRFG, Natasha, p. 17).

The female boarders felt that strong peer relationships formed through their close community were a necessity for their health and wellbeing. All the girls agreed that they would turn to friends for support or advice, as Monika responded, “most teenagers always turn to their friends” (FRFG, Monika, p. 21). In particular, the students spoke about the value of learning from others and the importance of supporting one another.

Monika recognized that “you learn a lot from your friends and, like, you take what they have done or – mistakes they have done and you actually learn from everybody else” (FRFG, Monika, p. 12). Susan linked the heightened importance of peer influence to residential life in that “you have all these people going through the same thing as you are and you’re with them, like, 24 hours a day” (FRFG, Susan, p. 14). Every female residential student indicated that they would turn to peers for support. The opportunities and close relationships unveiled through the very structure of a small school setting were touted by the female residential students as valuable and essential assets for their health and wellbeing.

**Male Residential Students**

The three male residential students were very open in sharing specific experiences and anecdotes during their focus group, which helped illustrate the assets of Hillside College in promoting and enhancing student health and wellbeing. I have organized their key discussion points into the following sub-themes: (a) residential environment, (b) program structure, and (c) small and comfortable school setting.
Residential Environment. Echoing the revelations of the female residential students, the male boarders valued the experience of learning to live with others. Robert identified the importance of being exposed to a global diversity of students in residence, and shared that he has roomed with “three completely different people in the four years that I’ve been here” (MRFG, Robert, p. 7). Robert also felt that having heard personal stories from roommates around the world pushed him to not take “as much stuff for granted” (MRFG, Robert, p. 7). Parker explained that one of the most important skills he gained as a young boarder was simply “having to room with someone that you have never met before” (MRFG, Parker, p. 8). Parker added that it helped him “to grow and learn how to cope with sharing a space with someone” (MRFG, Parker, p. 17). Parker revealed a specific example of becoming closer with a roommate after a fight, explaining “we ended up not talking to each other for about a month, umm, but then I think our relationship has become really strong since then” (MRFG, Parker, p. 9). Support and advice were often sought within the residential setting. Parker explained that “a lot of the time I’ll turn to my roommate or just the other guys in my house” (MRFG, Parker, p. 20). The male residential students unanimously valued the challenges of living and learning with others as a necessary step in their growth and maturity, and in many instances the boys would turn to the peer community within their residence for support.

Pranking in male residences was identified as having a role in contributing to their social wellbeing. During the focus group interview, there was a significant discussion about the meaning of ‘pranking’ within the male residential community. Officially, pranking is defined as a trick of amusing, playful, or
sometimes malicious nature. Pranking by senior students was viewed by all three boys as an expected element of residential life. Mark explained, “it creates a relationship and bond” (MRFG, Mark, p. 49). Mark later added, “you’re horsing around with them, it’s all good-natured fun” (MRFG, Mark, p. 54). Mark commented that residential staff were aware of these antics in the community, and even had meetings about it, reminding the boys that “you have got to know where to draw the line and sometimes there are students who you can’t prank because they are going to take it too personally” (MRFG, Mark, p. 52). The boys were all quick to delineate what they interpreted as pranking and horseplay vs. bullying. Mark stated, “I wouldn’t call it bullying, I would call it, just, horseplay” (MRFG, Mark, pp. 52-53). Robert admitted that “it certainly does create a hierarchy in the house, which isn’t always a good thing” (MRFG, Robert, p. 49). Yet Robert later added, “as seniors, you kind of learn, I mean, you know where the line is with certain people, you know not to cross it” (MRFG, Robert, pp. 53-54). The male residential students reflected on memorable pranks they experienced as juniors, and tricks they had executed as seniors, such as Grade 12s hiding every single junior student mattress minutes before curfew. Pranking was identified as a positive component to the male residential context.

All of the male residential students interviewed felt a very strong and supportive connection with their Residential Heads of House. Parker commented that “I just see him as more of a friend than anything else” (MRFG, Parker, p. 15). Mark agreed that, “the relationship that we have with Tunny is really amazing” (MRFG, Mark, p. 15). What made it amazing for the boys was the mutual respect fostered through humour, care, and support. Parker provided an anecdote about
curfew and lights out, and how his Head of House would pretend to pick him up by his nose if he did not have his lights out. The use of humour for discipline was meaningful for Mark and Parker and re-enforced their respect for their Head of House. Robert found that his Assistant Head of House was an essential individual who contributed to his wellbeing. Robert revealed that he had “gone to him for situations that I, you know, sometimes I maybe wouldn’t even go to my parents about” (MRFG, Robert, p. 22). The boys identified supportive residential staff as a necessary element to student health and wellbeing at Hillside.

Program Structure. All of the boys felt that a range of school options were a significant asset for student wellbeing. Robert identified, “things like the chess club or jazz band or lorelei choir, concert band, or all those things that go on, you know, they have knitting time … or they have an art club and they have all these different things for different people” (MRFG, Robert, p. 26). Health education classes were discussed, but not identified as an asset. Parker remarked, “I can’t even really remember what exactly we learned about” (MRFG, Parker, p. 30). Robert added, “it is a lot of stuff … that you have already learned through the elementary school process” (MRFG, Robert, pp. 30-31). Mark felt that the structure of the school day was paramount in providing a platform for student health and wellbeing. Mark described that “having to take OE (Outdoor Education) in Grade 9 and 10 is a huge thing that Hillside does, because it just almost forces everybody to get involved” (MRFG, Mark, p. 10). Mark also commented on the potential impact of outdoor education for some students and how it “can push somebody past their comfort zones” (MRFG, Mark, p. 12). Parker concurred and revealed that he believed that unique variations on
classroom learning at HCS helped him to grow. Parker described a learning environment rife with variety, interactive strategies, and student-led seminars. He summed this environment up by saying, “learning isn't always reading something and then answering questions about that” (MRFG, Parker, p. 11).

All three male residential students felt strongly that athletic involvement was necessary to their positive state of health and wellbeing. Mark indicated that, without some form of athletics each day, “I would have struggled with getting my mind off work” (MRFG, Mark, p. 25). Mark expressed a group sentiment when he explained, “once I step out onto the rugby pitch or the ice, everything kind of just floats away” (MRFG, Mark, p. 25). As in other focus group interviews, mandatory athletic involvement was valued for incurred social wellbeing in addition to physical wellbeing. Parker talked about his experience on the rugby team, “I found it became a really, sort of, community-involved thing” (MRFG, Parker, p. 9).

The boys identified specific staff as overall assets for student health and wellbeing. Robert clarified that, “they are both people that you can go to contact and have a conversation with in total confidentiality” (MRFG, Robert, p. 23). These roles included academic advisors, health centre staff, guidance counsellors, the Chaplain, and the Dean of Students. Robert stated that, for students, “it is just another way at this school that people can, you know, confide in somebody and know that it’s -- the information isn’t going to leave the room and, you know, get some advice on maybe what they should do about it” (MRFG, Robert, p. 23). Knowing that staff members were specifically available for the support of student health and wellbeing was viewed as an asset by the boys.
Grade 12 male residential students viewed themselves as responsible seniors with a duty to mentor and support younger students. Mark directly stated that, “we’re big role models in the school” (MRFG, Mark, p. 56). Mark further commented that younger students would “kind of know our faces and they kind of see us on the sports field, in class, standing up in front of the chapel, and I think just having somebody like that to look up to is really big and really important” (MRFG, Mark, p. 57). All of the male residential students felt an obligation to the student body, particularly to younger students and their sense of comfort on campus.

Robert defined seniors as, “people you can confide in, they are people who you can talk to, who understand some certain situations” (MRFG, Robert, p. 56). Earlier in the interview, Robert had mentioned the importance of the chapel speech within the bounds of senior leadership responsibilities; “basically you’re given 20 minutes to talk about whatever you want” (MRFG, Robert, p. 28). Parker acknowledged that the senior chapel speech can have a powerful impact on the wellbeing of the entire student community,

For some kids who are having a rough time, maybe, here in Grade 9 and 10, can listen to those seniors who will talk about how they maybe hated the school in Grade 9 and 10, but then either it was - when the spring rolled around and it turned into Camp Hillside that they fell in love with the school or it was just the bond that they made when they started playing hockey in the winter or rugby in the fall. … So I think that’s really cool to be able to listen to all your seniors and see how they have changed since they have come through Hillside. (MRFG, Parker, p. 29)

The male residential students valued their role as seniors in helping to shape the wellbeing of the entire student community.

The leadership class was touted as a specific example of a program that
enhanced overall student wellbeing at Hillside. Parker commented that, “just the fact that we have a class like that at this school that plans events and things to do for all the students” benefits all students, because “it really can make them happier and make them love the school more” (MRFG, Parker, p. 59). Robert emphasized that the leadership class is built with a group “of students who want to take the initiative” (MRFG, Robert, p. 59). Robert went on to describe that some of his most vivid memories involved the spirit events, school dances, or weekend activities organized by the leadership class. Mark summed up the role of seniors when he stated,

Monday night, you’re pranking the juniors; Tuesday night, you’re helping them with their homework; Wednesday night, you’re hanging out just in the common room; and then the next day, you’re giving them a lecture about alcohol and drugs because somebody in the house got in trouble and they need to know that it’s not okay. (MRFG, Mark, p. 50)

The male boarders made it clear that senior students and leadership programs at the school were vital components to a healthy school.

**Small and Comfortable School Setting.** The male residential students considered Hillside a small and close community. Despite the challenges that stemmed from being a small school, the boys were emphatic that the experience of caring relationships with teachers and peers contributed greatly to their health and wellbeing. Robert commented that HCS had a “student population of 365 capacity, which makes us a very, very tight-knit, close community which means everybody knows everything about everyone, you know?” (MRFG, Robert, p. 44). The boys recognized that living and learning together had its ups and downs in that, “you certainly run into a lot of situations where people are going to pass judgment, where people are going to, you know, talk, gossip, do this, do that”
In the same vein, the male residential students were emphatic that the intense closeness of peer culture contributed to their sense of wellbeing. Parker commented that “a lot of the time I’ll turn to my roommate or just other guys in my house” (MRFG, Parker, p. 20). When asked where they turned for support on health-related issues, Mark replied, “I would say my friends in general … especially the guys in my house because they are always with me” (MRFG, Mark, p. 21). Robert identified that “one of the most important things and most beneficial and most helpful things is that one of my best friends is a girl” (MRFG, Robert, p. 19). Peers were viewed as indispensable resources for student wellbeing.

Positive peer culture was identified as essential, yet complicated. The male residential students explained that competition among peers pushed students to do better academically, as Mark clarified, “I think there’s a certain competitive nature to all guys … when it comes to academics” (MRFG, Mark, p. 41). Parker concurred when he stated, “if your friends are people who will want to do well in school, then it’s going to motivate you to want to do well” (MRFG, Parker, p. 39). In terms of social and emotional support, Robert summed for the group that peers “are the people that you rely on and, you know, turn to” (MRFG, Robert, p. 39). Whether nudging one another through subtle competition academically, or providing emotional support, peers were recognized and valued by the male boarders.

The students also spoke passionately about the positive influence of life experience with peers gained outside the walls of the classroom. Robert stated, “a lot of what you learn, you learn from your peers … through mistakes … I’ve
learned a lot more here about everything from people than I have from my classroom" (MRFG, Robert, p. 31). Mark immediately concurred that, “it’s all about experience, I mean, there’s very little that you can learn in the classroom and then apply or that you can then just remember” (MRFG, Mark, p. 31). Mark’s learning curve and wellbeing were impacted by “the times you watch your buddy mess up big and then you know what not to do, or it’s when you do it and you know what not to do” (MRFG, Mark, p. 31). The boys all felt that Hillside structured specific opportunities to learn through experience. Mark declared that “the great thing about Hillside is that it gives you so many opportunities to learn through experience, and that’s one of the major things that makes it different” (MRFG, Mark, p. 31).

Close and trusting relationships with staff members fostered mutual respect and enhanced overall student wellbeing for the male boarders. Mark discussed his relationship with his academic advisor as extremely pertinent to his overall success and wellbeing. He valued that this advisor was also his coach and teacher. He considered this relationship “like a really, really unique experience that I don't think I would have found ever” (MRFG, Mark, p. 14). Mark stated that “having a good teacher or captivating teacher just motivates you” (MRFG, Mark, p. 35). Overall, Parker stated, “it’s the friendship … between staff and students that’s so huge at Hillside” (MRFG, Parker, p. 14). The male residential students valued caring relationships with staff as unique and necessary elements to their sense of motivation at school, and overall wellbeing.
Female Day Students

The third focus group consisted of six female day students. The female day students were in agreement about the programs and resources at Hillside College that they felt had a positive impact on their health and wellbeing. Female day students spoke to a variety of elements, particularly related to academic curriculum and school programming that positively influenced their health and wellbeing. I have grouped specific examples that the girls raised into two sub-themes: (a) program structure and (b) small and comfortable school setting.

Program Structure. In line with the female residential student discussion, the female day students resoundingly valued the variety of programs and co-curriculars offered at Hillside. From participating on international service projects to being a member of the choir, the female students were a group of very involved and committed young women. Jane commented, “It’s the people, academics, the athletics, it’s the after-school, it just fits together right” (FDFG, Jane, p. 13). Rachel concurred and stated that what made everything right for her was “being able to like be involved in, like, arts, drama, like, sports” (FDFG, Rachel, p. 15). The female day students described how they wanted to be involved, and that they expected the opportunity to take part in various clubs and teams. Kim’s explanation of the student culture, suggested that there were no labels for students at HCS, and that students naturally expected and accepted that their peers were widely involved. Kim stated,

At other high schools there’s always, like, the geeks, they’re like the band geeks, like, the jocks, that kind of thing, but I think at Hillside you can be involved with anything and you’re not labelled to do anything, like, for instance, I’m in the band but I also play field hockey, like, I don’t feel like
I’m confined, I don’t have to be able to do only one thing. (FDFG, Kim, p. 16)

Linda felt that she was also able to try anything and take risks at Hillside. “Like, I tried for the play and going to band and things like that” (FDFG, Linda, p. 15).

Jane summed up the group sentiment, “Hillside gives you a different experience that you might not be able to get at other places, like … you can just canoe to Tim Horton’s in class and you have a lot of exchange opportunities and service projects” (FDFG, Jane, p. 17). The female day students believed that a variety in program options allowed them to try new things that contributed positively to their health and wellbeing.

A pinnacle experience for the majority of graduating seniors is the delivery of a chapel speech. The speech is a 20-minute public speaking engagement given during morning chapel. All graduating students are afforded this opportunity, and most accept the chance to address the school in this formal and public gathering. The chapel speech is written by the student, and reviewed by the school Chaplain. Within reasonable bounds, the chapel speech is a student’s chance to speak openly about whatever he or she would like. The female day students pointed out that a common theme of all chapel speeches, delivered by over 90% of graduating seniors, was a call to fellow students to get involved and try new things. Jane remarked on an article given to students from the Chaplain, providing advice on how to write your chapel speech. Jane pointed out that the article reminded students to try to add something new, and share something unique to yourself, because “every single chapel speech mentions be yourself and get involved, and it was making fun of it” (FDFG, Jane, p. 18). Yet
Jane commented that students are passionate about being involved and that it was “what everyone believes and that’s why everybody says it in their chapel speech, because it’s something that you need to do if you want to take advantage of what Hillside offers” (FDFG, Jane, p. 18). For these six female day students, getting involved in a variety of program options was the key to achieving success and a heightened state of health and wellbeing at Hillside.

Every female day student raised the positive impact of having to join a sports team or athletic program each term of their attendance until Grade 12. Katie believed that “Hillside really teaches us to be an all around good person, especially because we are all forced to do a sport for all three terms” (FDFG, Katie, p. 11). Kim later added that mandatory athletics encouraged her to push herself to try new things because of “all the sports and that kind of thing, I don't think at a normal school I would have tried out for the field hockey team” (FDFG, Kim, p. 14). All of the girls were in agreement that a mandatory athletics program not only contributed to their physical wellbeing, but also enhanced their mental wellbeing. Mary referred to mandatory sports as a specific program directed at promoting the health and wellbeing of students. Mary elucidated on its value and stated, “I think that’s getting people involved making friends, especially for girls, like, rugby and hockey, they only have one team so Grade 9 to 12 possibly can all be on the same team, so everyone really bonds on a different level” (FDFG, Mary, pp. 25-26). The girls valued the healthy relationships developed from team membership, and the opportunity to nurture new friendships through exposure to teams and experiences.
The leadership program at Hillside was also viewed as a valued commodity for overall student health and wellbeing. Katie pointed out that “as a Grade 12 at this school, you know, you’re kind of seen as the role models” (FDFG, Katie, p. 42). Katie explained that seniors “set the bar for the tone of the school” (FDFG, Katie, p. 42). The girls clearly understood the weight of the responsibility of being a Grade 12 role model for other students. All of the girls remarked about various instances where younger female day students would come to them for advice or support. Jane explained that “if the girls in the locker room do have problems socially or, you know, physically, like, they can come and talk to us” (FDFG, p. 44). Jane later added that “we have probably gone through the same thing, so they just know they can come to us” (FDFG, Jane, p. 48). The female day student common space, called the locker room, was viewed as an essential and comfortable space for peer mentoring and senior role modelling.

Kim brought up a strong example of the leadership program at Hillside. Any time there are issues happening at the school, for example, revolving around substance use and abuse or student respect in the community, the Grade 12s will address the student body through a forum in chapel. These student meetings only involve students addressing students, while staff members are not present. The day student girls described running these meetings as an accepted role for Grade 12s to deepen levels of trust and respect within the school. Kim explained that what is conveyed to students is an offer to go to the seniors for support or to talk. Kim described that a Grade 12 speaking publicly to students would say, “If there’s anything that you wanted to talk about, like, anything at all, you can always come to any of us, any of your Heads of Houses or anything, any grad,
basically, you can, like, you can trust us” (FDFG, Kim, p. 46). The level of trust and respect in Hillside’s community, driven by responsible Grade 12s in leadership roles, seemed to be an undeniable ingredient for overall student health and wellbeing.

Small and Comfortable School Setting. The trust and comfort that comes with learning each day in a small setting was paramount to the female day students. At the onset of the focus group interview, Katie explained, “It’s such a small school I think everyone knows each other so it kind of makes you feel safe” (FDFG, Katie, p. 11). Jane went on to capture the essence of comfort and remarked that, “Since it’s such a small school, you know at least something about everyone and you don’t feel like it’s just strangers in the hallway, you know pretty much everyone’s name” (FDFG, Jane, p. 14). Linda explained “there’s … a certain level of trust … people leave their lockers open … we trust each other not to steal” (Linda, FDFG, p. 45). Familiarity at Hillside, rooted in a small school population, breeds a level of trust and comfort that boosts connectedness and student health and wellbeing. Kim used the delivery of the chapel speech as a clear instance of how trusting and comfortable the Hillside community truly was. Kim pointed out that “people feel that they are comfortable enough to share their experiences like, and just little details about their life” (FDFG, Kim, p. 27). Kim valued that students “are able to talk to basically the whole school about how we are feeling at, like, a certain point in time, how something affected us,” and she attributed this comfort level to a trusting, healthy, and tight-knit community (FDFG, Kim, p. 28). The trust and safety felt by students in a small school setting was an overriding asset for female day students.
Female day students believed that staff-student relationships built on care and trust were central influences to their state of health and wellbeing. The female day students, in particular, pointed to the connections they had with academic teachers. Mary remarked that, “the teachers are really great here, too; it’s a good relationship, they’re not so serious so you don’t feel bad about approaching them” (FDFG, Mary, p. 13). Jane believed that the unique relationship with teachers was different from other schools, in that “you can have a casual conversation with them and you couldn’t do that at just any school” (FDFG, Jane, p. 13). Female day students coveted the opportunity residential students gained in living with staff members; they valued that their boarder friends had “a same-sex Head of House and it’s a smaller house and they actually live with them” (Katie, FDFG, p. 23). The level of comfort and trust between staff and students seemed to be a key factor in building confidence and trust amongst the female day students, which they all valued deeply. As Linda pointed out, “You feel comfortable talking to your teachers, you feel comfortable going to class, and I think it’s how comfortable I feel here that makes it what it is” (FDFG, Linda, p. 13). The “it” to which Linda was referring is the overall positive environment at HCS.

The female day students felt that the high expectations of teachers for student success were genuine and caring. Katie explained this view in that “they really want you to do well, they don’t want to see you give up, they don’t want to see you fail, like, they will really try as hard as they possibly can so that you understand a concept” (FDFG, Katie, p. 30). Feeling cared for by their teachers made the female day students feel extremely positive about school. Linda echoed Katie’s remarks in a statement about the value of teacher support and care. “The
teachers, they want to be there, they’re not just there because it’s their job, so they want you to succeed” (FDFG, Linda, p. 31). Caring staff members are essential ingredients for positive student health and wellbeing at Hillside.

The girls were very excited to share their appreciation of peers and the positive peer community at Hillside. The exposure to people from around the world as a result of the residential program and positive student community were factors they felt enhanced their overall health and wellbeing. Mary offered her thoughts about the admission process at the school, and suggested that the interview and selection process for new students helped to build a positive and likeminded peer community. She explained that “not just anyone can come here, like, you have to be a certain type of person who is willing to be nice to everyone and to be involved and spirited and just be a good person” (FDFG, Mary, p. 12). Mary felt that it was her friends who had been central to a positive state of health and wellbeing. “You make really, really good friends who are just there for you whenever you need and you can tell anything to, and all of my friends here are, like, what make me happy” (FDFG, Mary, p. 12). Kim agreed with Mary and also added that meeting friends from around the world expanded her horizons; she said, “You can meet people from, like, around the world from so many different countries and it helps you to gain, like, knowledge about basically their culture and how people are in, like, different places around the world” (FDFG, Kim, p. 14).

Linda explained the contextual nature of peer relationships for day students, in that “we come here and then we go home, so I think our main level of support would be our friends, and other than that, would be like our parents”
(FDFG, Linda, pp. 24-25). All of the day students agreed that they would turn to their friends for support on health-related issues. Jane suggested, “I think that we go to our friends first” (FDFG, Jane, p. 25). The girls concurred that their first line of support for their health and wellbeing was their peers. A positive and supportive peer community cultivated through a small and comfortable school setting was identified as a key factor for enhanced student health and wellbeing.
**Male Day Students**

The male day students were the final group to participate in a focus group session. Their responses were specific and sensitive to the resources, programs, and people specifically directed to enhance student health and wellbeing at Hillside. I have divided their discussion points into two sub-themes: (a) program structure and (b) small and comfortable school setting.

**Program Structure.** The male day students pointed to specific curriculum options and mandated opportunities at HCS that directly elevated their state of health and wellbeing. In particular, Tate valued the opportunity to take part in a variety of options. Tate indicated that, when students are busy, students are happier. Tim agreed that “when morale is high, then it’s good, and spirit events help that, for sure” (MDFG, Tim, p. 21). Tate further stated, “people being able to go sailing or go play ultimate Frisbee or something, that would help too, just being, having stuff to do all the time, help people stay busy and keeping out of trouble; keeping morale higher, too” (MDFG, Tate, p. 21).

Grade 12 senior students and the leadership program were valued entities for student wellbeing at Hillside. With regard to Grade 12s, Mitch stated “they’re pretty much role models for the younger grades” (MDFG, Mitch, p. 29). Mitch valued the role the leadership class played in enhancing student health and wellbeing. Mitch explained “they (Grade 12s) play such a large role in the school,” and “they play in all the spirit events, so they are responsible for a lot of the morale that keeps being high” (MDFG, Mitch, p. 29). Tim added that, “the Grade 12s are a huge asset to the school” planning events. Tim further added that, “we are there to keep everyone in line as well” (MDFG, Tim, p. 30). Tim felt
strongly that Grade 12 leadership responsibilities were primarily about setting a good example and mentoring younger students. Tim elucidated, “if a Grade 12 breaks the rules or something, then it opens that hole for juniors to think, well, if they do it, we can do it” (MDFG, Tim, p. 30). The male day students valued their role and responsibility as seniors, not only in role modelling for the entire school community, but also for their efforts in building student morale.

Outdoor education was specifically recognized as a unique and requisite course for overall student health and wellbeing in the community. Mitch contributed that “OE allows, like, for a more, like, well-rounded development of the person’s, like, helps achieve the school’s value of mind, body, and spirit” (MDFG, Mitch, p. 12). Mitch then specifically explained that outdoor education courses help “gain a sense of community” because you are doing “all sorts of interesting activities and team building and trust, respect stuff, so it really helps” (MDFG, Mitch, p. 12). For Jeff, the physical activity and variation in his academic day made a difference in his daily wellbeing. He commented that, “you were actually doing something fun and being active so then it just makes you, I guess, feel better” (MDFG, Jeff, p. 13). Outdoor education was branded as a specific program positively influencing overall student health and wellbeing.

Jeff identified mandatory athletics as a beneficial program at Hillside. He stated, “It’s mandatory to do a sport every term, so that clearly would make you healthier, be more active, and have a healthier lifestyle” (MDFG, Jeff, p. 9). Tate echoed Jeff’s belief, and added that “also mentally, I think, it keeps you busy and doing something” (MDFG, Tate, p. 9). The boys were in agreement that mandatory athletics programming not only enhanced their overall physical health,
but positively impacted their mental and social wellbeing. Team membership was considered beneficial, as Jeff stated, “you put focus towards that team and you, like, if you’re on a team sport then you care for the team and you want to support that team” (MDFG, Jeff, p. 10). Mandatory athletics were esteemed for their positive physical, social, and mental returns.

The day boys also recognized the value of institutionalized school support in the form of the health centre, specific staff roles, as well as the process for student discipline. For simple physical health support Tim indicated “if like you’re not feeling well or something, then people turn to the health centre” (MDFG, Tim, p. 14). Tim also acknowledged the role of the Chaplain and the Dean of Students in that, “they are there to talk to, they are completely confidential with everything that you talk to them about” (MDFG, Tim, p. 17).

Furthermore, Tate elucidated about how student discipline was handled. If a student makes a poor decision or breaks a school rule, a disciplinary meeting is held at Hillside involving the student, his or her advisor or Head of House, and predominantly consists of a group of peers and Grade 12 seniors. The meeting allows the student to explain his or her side of the story, and then fellow students, with some staff guidance, devise appropriate accountability. Tate appreciated that “we have standards meetings instead of just getting suspended or whatever” (MDFG, Tate, p. 8). Tate valued that Hillside aimed at “trying to make you learn or become better persons instead of just going through the actions and the punishment” (MDFG, Tate, p. 8). Specific programs and staff were deemed essential for student health and wellbeing.
Small and Comfortable School Setting. Early in the focus group session, male day students recognized the value of a small school atmosphere. Tim described that, “you know everybody in the hall, everybody knows everything that’s happening … that is a big trust thing as well” (MDFG, Tim, p. 8). For Tate, young people need to feel that they are “valued or belong or at least cared for in some way” (MDFG, Tate, p. 6). Hillside’s small school atmosphere structured comfort for the day boys.

For the male day students, a positive school community and caring staff were paramount to their wellbeing. Spirit events and school social events were identified as specific examples contributing to a positive school community. Tate indicated that the spirit events at the school were “good for people’s, I guess, mental health, like their mood and confidence and stuff like that to get people involved” (MDFG, Tate, p. 19). Closer to the end of the focus group session, Tate and Tim shared that they believed admissions played a small part in contributing to student happiness and wellbeing because of the interview process. Tate explained that the interview “judges whether the person here is going to be involved, the person who is coming is going to want to be at the school and wants to be involved in stuff” (MDFG, Tate, p. 37). Tim concurred, sharing that Hillside seemed to seek out students who were “happy with making fools of themselves” (MDFG, Tim, p. 37). As Jeff stated, “that’s what you’ve got to do here to fit in, is you make a fool of yourself … if you’re standing on the side not playing any of the games, then you don’t fit in” (MDFG, Jeff, p. 38). Senior students were appreciated as the main instigators of school-wide activities and spirit events aimed at raising student morale and building community.
Caring teachers were viewed as an additional benefit for overall student health and wellbeing. Tim stated the importance of the “relationships that we have with our teachers” (MDFG, Tim, p. 10). Tim further added that “it’s almost like the students are respected, staff cares for everybody’s wellbeing, and even the students respect the teachers just as much” (MDFG, Tim, p. 10). Respectful and close relationships with teachers were valued by the male day students. Tim explained that a comfortable and laid back connection with staff members “allows us to have that relationship where you’re almost friends with your teachers” (MDFG, Tim, p. 10). Tim went on and provided insight about being taught by teachers who were involved in all areas of school life and not just academics.

Because they are involved in everything, they can be your coaches, like, your bio teacher could be your hockey coach and also you have that relationship, you’ve got the teacher relationship and you’ve got the coach relationship, which is like a whole friendship, as well. (MDFG, Tim, pp. 10-11)

The boys sincerely treasured their exposure to caring staff members. For Jeff, his self-confidence was boosted because “the teachers are promoting you to do well and pushing you to do well, so then you become; you have a higher self-esteem” (MDFG, Jeff, p. 11). Tim acknowledged teachers as people to whom students could turn for emotional support. Tim said “there’s some teachers that you know you can trust with things like that” (MDFG, Tim, p. 15). For Tim, a teacher he had early in his career at Hillside was an ongoing resource for support. Tim stated that “he’s the kind of person I know I could go to about something and he would be there” (MDFG, Tim, p. 16). Overall, caring and connected staff-student relationships were vital to positive student health and wellbeing.
Female Staff

Four female staff members participated in individual interviews. The four individuals represented a cross-section of staff at Hillside. One participant was a classroom teacher and Assistant Head of House (Ms. King), one was the Director of the Health Centre (Ms. Higgins), one was a Residential Head of House involved in international student programming (Dr. Dupont), and the final participant was the Dean of Students (Ms. Colton). The female staff participants were all passionate educators dedicated to their profession, and their beliefs and complex understanding of the Hillside community shed light on revelations from student focus group sessions. The female staff revealed programs and resources that they believed positively impacted student health and wellbeing. I have grouped their key discussion points into the following sub-themes: (a) residential environment, (b) program structure, and (c) small and comfortable school setting.

Residential Environment. All female interview participants valued Hillside’s residential context for students:

Living in a boarding school where they have to deal with a roommate, where they have to deal with “x” number of other girls or boys in a house, and they have to learn how to communicate and how to be respectful, how to be loyal, are all good qualities that we do. (FS1, Dupont, pp. 10-11)

The support offered in the residential setting through the channels of residential staff and the medical network was far-reaching. Ms. Colton stated that a broad spectrum of support was necessary because “boarding schools are a home away from home” (FS2, Colton, p. 9). Furthermore, she stated “a one-on-one living in a family environment is the most nurturing, the most nurturing community you can be in” (FS2, Colton, p. 22). Ms. Higgins acknowledged that “there is a big safety
net here for students,” and spoke for all staff when she added, “we just don’t want anything to happen to kids, and it’s a big weight to feel like a parent has entrusted their child to you” (FS3, Higgins, p. 20).

Residential staff helped to promote healthy development in young people by recognizing adolescent milestones and understanding adolescent challenges. Staff had keen awareness about the issues for young people in residence, and revealed an appreciation of the student experience, “when you’re in boarding, there is nowhere to hide, you have to come back and live and sleep with the people that may be causing you some grief, so … we play a big role in mediating in the kind of problems that teenagers have” (FS3, Higgins, p. 19). Dr. Dupont stated, “In my own house I try to have it very calm, very even, and so I try to minimize conflict” (FS1, Dupont, p. 29). Ms. King believed students would turn to their Heads of House or Assistant Heads of House when in need of support. She imagined herself as a residential student and why she might turn to residential staff; “they see me when I go to bed, they see me when I’m doing homework, they see me at my worst, my best, and so they would know me the best” (FS4, King, pp. 22-23). Residential staff members were identified as key players in the momentum of healthy development and positive wellbeing of young people studying at Hillside.

The structure of housing was viewed as an asset for the wellbeing of students. The female staff liked “having small houses with a Don and a Head of House so there’s always somebody there to support the kids … so the kids have an adult that they can always turn to” (FS1, Dupont, p. 10). All of the female staff participants provided personal anecdotes illustrating the impact of residential staff in supporting the healthy development and wellbeing of a young person. For
example, when Dr. Dupont identified an international boarder as struggling socially and academically, she began supporting her right away in “building a relationship with her so that she feels, she really felt that I was like her mom” (FS1, Dupont, p. 15). As her residential Head of House, she recognized that the student “needed somebody that she could trust, that she could say anything to, that she could express her fears to” (FS1, Dupont, p. 15). When a student is identified for social, emotional, or physical reasons, Hillside uses “scaffolding academically and emotionally” to begin supporting the individual student (FS1, Dupont, p. 16). For example, Dr. Dupont worked with other staff members in “finding areas in which she could excel, so putting her in the music department,” then “liaising between her and her teachers to explain how she was feeling because she couldn’t express it herself; buying sticky rice and making it for her because that’s what she was missing from home; supporting her in how to deal socially in a Canadian situation” (FS1, Dupont, p. 16). The main goal was “to develop her self-esteem so she could deal with things and become more resilient and stuff like that” (FS1, Dupont, p. 18). Residential Heads of House have a valuable role in helping a young person maintain a positive trajectory of healthy development and wellbeing.

Additional anecdotes about life in residence identified positive moments in supporting student wellbeing. One staff member stated that, “in my house we all watch Glee on Tuesday nights and it’s fun to do” (FS4, King, p. 16). For Ms. King, a healthy and happy residential community was essential for student wellbeing. She asked, are students “going to remember that math question that they didn’t get, or are they going to remember hanging with their whole house on
a Tuesday night?” (FS4, King, p. 17). When Ms. King knew a student was struggling socially, she built a trusting relationship to help support that student through the use of music. She explained, “when I was on duty and she would just come to the office and we would just hang out and I would tell her a new band that she should listen to and it was just a nice way for both of us to kind of see how each other’s day was going and kind of what was going on” (FS4, King, p. 21). The female staff valued caring and connected relationships with students in residence, and underscored these relationships and support for students as essential to the success, wellbeing, and health of young people at HCS.

Program Structure. The structure of school routine was viewed as beneficial. “Programming in athletics or art or those kinds of extra-curricular activities, programming that into the day’s schedule so that it is a mandatory part of the day” were deemed essential to student wellbeing (FS4, King, p. 9). Offering students a healthy lifestyle by promoting involvement in arts or sports contributed to positive student health and wellbeing. Sports teams were identified as “a pretty tight group,” and the Director of the Health Centre pointed out that “sometimes a coach will approach us and say could you be helpful in helping us with this” (FS3, Higgins, p. 38). Ms. Higgins found that “coaches have a particular tighter relationship with students, as do Heads of House” (FS3, Higgins, p. 39). Athletic involvement was highlighted, not only for its physical health merits, but also for the community support from team involvement. Despite the demands of a busy schedule, female staff underscored the importance of involved students; “for some, they say we offer too much, between music, sports, academic, and our APs, and just looking at the school calendar, it’s a good thing” because “life is full of
pressures, we have to learn to make choices” (FS2, Colton, p. 21). Busy and involved students were viewed as healthier.

Community service involvement was also recognized as contributing to student wellbeing. “The extracurricular is huge and the advantages for community service that some other schools may not be able to offer” (FS2, Colton, p. 8).

Hillside College offers international service projects. Students travel to sites all over the world working in orphanages in India or helping to build water wells in remote villages in parts of Africa. Ms. Colton indicated that the main goal of these projects was to instil a sense of giving back and global awareness. She stated, “If everybody feels a passion when they come back from an underdeveloped country, that will play into their life” (FS2, Colton, p. 9). Participating in community service projects was viewed as an asset in the development of young people at Hillside.

Specific aspects of academic curriculum were identified as aimed at enhancing the health and wellbeing of students. Hillside College houses a learning commons, which provides academic support to students in the form of a learning strategist, individual program planning, tutors, professional development for teachers, and academic coaches who work solely with students on learning skills. Academic support was viewed as an asset: “learning support or an academic coach or, you know, someone to proofread something or a peer to ask a question to, that support network is there” (FS4, King, p. 28). Motivational teaching strategies were also raised as valuable for student wellbeing. Ms. King stated, “It comes down to activities that are interesting.” She worked to “create a classroom that is very open and it’s very laid back … there’s no such thing as a stupid
question” (FS4, King, p. 25). Furthermore, the leadership class was pointed to as a specific aspect of the academic curriculum aimed at enhancing student wellbeing. When the leadership model of the school is working properly, “it should be a good model for developing life skills,” mainly due to the curriculum of the leadership class in promoting decision-making skills (FS1, Dupont, p. 10). Specific components to the academic curriculum at Hillside were viewed as positively addressing student wellbeing.

Outdoor education was identified by two participants as beneficial. Ms. King believed that having students push their comfort zones on the high ropes course correlated to their sense of wellbeing, confidence, and life skills. On the high ropes course, “that’s a ton of challenges in itself, both personal and, you know, personal boundaries obviously, you’re getting a bit more physical with classmates and, you know, going up in the air, that’s scary” (FS4, King, p. 35). The outdoor education program was viewed as building confidence and self-esteem in young people. “You’re on a climbing wall, they can go canoeing, these things are stretching most teenagers” (FS2, Colton, p. 12).

A school program with clear guidelines and fair discipline policies was valued by all female staff interviewed. Dr. Dupont believed that young people needed boundaries; “the rules that we have are very transparent and the kids know the consequences” (FS1, Dupont, p. 13). Ms. Colton concurred that, “well-defined guidelines are a must in a teenager’s life” (FS2, Colton, p. 11). Furthermore, “Hillside School does set up fairly structured boundaries for teenagers because we realize that they are going to be experimenting” (FS3, Higgins, p. 19). The female staff emphasized that boundaries, rules, and guidelines were in place for the safety
and care of student wellbeing. “I hope that the kids understand that everything we do is because we care for them, and we want them to develop in a positive way” (FS1, Dupont, p. 14). The method for handling student transgressions at Hillside revealed a school vision that placed the healthy development of students at the forefront. The ultimate goal of any discipline meeting was not punitive, in that “when they have done something that they need to recognize what they did, why they did it, and here’s the consequence” (FS2, Colton, p. 11).

All participants pointed out the value of specific staff in addressing student health and wellbeing; “we have Valerie, we have the health department, we have the psychologists, we have outside professionals” (FS1, Dupont, p. 13). Valerie is the Dean of Students, and “she knows exactly what’s going on, and so there’s obviously a positive relationship in a positive, there’s good communication that is happening between her parents and student and teachers or whomever else is involved in the situation” (FS4, King, p. 14). Valerie Colton was interviewed, and she described her own role:

My role as Dean of Students is to effectively manage our students’ wellbeing outside of the classroom. That can involve their wellbeing physically, mentally, spiritually. My office is what I like to call a dumping ground for anything and everything, whether it’s good or bad. We can celebrate the good things in a day, or we can mourn the loss of a grandparent or a divorce. It’s a very privileged position because it’s confidential. (FS2, Colton, p. 5)

Ms. King recognized that “the support that kids have on that more medical level I think is pretty, it’s pretty positive” (FS4, King, p. 15). Ms. Colton commended the school; “we have a great support team in our health centre and counselling” (FS2, Colton, p. 9). The essence of how the school structured support for students was broad, as “there is more than just a teacher, there is more
than just a health centre, there is more than just a counsellor, there’s more than just a Dean of Students, there is a whole broad spectrum of people” (FS2, Colton, p. 12).

*Small and Comfortable School Setting.* The benefit of a small school setting and connected community was valued by all four female staff participants; “I think small schools are better than big schools” (FS1, Dupont, p. 35). Ms. Higgins stated, “I think their learning happens in a safe, kind of a happy environment” (FS3, Higgins, p. 43). Ms. King identified that small classes contributed to a better learning environment and therefore enhanced student wellbeing; “it is such a small class environment that everyone pretty early on, actually, felt really comfortable and everyone is comfortable working with each other” (FS4, King, pp. 25-26). A small, trusting, and comfortable community was raised as an essential asset by all participants.

The female staff emphasized the importance of caring staff-student relationships in creating a positive space for students. “Structurally we have people in place that there is the mentoring and there’s the relationship building” (FS1, Dupont, p. 11). Caring student and staff relationships happened in many venues: on the field during sports, in the residences, in classrooms, and through the advisor system. Each student at Hillside is assigned an academic advisor who communicates consistently with that student and his or her teachers, coaches, and parents. Advisors “try to support the kids to bring out the best in them in terms of their academic work or their personal achievements in terms of athletics or arts” (FS1, Dupont, p. 11). Staff believed that students “need to feel valued, they need to feel heard, they need to know that people will be honest with them” (FS3,
Higgins, p. 43). Ms. Higgins explained that students “have to have a good relationship with their teacher” to feel good and learn at their best (FS3, Higgins, p. 44). Hillside is positive for students because “kids have great relationships with both their teachers and their dons or their Heads of Houses” (FS3, Higgins, p. 9).

Participants gave very personal feedback about specific things they have done to enhance student health and wellbeing at Hillside. Ms. Higgins revealed that “I think that’s probably the role that I most fill these days is listening to the problem, listening to what is the issue and trying to help the student find their own solution to it” (FS3, Higgins, p. 33). Ms. King explained that she always tried to see everything from the student’s perspective, and if a student was busy and unable to hand work in or sleep well, she recognized “enough is enough and we’ve got to look out for these kids because that is essentially our job” (FS4, King, p. 14). Ms. Colton was always determined to ask herself “what can I do at this moment to make the person feel loved and not leave my presence” (FS2, Colton, p. 15). It is clear that staff members at Hillside genuinely care about the health and wellbeing of students, and they work to ensure positive spaces and relationships for student growth and wellbeing.

**Male Staff**

Two male staff members volunteered to participate in individual interviews. The two participants spoke from their experience as the Assistant Head: School Life, former school Chaplain (Mr. Cameron), and as a Residential Head of House and Outdoor Education instructor (Mr. Tunny). The male staff participants were thoughtful, dedicated to their profession, and willing to share their thoughts and beliefs about programs and resources that they believed
positively impacted student health and wellbeing. I have grouped their key
discussion points into the following sub-themes: (a) residential environment, (b)
program structure, and (c) small and comfortable school setting.

_Residential Environment._ Mr. Tunny stated that, as a Residential Head of
House, “you take on the role of a parent” (MS2, Tunny, p. 21). Living in small
residences fostered a family relationship between participants and students. Mr.
Cameron singled out “small residences” as essential to the wellbeing of students
(MS1, Cameron, p. 12). For Mr. Tunny, “having residences that are small enough
that you can have … a more personal relationship” was essential in supporting
student wellbeing (MS2, Tunny, p. 7). Residential staff members are “mimicking
the support” students “would have in a strong supportive family at home” (MS2,
Tunny, p. 48). Male staff believed in strong relationships with students primarily
based on trust to provide an outlet for students when they needed to talk. Mr.
Tunny explained that students “need to have trust in their Head of House, so if
there’s a problem they can talk to you about personal issues and there’s
confidentiality and there’s trust that there won’t be judgement” (MS2, Tunny, p.
48). The family-like connections derived from living and learning together were
identified as contributing to overall student health and wellbeing.

Residential living provided an additional space for learning that
contributed to student wellbeing. The residence was a powerful medium for
positively influencing the moral development of students. Mr. Tunny was
passionate about the depth of support he believed residential staff offered to
students. He stated, “I would venture 75% of the learning that will go on to
facilitate this person and their learning later in life is the stuff that happens outside
of the classroom, they will not remember what $dx + dy$ or $z =$” (MS2, Tunny, p. 4).

Mr. Tunny added that, in residence, the breadth of health discussions can be varied:

> When you live in a residential setting you have discussions with kids about abortion, about umm sexual issues where they are you know confused, and they don’t understand and they get involved in things that they’re not comfortable with because of peer pressure or you know talk to them openly about you know weekend binge drinking. (MS2, Tunny, p. 20)

Mr. Tunny reinforced his belief that “90% of that health education and learning and peer understanding at Hillside happens in the day-to-day living and in the dorm rooms at night” (MS2, Tunny, p. 19). Learning for wellbeing was delivered in the residential context. Mr. Tunny provided an example of a teachable moment in residence. When a teenage boy says something racist or homophobic you “take that as a learning moment” and “you have to be that person who says, NO I am going to step up here and I’m gonna make a stand and I’m gonna stand for something” (MS2, Tunny, p. 20). For Mr. Tunny, these moments in the residential context were “far more important than … what happens in the classroom” (MS2, Tunny, p. 20).

*Program Structure.* Ultimately, the male staff participants touted “the idea that we’re developing kids in mind, body, and spirit” (MS2, Tunny, p. 6).

Hillside’s vision for students is aimed at “developing them as a whole person” (MS2, Tunny, p. 6). Staff valued that the school actually mandated “that students will participate in the academic schooling that’s required, but they will also participate in activities that will help them evolve in a healthy lifestyle” (MS2, Tunny, p. 7). The physical, mental, and social wellbeing of students is addressed
at Hillside “through sport, through physical activity, through outdoor adventure, and that sort of thing … we’re developing the spirit of kids” (MS2, Tunny, p. 7). Mr. Tunny singled out that “mandating kids to do sport” was essential to student health and wellbeing (MS2, Tunny, p. 11). Mr. Cameron acknowledged that “their [students’] days are very, very busy” (MS1, Cameron, p. 27). By involving students in a busy routine with a vast array of options, “we’re trying to create kids that have a multitude of interests and aren’t you know … unidimensional and strictly focused on just work or just sports or just you know getting into an Ivy League” (MS2, Tunny, pp. 15-16). At one point Mr. Tunny spoke briefly about teaching a young international student the art of paddle making in the canoe club; “he’s just drawn to it, he just loves it, he wants to make another one over the summer for his dad” (MS2, Tunny, p. 17). Mr. Tunny valued his experience in teaching the young student something new and stated, “that’s the sort of thing that gets you” (MS2, Tunny, p. 17). Additionally, through community service, “we’re in the process of … creating well rounded, interesting, umm sympathetic, empathetic adults that will carry those … values into their future” (MS2, Tunny, p. 13).

Those male staff interviewed felt that, for students to be at their best, Hillside must also “hold them up during their challenges” (MS1, Cameron, p. 11). Specific staff roles were identified as providing indispensable support for enhanced student health and wellbeing. Mr. Cameron indicated, “we have a strong … health centre staff right here on campus that is very intimately involved with the kids, we have a social worker, like a Dean of Students … we’ve got a Chaplain, myself, Head of House, every house has an Assistant Head of House”
(MS1, Cameron, pp. 11-12). The benefits of the advisor support system were also acknowledged. Advisors are “assigned as sort of as a second safeguard for the academic side.” Mr. Tunny also added that “there are grade team meetings” (MS2, Tunny, p. 11). Grade team meetings involved all the teachers of a specific grade, and additional staff assigned to that grade in the role of Heads of House or Academic Advisor. For example, the chair of the Grade 9 grade team meeting might raise a concern about a male student who was suddenly not handing in work. Staff at the meeting would talk about how this student might be doing in residence, how he was performing on the field, or what his family situation was like. All factors were discussed, and an action plan would be devised to support that student. The action plan might involve a variety of staff, a network of scaffolding for the student. Mr. Tunny explained this network:

You have a school counsellor and a Dean of Students and umm ah Chaplain and a ah Head of School Life, you know there are multiple layers of support that are offered, you know Heads of House, student Heads of House, there is a, I think really broad and deep safety net for kids. (MS2, Tunny, p. 7)

The network of support was extremely valued. “We have the exact same problems of any other school, but we have multiple layers of people that help deal with it” (MS2, Tunny, p. 55).

Mr. Cameron additionally identified the “School Life Team”; “it’s like a case group” as a foundation for student health and wellbeing (MS1, Cameron, p. 19). He explained that there is Dr. Dupont, and “she’ll speak from more of a programmatic level keeping an eye on our international kids”; as well as “our Director of Health Services, Janet Higgins, so she’s dealing specifically with the medical state of and the medical health of the community,” along with “our Dean
of Students who works closely with individual students much like a social worker counsellor,” and finally the “Director of Learning Strategies,” and “she helps all of our kids with … learning differences” (MS1, Cameron, pp. 19-20). Mr. Tunny seconded the benefit of “the learning commons” under the guidance of the Director of Learning Strategies as an “opportunity for some more personalized academic resources to be applied and we’ve seen it work” (MS2, Tunny, p. 7).

Specific staff roles at Hillside, aimed at enhancing student health and wellbeing, are mandated through the school program.

Boundaries and accountability were deemed necessary components to student health and wellbeing by both male staff participants. Mr. Tunny explained that “there are [sic] a framework of rules” laid out in “a school life guide,” and it’s “a framework that’s created to keep this community safe … and healthy” (MS2, Tunny, p. 25). With standards and values espoused throughout all facets of the Hillside community, staff felt that the support for students was well grounded: “You’re not actually setting boundaries or speaking words for the sake of saying them … you will support them to the ends of the Earth” (MS2, Tunny, p. 31). Mr. Cameron shared, “We don’t even use the term discipline. It’s accountabilities or consequences” when a student has contravened a value in the school community. He pointed out that “if a kid is doing drugs, it says something about all of us as a community, not just that student who’s choosing to do drugs” (MS1, Cameron, p. 17). For male staff, the holistic approach to school standards and values positively impacted student wellbeing.

Both participants felt that the way in which student transgressions of school policy were handled demonstrated a community keeping student wellbeing
at the forefront. Student discipline was handled as “a community-based approach to the accountability” (MS2, Tunny, p. 26), and senior students were “very involved” (MS1, Cameron, p. 17). The main goal of “every experience around that standards meeting is to help a student reaffirm themselves to what the school stands for as a community” (MS1, Cameron, p. 18).

Mr. Tunny shared an interesting point when he explained that sometimes student-driven accountabilities are not what the adults would expect:

There have been times where we’ve seen something relatively minor and students have taken great offense at it, and students are really, feel that is something beyond the norm, and have been, probably more punitive. (MS2, Tunny, p. 27)

Student participation in accountability at Hillside was viewed as having a pulse on student culture and contributing to student wellbeing. Mr. Cameron stated that “I go to my senior students and say what are we gonna do here, how can we help this guy figure it out” (MS1, Cameron, p. 18). In standards meetings, “there’s more of the students’ peers in that group than there are staff” (MS1, Cameron, p. 18). Students are empowered at Hillside by having “a say within this community about how things are run” (MS2, Tunny, p. 27).

Small and Comfortable School Setting. A small school population was valued for student wellbeing at Hillside. Low student-to-staff ratios were seen as indispensable in that “we intentionally try to keep close ratios between staff and students whether it’s in a residence or in a classroom” (MS1, Cameron, p. 10). The 3.5:1 staff-student ratio was viewed as “close to being what a family ratio is, so we try to really keep a family atmosphere here” (MS1, Cameron, p. 10). The direct benefit of a small school for students was explained by Mr. Cameron; “we
know our students, and if you know them you’re more apt to catch them before they fall into any cracks” (MS1, Cameron, p. 10).

Caring and connected staff-student relations were discussed widely by the two male staff participants. Student wellbeing was heightened at Hillside because staff aimed to “be paying attention, and to be listening” (MS1, Cameron, p. 14). Mr. Cameron indicated that staff-student relations helped when a student was going through a crisis because “we’ve got strong enough relationships with all of our students that usually when a friend is that worried about another friend they’re telling the adults pretty quickly” (MS1, Cameron, p. 14). Essentially, “it goes back to you’ve established really healthy strong relationships with these kids from the outset, so when they’re in crisis they’re comfortable leaning on us to help them through the abyss” (MS1, Cameron, p. 15).

Both male staff believed that caring teachers and staff were paramount to student health and wellbeing. Mr. Tunny felt that, for students, “they will remember that there was a teacher who took interest in them, who was caring, um was willing to spend extra time with them, was actively involved in their learning” (MS2, Tunny, p. 5). Staff acknowledged that strong connections with students were “facilitated by being there to coach them, seeing them in the athletic form, in the Arts form, in a play, seeing them work through the angst of teenage years in your house” (MS2, Tunny, p. 57). At one point, Mr. Cameron conveyed “you love ’em like your own kid” (MS1, Cameron, p. 15). Furthermore, he spoke about experiences in “fostering those hallway relationships” to help build healthy and caring student and staff relationships (MS1, Cameron, p. 21). Mr. Cameron spoke about a scenario on campus and how he worked to connect with students:
Whether it’s just tossing a football around umm and it’s like you have to think of it as like with your own kids you have to put your time aside to give them some of you so that you can know them and they can know you in a way that fosters a relationship and becomes reciprocal, be respectful and affectionate, professionally of course. (MS1, Cameron, pp. 21-22)

When he asked students to join in a game of football, Mr. Cameron’s goals were to connect with those students, demonstrate his care, and promote their wellbeing. He stated, “just giving of yourself that time as opposed to being too busy or seeing it as the job, it’s gotta be seen as the lifestyle first” (MS1, Cameron, p. 22).

Balanced and healthy staff were identified as necessary for overall student health and wellbeing. Mr. Cameron stated, “I think healthy adults make healthy kids, and that’s for me is the, the most important thing in our community” (MS1, Cameron, p. 40). If staff are taking care of themselves, then “they pay attention, they’re rested, so they have the energy to crawl into the tough spots when they need to” (MS1, Cameron, p. 25). Mr. Tunny also pointed out that “healthy role modelling for students, is … important for us to help them find a balance” (MS2, Tunny, p. 29).

There seemed to be a very strong sense of community within the school. Staff recognized that peers were deeply connected. If a student was having trouble, staff believed that “they would … usually talk to their peers before the staff or the adults” (MS1, Cameron, p. 23). How Hillside creates a strong sense of community is “more about what we do in intangible ways,” according to Mr. Cameron (MS1, Cameron, p. 10). The value of trust is “important to the fabric of our community” (MS1, Cameron, p. 17). Mr. Tunny stated, “We do a fairly good job of providing kids with an experience that’s positive and holistic and helpful” (MS2, Tunny, p. 8). Essentially both male staff interviewed felt Hillside was “not
just a school that teaches kids; we’re a community that helps to raise kids” (MS1, Cameron, p. 11).

**Day Students and the Residential Environment**

For day students, the residential environment was not raised as a contextual asset for their health and wellbeing. In fact, day students noted their awareness and empathy for boarders who may have experienced challenges such as sleep deprivation, gossip, and peer conflicts: common negative factors associated with residential life. Both male and female day students noted the important role their families, and in particular parents, played in contributing to their state of wellbeing.

Female day students noted a desire for parallel aspects to the residential program in the day program because they felt certain elements were considerably beneficial to their peers. For example, Mary, a female day student, talked about how, unlike residential students, day students have a Head of House, but not an Assistant Head of House. Assistant Heads of House, also known as ‘dons’ to students, were recent university graduates interested in a career in education, who lived in boarding houses on campus to assist with the day to day duties of running a residence and evening supervision. Mary stated that female day students could benefit from having that additional staff support so prevalent for boarders, “I know a lot of the boarder girls, I don’t know about the guys, like … but like the girls, like, they would go and talk to their dons, like, not that much older than them” (FDFG, Mary, p. 50). Mary pointed out that younger assistant heads of house are helpful with adolescent issues because “they’re approachable but they’re just, it’s like they can talk about it … and I think that helps with the girls a lot” (FDFG, Mary, p. 50). Mary re-iterated that for female day students, “we don’t
have that, we have each other, but we don’t have a non-judgmental, like, someone to talk to” (Mary, FDFG, p. 50).

Furthermore, female day students engaged in a discussion about what ideal additions could be made to their school program to continue to build and enhance external developmental assets. Mary added, “I think that day students should be, like, assigned a room with like one of their best friends that are, like, yeah, it’s totally okay if they come in my room … “ (FDFG, Mary, p. 59). Linda echoed Mary in that, “I think it’s easier for boarders as well because if you have a double spare for day students, like, you go to the library or you go to the locker room or you go to the upper commons, and there are always people” (FDFG, Linda, p. 59). For Linda, having a residential space is helpful because “if you need, like, a minute to yourself, like, you can’t just be like a boarder and go back to your room and just sit or take a nap or study or anything, there’s just always people” (FDFG, Linda, pp. 59-60). Linda’s thoughts demonstrated her need for personal space and privacy on campus. The ideas and comments established that female day students observed, appreciated, and additionally felt they would also benefit from the community and independence of residential living, as well as the caring presence of Assistant Heads of House.

The significance of the residential environment was raised by all staff participants. It is important to note that all six staff members who volunteered to participate lived on the campus of Hillside College. Mr. Cameron lived in a private residence between two male boarding houses. Ms. Higgins lived in a private residence adjacent to the Health Centre. Ms. King lived in a small apartment attached to the female residence where she was an Assistant Head of
House. Mr. Tunny, Dr. Dupont, and Ms. Colton were all Residential Heads of House who lived in private homes attached to the boarding residences which they ran. Although the staff members interviewed were involved in the full life of the school, only one staff participant, Ms. King, was an official classroom teacher. Having staff members with a residential perspective contributed to a focus on the residential environment and its ensuing external developmental assets.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This thesis examined the perspectives of students and staff at one school to gain a better understanding of the aspects of school that contribute to the health and wellbeing of students. In this chapter, I connect student and staff perspectives to the literature about positive youth development and developmental assets. The limitations of the study, implications for future research, and my final thoughts complete the thesis.

External Assets

Leffert et al. (1998) encouraged researchers to deepen their understanding of the measurement of adolescent perceptions using particular asset categories. Other researchers have also asked for more qualitative research on the meaning of developmental assets for young people (Mahoney, Lafferty, & Nutter, 2003; Scales et al., 2000; Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007). Therefore, the initial interview question in this study allowed students and staff at Hillside to share their perceptions about specific external developmental assets that they believed were most important to the health and wellbeing of young people. Participants were asked not only to rate the importance of these external developmental assets to adolescent health and wellbeing, but also to provide reasons for their selections.

At Hillside College, student and staff selections placed family support, positive peer influence, youth programs, and a caring school climate as the
external assets that were of paramount importance to them. These four choices were initially defined for participants as:

Table 3

*Definitions of External Assets Selected by Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family support</th>
<th>Family life provides high levels of love and support.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caring school climate</td>
<td>School provides a caring, encouraging environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive peer influence</td>
<td>A young person’s best friends model responsible behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth programs</td>
<td>A young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.</td>
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</table>

Participant reasons for their choices provided additional insight into the above definitions of external assets for students and staff (definitions adapted from the Search Institute, 2006). For example, students referred to family support as people to whom one would look up to and from whom one would learn. For example, one day student, Kim, explained that she learned from the mistakes that family members made. Students spoke passionately about their mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and even cousins: the family was revered by respondents, and two participants, Mr. Cameron and a male day student, Jeff, in particular, noted that it was family members who were most influential in instilling values.

Leffert et al. (1998) found that positive peer influence decreased the likelihood of alcohol or substance use and abuse. In this study, students and staff would concur with the finding of Leffert et al. Students and staff believed that peers have the potential to be influential in both positive and negative ways.
Students acknowledged that their peers’ behaviour and choices could determine whether or not they slept in and missed classes, signed up for the hockey team, or tried out for the school play. Staff identified that some negative peer influences were attributable to bullying; exclusion and cliques; misuse of Facebook or texting; substance use and abuse; and/or hurtful gossip. Ms. Colton poignantly added “there’s very little privacy left” (FS2, Colton, p. 15). Young people involved in this study relied on their friends for advice and support in dealing with parental conflict, gossip, or when not getting along with a roommate. Peer support in navigating the ups and downs of adolescent social lives was significant. Additionally, participants increased the range of positive peer influences by citing peer competition as a possible positive motivator in that both staff and students discussed the relationship between striving for academic success and healthy peer competition on tests and projects. Ms. King, for example, reflected on the Grade 10 students in her residence working tirelessly to out-do one another on a radio program project about the 1920s and 1930s.

Scales et al. (2000) established that spending time in youth programs promoted thriving and positive outcomes in adolescents. Participants in this study contended that youth programs were valuable because of opportunities to meet new people, try new things, get active, and push boundaries. Students also referred to involvement in youth programs, specifically sports, as important for their mental or emotional wellbeing, emphasizing the need for time on the field or with a team as an escape from academic pressures. Jess and Mark, residential students, relished the opportunity to head out to sports activities every afternoon for a break from the pressures and demands of university applications. Several
staff members reflected on an international student who stepped outside of her cultural bounds to join the girls’ rugby team, where she found success, in their view, by trying something new and becoming very adept at it.

Research has found positive results in asset-building schools (Mahoney, Lafferty, & Nutter, 2003; Scales, 1999; Shek & Sun, 2008), i.e., those that aim to have a caring school climate. Respondents in this study enriched our understanding of what is meant by ‘a caring school climate.’ Hillside staff felt strongly that a school needs to be safe and caring so that young people can test limits. Students believed that feeling comfortable at and in school allowed them to take risks and develop a sense of self. In fact, their conception of feeling comfortable was rooted in their interactions with caring staff members.

Participant responses to the initial interview question in this study showed a difference in judgment about the importance of particular external assets. For example, male students rated adult role models high on their selection list, while female students indicated high expectations from adults as an important external asset. Male students expanded: adult role models were described as people to strive to be like, i.e., individuals to hold in high regard and having the potential to change one’s values. High expectations from adults were viewed by female students as a motivator for setting goals, and not wanting to fail or disappoint teachers or parents. More female participants than males highlighted school boundaries as a valuable external asset. Female staff explained that school boundaries were valuable for the physical, emotional, and social safety of young people.
In terms of the relationship of gender to developmental assets, girls generally identify having more assets than boys (Scales, 1999). This study did not aim to measure the developmental assets present in participants. Typically developmental assets research, particularly the identification of assets in adolescents, has been generalized across gender lines (Benson, 2002; Scales & Benson, 2006). In many studies, assets are accounted for and measured, but demographic variables, such as gender, are controlled (Benson, 2002; Fulkerson, Story, Mellin, & Leffert, 2006). For example, Chew, Osseck, Raygor, Eldridge-Houser, and Cox (2010) inventoried developmental assets among young people at a youth juvenile facility. The Chew et al. study is as an example of quantitative research on developmental assets that measured assets in young people, but did not explore gender differences.

The students and staff who participated in this study demonstrated through their wide-ranging choices (11 of 12 external asset options selected by at least one participant) that all external assets are vital to adolescents. These findings complement existing research that has examined the validity of the developmental assets framework (Scales et al., 2000). The perceptions of students and staff at Hillside College enhanced current developmental asset definitions. These initial findings explore the developmental assets framework and encourage additional consideration of adolescent and educator perceptions of particular asset categories and their meaning. Finally, the role of gender in asset valuation and meaning requires future consideration.
Residential Environment

Residential students and staff participants highlighted the residential environment as an important context for the healthy development of young people. From the perspective of participants in this study, residential environment means the boarding houses on campus where approximately two-thirds of the student body reside with Heads of House and Assistant Heads of House during the school year. Social interactions and experiences in residence, coupled with peer and residential staff support, were identified as having contributed positively to the health and wellbeing of residential students attending Hillside.

Residential students and staff members discussed specific types of social interactions and experiences in the residential environment in this regard. In particular, the challenge of learning to live with others was identified as beneficial. Dr. Dupont, a residential Head of House herself, felt that one of the biggest strengths for students was learning to live in a community. Residential students believed that working through difficult situations with fellow boarders improved their wellbeing. Female residential student experiences of dealing with a messy roommate or a roommate who talked on her cell phone late at night catapulted forward their skills of learning to live with others. Mark, a male boarder, shared that it was sometimes stressful to live with 360 teenagers all the time, but the experience had shaped his perspective that “sometimes life is simple” (MRFG, Mark, p. 42). The challenge of learning to live with others in community was identified by residential students and staff as beneficial to overall student health and wellbeing.
Thurber et al. (2007) conducted a research study that examined the positive development of young people attending camp. Thurber et al.’s research is most closely related to this study, in that young people attending camp are living in an intense residential setting with prescribed programming and engaged staff. An unexpected finding of Thurber et al.’s research revealed that peer relations at camp were strained over time, while the growth and development of young campers remained positively impacted. Students and staff at Hillside recognized that living in community with others, while challenging at times, was inevitably valuable to the development of young people.

Peer support and caring and connected residential staff members were highlighted as assets within the residential environment. During focus group interviews, residential students consistently demonstrated that they sincerely appreciated their friends in residence and reported that they would often turn to a housemate or roommate for advice. Every single residential student participant believed that peer support heightened his or her overall state of health and wellbeing. Caring, supportive, humourous, kind, and connected residential staff members were identified as vital to healthy living for students in residence. Robert, a male boarder, and five of the female boarders, said that they would be able to go to their residential staff for support when dealing with an issue such as a roommate conflict or a relationship breakup. Parker valued the time that his Head of House gave just playing ping pong with the boys in the common room one evening. Staff participants believed the affinity and trust students felt for residential staff was nurtured through open, family-like connections. Whether through supporting a young woman in residence with anorexia, or simply cooking
a surprise dinner for the students in their residence, staff took on the role of in loco parentis (in the place of a parent) with pride. Small ratios in the structure of residence were touted as essential for deepened connections. Mr. Tunny felt that, if a student’s grandfather had passed away, simply placing a hand on the shoulder of that student was one way of connecting and supporting. Ms. Colton explained that she felt honoured when students approached her. Students felt connected to, cared for, and supported by their residential staff. Listening, caring, and connecting with adolescents were cherished and honed, and seemed to be natural skills in residential staff.

One additional theme from staff interviews became apparent. Both male staff interviewed, and Ms. Colton, demonstrated a passion for student learning beyond the walls of the classroom. They emphasized that the residential environment provided a unique platform for delivering life lessons or influencing the moral development of young people, thereby having a positive impact on their health and wellbeing. Ms. Colton stated, “I think you have the icing on the cake when you’re in residence because you are devoted to ‘x’ number of students, which gives you educational moments every day” (FS2, Colton, p. 22). The residential environment was viewed as a unique and opportunistic platform for positively influencing young people through the potential for life lessons and potent educational moments.

The current findings complement existing research that highlights the critical role of context in influencing the health and wellbeing of young people (Boyce, Roche, & King, 2008; McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002; Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007). Developmental assets research has
indicated that external assets include social interactions and experiences that contribute to youth development (Mahoney, Lafferty, & Nutter, 2003; Scales, 2000; Scales & Benson, 2006). The Search Institute (2006), in their list of 40 developmental assets, has branded the category of support within external assets, pinpointing the particular assets of family support, positive family communication, other adult relationships, caring neighbourhood, and caring school climate. The residential environment meshes uniquely with external developmental assets related to the category of support.

**Program Structure**

Exploring the specific programs and resources that support student health and wellbeing at Hillside was an explicit goal at the outset of this study. Participants pointed to particular aspects of Hillside’s program as essential to the health and wellbeing of students. Students and staff identified the co-curricular and athletic program, outdoor education, designated staff positions, and the leadership program as cornerstones for healthy student development.

Nearly every participant I interviewed expressed that the vast array of co-curricular and athletic options available at Hillside propelled students on a positive trajectory of development. Students liked to be busy and widely involved. The school website stated that “involvement in student activities enhances the quality of school life, discourages cynicism and encourages a more engaged and dynamic approach to human affairs.” Students further valued that participation in athletics was mandated. Jess, a female boarder, indicated that, when she opted for a term off from sports (Grade 12 seniors are permitted to take one term off from
sports), she had become bored and her academic standing had suffered. Several students acknowledged the value of team camaraderie, making new friends, and escaping stress or academic pressures through sport. Staff unanimously reported that Hillside’s varied co-curricular and mandatory athletic programs were vehicles for the social, physical, and mental wellbeing of students.

In the 40 developmental assets for adolescents, spending time in creative activities and youth programs were identified as building blocks for healthy youth development (Search Institute, 2006). Creative activities included music, theatre, or other arts (Search Institute, 2006). Youth programs referred to sports, clubs, or school organizations (Search Institute, 2006). Thurber et al. (2007) found multidimensional growth in young people exposed to new activities at camp. Hillside students complemented these findings when they revealed how fortunate they were to have had access to visual arts, drama and dance, music and choir, debating, and sports. Opportunities for participation in a vast array of activities helped Hillside students become healthy and stay engaged, and contributed to the development of character and positive wellbeing.

Primarily male students and several staff I interviewed valued the place of outdoor education in the school curriculum. Outdoor education (OE) at Hillside was an extension of one of the founding principles of the school; that a student’s educational experience should extend beyond the classroom. OE courses were singled out for pushing comfort zones, encouraging team building, and fostering decision-making skills. Tim and Jeff, day students, shared that they were so positively impacted by OE that they had decided to pursue post-secondary studies in the field of OE and Kinesiology. Robert reflected on his experience in a Grade
OE crisis simulation. Being confronted with injured victims in the forest required Robert to draw on first aid knowledge, crisis management, communication, and problem-solving skills. Working through challenging OE lessons seemed to build student confidence and wellbeing in immeasurable ways. Health education lessons, however, which were embedded within OE courses, were not highlighted as a necessary or vital aspect of the curriculum. In fact, student reflections on health education lessons were either absent, or students noted that those classes had been ineffectual. Jess, a female boarding student, remembered that a Sexually Transmitted Infection lesson in Grade 9 was received by students in her class at the time, as a bit of a joke.

At Hillside, staff and students recognized that the programs and resources that positively influenced student development were happening outside the realm of traditional health education classes (Joint Consortium for School Health, 2010; Shain, 2005). Unique outdoor education resources and activities, such as canoeing and high ropes elements, combined with personal and interpersonal development through interactions with the natural environment, addressed foundations of comprehensive school health (Joint Consortium for School Health). Research furthermore has linked outdoor experiential programs to bolstered developmental assets within young people (Scales, 2000; Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007).

Specific staff positions were singled out by participants as assets for positive youth development. Hillside College seemed to have an endless array of complex staff systems designated for student support academically, socially, physically, and mentally. Female residential students spoke affectionately about
the support they had received from academic advisors. Natasha explained that an academic advisor was a “teacher that really cares about you and really keeps an eye on you” (FRFG, Natasha, p. 30). Students noted the School Chaplain, guidance counsellors, health centre staff, and the Dean of Students as designated staff for their support. Staff members classified many of these roles as part of the School Life Team, a group of staff who worked cooperatively on a daily basis to support individual student health and wellbeing. The Dean of Students was especially viewed as indispensable. The Dean of Students, who was interviewed, remarked that she was always there to help students mourn the loss of a family member or work through a parental divorce.

The Search Institute (2006) has acknowledged other adult relationships as an external developmental asset. Hillside has instituted networks of specific adults at the school to promote and support the physical, mental, and social health of the whole school community. By ensuring a policy of assigned staff for the support of youth wellbeing and health, Hillside can be defined as a healthy school, according to the Ontario Public Health Association (2009).

Leadership opportunities and student empowerment at Hillside were perceived as powerful ingredients for student wellbeing and development. Key pillars of the Grade 12 leadership program at HCS were leadership, service, and accountability. Grade 12 students were expected to model citizenship and spirit for younger students. Leadership was structured throughout the school through a Grade 12 leadership class, through seniors being in charge of various aspects of school life such as the library and athletics, and through a grade representative program for all ages. Leadership opportunities required cooperation,
communication, decision-making, role modelling, and responsibility. Mitch, a day student, remembered looking up to his Grade 12 seniors in awe. Mitch valued their school-wide involvement and how they fostered school spirit through events and pep rallies. Krista, a boarder, recalled the demands and importance of organizing a school-wide game of stealth (finding a hidden car on campus) to build community morale. Furthermore, students and staff supported the involvement of student leaders in discipline committee meetings. Empowering young people to lead in the school, mentor younger students, act rambunctiously and build spirit, and uphold school values enhanced the wellbeing of the entire student body.

Two additional themes became apparent during interviews. Kim, a day student, Mr. Tunny, and Ms. Colton, each raised the importance of community service involvement. They valued that Hillside encouraged students to help others as a way of life. Also, staff members believed clear boundaries and accountabilities upheld community values and elevated overall student wellbeing. Mr. Tunny spoke emphatically about a student who had been in a fight with another student, and whom he would not allow to attend the graduation after party. Mr. Tunny was willing to override parental acquiescence to uphold the values of the school community.

Leadership opportunities and independence were key assets for young people’s development in a camp setting (Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007). Engaging young people in leadership responsibilities and opportunities has additionally been established as a valuable asset that predicts thriving among adolescents (Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2006; Scales,
Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Empowerment is in its own category of external assets in the Search Institute’s 40 developmental assets (Search Institute, 2006). Hillside’s leadership program placed young people in responsible roles in their school community and complemented the category of empowerment. Furthermore, service to others, as stressed at Hillside, is widely accepted as a foundation for positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2006).

**Small and Comfortable School Setting**

Hillside’s small and comfortable school setting was viewed by participants as the backbone for overall positive student health and wellbeing. The school campus resembled a camp setting with interconnected classrooms, gyms, offices, and residences. Every structure was inviting and home-like. When I reviewed the interview transcripts, what became evident was the emphasis on a student-centered school community; a school culture focused on the care, comfort, and well-rounded education of students. At HCS, a student-centered community was enacted through small school size, peer connections, and caring staff-student relations.

The small school population at Hillside was valued by all participants. Students acknowledged that, even though living in a small community bred strained relations and gossip, the benefits far outweighed the challenges. Participants described a tight-knit community of staff and students that formed a basis for close relationships, trust, and connectedness. Everyone seemed to know
one another at the school. Mr. Cameron and Dr. Dupont attributed the school policy of intentionally low student-to-staff ratios to a comfortable school climate.

McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002) proposed that young people were healthier and happier when their school size was small. Participants in their study concurred with the importance of a small school size that enhanced adolescent development (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). Research in the field of positive youth development and developmental assets has long supported that, when adolescents feel that they belong in a community, they are less likely to become involved in health-compromising behaviours (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczal, & Hawkings, 2004; Leffert et al., 1998; Scales et al., 2000). Scales et al. (2000) recommended that future research find out more about developmental assets. The participants in the current study have revealed that a small school population may bring interconnectedness, safety, trust, and community.

The peer culture at Hillside was treasured foremost for the support network provided by friends. Sarah, a female boarder, declared that she was “closer to my friends than I am my actual family” (FRFG, Sarah, p. 21). Mr. Cameron explained that students often came forward to staff members with concerns about friends. Peer connections were also esteemed for the opportunity of having learned through friends’ experiences or mistakes. A connected and supportive peer culture was deemed crucial to student wellbeing and healthy development.

Peer relationships have been acknowledged within the research literature as both a risk and resource for the health and wellbeing of young people (Leffert
et al., 1998; Vesely et al., 2004; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Students and staff involved in this study extrapolated further understanding about positive peer relationships. Their views have added meaning to the Search Institute’s classified external developmental asset of positive peer support (young person’s best friend models responsible behaviour) (Search Institute, 2006). Additionally, students in this study shared that they valued the times when they learned through the irresponsible behaviour of their peers. Students and staff added that peer support came from friends who could provide advice or a listening ear, and who looked out for one another. The Search Institute (2006) does not include peers under their broad external assets category of support. Family and other adults are included, but participants in this study indicated that peers were a vital support network.

All of the students interviewed took the opportunity to tell me about how important caring and considerate staff members were to their sense of wellbeing. The level of respect for Hillside staff was extremely high. Students valued the casual and friendly approach of staff, and often commented about how comfortable they felt talking to teachers. On a number of occasions, students stated that there were staff members to whom they could turn for emotional support on issues such as body image or peer conflicts. Students appreciated that staff had high expectations of them, and were holistically involved in their lives. Robert, a male boarder, spoke highly of one staff member and praised that “he was my advisor, my OE teacher, and my rugby coach” (MRFG, Robert, p. 13). Staff members were extremely passionate about their role in fostering student wellbeing through care, support, and listening. Mr. Cameron, Mr. Tunny, and Ms.
Colton were also emphatic that healthy and balanced staff members made for healthier students. Mr. Tunny was adamant that feeling personally satisfied and being actively involved in cross-country skiing and paddling enhanced his ability to connect with students. Ms. Colton made it clear that her role included being available to staff members when they needed to unload emotionally, so that staff members could be more present and balanced for students.

Caring staff members at Hillside were referred to time and again as a powerful medium for student wellbeing. The Search Institute (2006) has named other adults as an external developmental asset. Studies have examined the important role of non-parental adults on building developmental assets in adolescents (Rhodes, 2002; Scales, 1996, 2000). McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002), for example, established that, when students feel cared for at school, they are less likely to engage in compromising behaviours. Staff members in this study also pointed out the necessity for maintaining personal balance and emotional wellbeing for the benefit of students. Similarly, Rowling (2009) and Mason and Rowling (2005) acknowledged that the wellbeing of staff was a necessary conduit for the mental health and wellbeing of students.

**Summary**

Through a diverse range of intended programs, resources, staff support, and experiences with a student-centered emphasis, participants in this study described a school that has developed a culture aimed at supporting and elevating the healthy development and wellbeing of young people. It became clear throughout the study that Hillside College is a school that has adopted a holistic
approach to the healthy development of students. HCS offered a climate where health and wellbeing were positively infused in the day-to-day life of its students. From students gathered together in a residential common room on Tuesday nights watching Glee, to the Grade 12 students leading a pep rally in the gym, to the short but friendly greeting of a science teacher, every moment and each experience seemed to build young people’s overall sense of self and wellbeing. In the words of Mr. Tunny: “You don't buy in because of the pretty uniforms, or the freshly mown field, or the ivy coloured whatever, you buy in at a deeper level” (MS2, Tunny, p. 60). Overall, students and staff connected me to a school with a deep commitment to student health through its residential environment, program structure, and small and comfortable setting.

Limitations

There were five notable limitations to this study: researcher bias, setting, short time frame, age of student participants, and the absence of opportunity to conduct additional one-on-one interviews with students. The method for collecting data for this study specifically aimed to gather evidence about the particular assets within a school setting that strengthened the health and wellbeing of young people. As such, it was paramount that participants were asked specific questions in interviews about what bolstered their wellbeing at their school. Students and staff were asked one question about the challenges to issues of health and wellbeing in their school setting, but this data was not presented as a separate theme, as I chose to remain focused on the research goal of noting positive external developmental assets identified by participants. Assets
acknowledged by participants such as motivation through competition with peers, or learning to live with others in a residential setting were both positive and negative (a contradiction noted on pages 45 and 57). Nonetheless, the data strongly supports the fact that participant interpretation and beliefs about those drawbacks demonstrated that some challenges of identified assets actually contributed positively to their wellbeing. An entirely complementary study could have been conducted about the obstacles and negative assets faced by students and staff at Hillside College; however, it was the researcher’s decision to keep the focus of the study on the goal of highlighting positive external assets for young people. Scales, Benson, Leffert, and Blyth (2000) noted the importance of examining adolescent perceptions about what is positive for their wellbeing and stated that “to understand thriving it is necessary to disentangle the various contextual niches in which adolescents’ lives are embedded” (p. 41). Furthermore, Scales, Benson, Leffert, and Blyth capitulated that “less research has examined the ‘pile up’ or cumulative impact of positive features of the environment across multiple developmental contexts” (p. 41).

This context for this study was an independent, predominantly residential school setting— a specific and unique educational venue. The total student body at Hillside College includes two-thirds residential students. This setting does not lend itself to replication, but did reveal unique insights in response to the research goals of this study.

The data collection took place over a period of approximately two months, at the end of the school year. Gathering data from students and staff over the course of an entire school year might have revealed more about students’
changing attitudes and opinions and the importance of particular external assets at the school. The students and staff at the time of interviews and focus groups were in a year-end mode, and participants in general seemed to be nostalgic about the nearing graduation and leaving Hillside. Collecting data at different stages throughout the year, to compare student and staff perceptions as they related to the seasonality of school terms, might have produced varied results, but was beyond the scope of the study. It would also have been beneficial to compare perceptions with more international students, newer students, and students in other grade levels. Scales, Benson, Leffert, and Blyth (2000) found that “younger and older students experience somewhat different thriving patterns” (p. 41).

Finally, detailed accounts of individual student experiences were not probed in one-on-one interviews due to time constraints. Healthy development in adolescents generally follows a pattern of milestones that are uniquely demarcated, and individual experiences/journeys are deeply personal. Focus groups allowed for a great deal of student participation and reinforcement of general themes, but additional one-on-one interviews might have afforded opportunities to explore deeper insights and explanations about external assets as they related to each personal student experience.

**Implications for Future Research**

The findings of this study successfully explored the initial purpose for my thesis research. Many aspects of external developmental assets at work in a school setting, from the perspectives of both students and staff, were investigated. This research reminds educators, parents, and anyone with vested interests in the
healthy development of young people attending secondary school, that every experience and each interaction a student has in the arena of a school matters. Student and staff accounts of personal experiences reminded me about the essential ingredients of a healthy school. It is my hope that this qualitative study has highlighted elements at one school that can contribute positively to overall student health and wellbeing in other schools. Hillside College students and staff have reported external assets conducive to thriving in adolescence, and participants have re-enforced the role that schools have in making a holistic and synergistic difference in the lives of young people.

The perceptions and ideas of participants have added further understanding about healthy youth development, developmental assets, and information for the needs of learners in other educational settings. However, there are new lines of inquiry that can be derived from this study. This research did not ask parents or guardians about developmental assets in schools, and it would be interesting to find out the aspects of school that parents believe contribute to their child’s wellbeing. It would also be interesting to conduct focus groups that included international students and students in other grades. It would be interesting to compare and contrast a Grade 9 view with a Grade 12 view. Exploring the perceptions of international residential students might shed new light on the meaning of developmental assets. It would also be helpful to investigate, explore, and understand more about developmental assets in other settings such as public secondary schools, a single-sex school, or a Montessori school, since it is clear that context plays a meaningful role in the interpretation of
external developmental assets. Finally, the findings suggest that more needs to be established with regard to the meaning of developmental assets to young people.

**Implications for Practice**

It is widely accepted that simple actions within schools can work to enhance external assets. The findings of this study have the potential for practical application and implementation in a variety of educational settings. Many positive external developmental assets could be generated through simple and no-cost innovations that featured prominently in the descriptions of school characteristics shared by participants in this study. For example, one practical undertaking to enhance caring staff-student relationships in schools could involve the practice of having teachers rotate hallway duties during transition periods in the school routine. Teachers working hallway duty would only have one obligation: to greet students moving from one class to another and to demonstrate an interest in the day to day lives of individual students.

Participants involved in this study noted that when students are asked about themselves and feel recognized, their wellbeing and healthy development is strengthened. Energetic and passionate educators in schools already cheer students on and promote safe and caring environments, and this study has reiterated the importance of caring staff and student exchanges. Opportunities exist within current school environments however, to continue building external assets. This study demonstrated that mandatory athletic programs and/or a variety of available clubs and co-curricular activities in school programs enhanced the wellbeing of young people at Hillside College. Results from this research study
showed that both staff and students benefit from joint participation in supplementary programs for young people. Simple steps can be taken within schools to add programs for young people. For example, motivated teachers and senior students in a school could launch a lunch hour initiative whereby all students are invited to participate in outdoor and experiential activities, group dynamics exercises, and cooperative games. This type of program could add to the physical and mental health of students, involve students of all ages, and contribute to positive interactions among staff members and students. Implementing activities and initiatives like this in schools can build and strengthen assets important to the wellbeing of young people.

**Final Thoughts**

This study has provided one example of a school that has placed the overall health and wellbeing of students as a school-wide priority. It is the sum of experiences on the sports field, conversations with a caring teacher, or arguments with a roommate that participants valued as assets for the healthy development of young people. There is no written curriculum at Hillside for the pillars of athletics, academics, and co-curricular arts that are considered to be core components and “more than just lessons” (school website). The positive development of youth at HCS is an experience delivered to students developed by caring and engaged staff members who truly believe in the education of the mind, body, and spirit.

The culmination of this research has resonated with me for several personal reasons. The task of writing a thesis has positively impacted my own
sense of self and wellbeing. I originally embarked on graduate studies because of a professional mandate. The desire to pursue a Master of Education degree was driven by professional needs and the urge to attain certifications necessary for applying for administrative roles within the school where I was working. Initially graduate studies were seen as a means to an end. I have grown as a graduate student in countless ways, and in tandem with many life-changes. The graduate studies experience has transformed into a personal journey. Much like the students at Hillside, I have benefitted from layers of support and guidance from faculty who wholeheartedly view graduate work as a non-linear experience. This thesis is no longer a means to an end. It has become a rewarding personal experience that has taught me a great deal about reciprocity, listening, and truly hearing the voice of my participants and my committee members. Mirroring the words of Mr. Tunny, I too have learned to buy in at a much deeper level.
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Samdal, O. (1998). The school environment as a risk or resource for students' health-related behaviours and subjective wellbeing. Research Centre for Health Promotion, of Bergen, Norway.


APPENDIX A: DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS FOR ADOLESCENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Family support—Family life provides high levels of love and support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Positive family communication—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Other adult relationships—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Caring neighborhood—Young person experiences caring neighbors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Caring school climate—School provides a caring, encouraging environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Parent involvement in schooling—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Empowerment</th>
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<tr>
<td>7. Community values youth—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Youth as resources—Young people are given useful roles in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Service to others—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Safety—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.</td>
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<th>Boundaries &amp; Expectations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Family boundaries—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. School Boundaries—School provides clear rules and consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Adult role models—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Positive peer influence—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. High expectations—Both parent(s) and teacher encourage the young person to do well.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Constructive Use of Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>17. Creative activities—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Youth programs—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Religious community—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Time at home—Young person is out with friends “with nothing special to do” two or fewer nights per week.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Commitment to Learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. Achievement Motivation—Young person is motivated to do well in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. School Engagement—Young person is actively engaged in learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Homework—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Bonding to school—Young person cares about her or his school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Reading for Pleasure—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Positive Values</th>
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<tr>
<td>26. Caring—Young person places high value on helping other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Equality and social justice—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Integrity—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Honesty—Young person tells the truth even when it is not easy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Responsibility—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Restraint—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.</td>
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<th>Social Competencies</th>
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<tr>
<td>32. Planning and decision making—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Interpersonal competence—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Cultural competence—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Resistance skills—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Peaceful conflict resolution—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Positive Identity</th>
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<tr>
<td>37. Personal power—Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>38. Self-esteem—Young person reports having a high self-esteem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Sense of purpose—Young person reports that “my life has a purpose.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>40. Positive view of personal future—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.</td>
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APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT EMAIL FOR STAFF INTERVIEWS

“Promoting the healthy development of young people: The developmental assets of a school as seen through the eyes of its staff members and students.”

RECRUITMENT EMAIL INVITATION FOR STAFF INTERVIEWS

My name is Ally O’Grady, and I am a Master’s student at the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study that I am conducting. This research will contribute to my Master’s thesis, under the supervision of Dr. Lynda Colgan. The research you are invited to participate in will be an individual interview on the topic of how the healthy development of young people is promoted at [school name]. This study was granted clearance by the General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans,” and Queen’s policies.

The purpose of this study is to describe the ways in which a school contributes to the healthy development of its students. To do this, I am planning to conduct several focus group interviews with Grade 12 students, and individual interviews with four staff members. The interview will allow you to discuss your views about the ways in which you believe your school contributes to the healthy development of students.

The interview will be conducted at a time, and in a private location on the school campus that is convenient for you. The interview will be approximately 60 minutes in length.

I intend to publish the findings of the study in professional journals and report them at conferences. At no time will the actual identity of the participants be disclosed, and confidentiality is guaranteed to the extent possible. If at this point, or any point in the future, you have any questions about this research study, you should feel free to contact me, Ally O’Grady, M.Ed. student, Faculty of Education, Queen’s University (0abs@queensu.ca, 705-652-1515).

If you would like to volunteer to participate in an individual interview for this study, please respond by e-mail to Ally O’Grady at 0abs@queensu.ca at your earliest convenience. If you decide to volunteer and respond by e-mail, you will then receive an additional e-mail with further details about the research as well as a Consent form.

Sincerely,

Ally O’Grady
Please write your email or postal address at the bottom of this sheet so I am able to contact you with the study results.
email or postal address: __________________________
APPENDIX D: EMAIL OF INFORMATION AND ADDITIONAL CONSENT FORM FOR STAFF INTERVIEWS

Email of Information

Hello [staff participant name],

Thank-you for your participation last year in an individual interview on the topic of how the healthy development and wellbeing of young people is promoted at [school name]. In the original letter of information and consent, you agreed to a verbatim transcription of the interview that would conceal your identity and the identity of people you mention throughout the course of that interview by using fictitious names.

I have attached a section of my thesis where a series of quotes are used to present the viewpoints of female/male staff at [school name]. In order to add detail to this section I have referred to staff roles with descriptors and titles. I am sending this attachment for your review as I am seeking a change to the original consent form for the interview.

I am seeking permission to add position titles and job descriptors to some pseudonyms. You may be identifiable to colleagues or students due to this change. You have the option to decide whether or not you would like to grant permission for this change through an additional consent form. I have placed the additional consent form in your mailbox in the staffroom. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Ally O'Grady
Additional Consent Form for Staff Interviews

“Promoting the healthy development of young people: The developmental assets of a school as seen through the eyes of its staff members and students.”

I have read sections of the research study and transcripts of my individual interview, and I understand that my participation in the interview was voluntary. I am comfortable that the information I have provided was treated as confidential. I understand that the interview transcription was used as data for analysis in the research study. I support the use of job titles and position descriptors in the final written sections of the research study.

Please sign one copy of this consent form and return to Allyson O'Grady. Retain the second copy for your records.

Participant’s name: ____________________________
Signature: ____________________________
Date: ____________________________

I grant permission for job titles and position descriptors to be used in written sections of the study

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<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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Any questions about study participation may be directed to Ally O’Grady, M.Ed. student, Faculty of Education, Queen’s University (0abs@queensu.ca, 705-872-1627). Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Ethics Review Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.
APPENDIX E: RECRUITMENT ANNOUNCEMENT FOR GRADE 12 STUDENTS

“Promoting the healthy development of young people: The developmental assets of a school as seen through the eyes of its staff members and students.”

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR ANNOUNCEMENT AND INVITATION TO GRADE 12 STUDENTS

Hello, my name is Ally O’Grady, and I am a Master’s student at the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University. I am here to invite you to participate in a research study that I am conducting. This research will contribute to my Master’s thesis, under the supervision of Dr. Lynda Colgan. The research you are invited to participate in will be a group interview, on the topic of how the healthy development of young people is promoted at [school name].

The purpose of this study is to describe the ways in which a school contributes to the healthy development of its students. To do this, I am planning to conduct focus group interviews which will involve 6 to 8 students in four separate groups. The groups will be divided by gender and whether or not you are a day student or a residential student. The purpose of the focus group interview is to allow you to discuss your views about the ways in which you believe your school contributes to the healthy development and wellbeing of students. You are invited to take part in this study because I am hoping to learn from you about the resources at your school you consider important for being healthy. This could be an interesting opportunity for you to participate in University research at the graduate level and to learn more about your own personal health and development.

The focus group interview will be conducted at a time that is convenient to all who are invited. The location will be at the school in a neutral, inviting, and comfortable space. The focus group interview will be moderated by me, and will be approximately 60 minutes in length. At no time will the actual identity of the participants be disclosed, and confidentiality is guaranteed to the extent possible.

Following this meeting, you will be receiving an e-mail which includes additional details and information about this research study; it is called a Letter of Information and also includes a Consent form.

If you are interested in participating, please follow the instructions in this letter and please e-mail me to let me know that you would like to volunteer. Parents or guardians of the students who volunteer will also be receiving the Letter of Information and Consent.
If at this point, or any point in the future, you have any questions about this research study, you should feel free to contact me, and these contact details can be found in the Letter of Information and Consent to follow.

I look forward to your interest in participating, and thank-you for taking the time to hear me today. Have a wonderful day.
APPENDIX F: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

FOR STUDENTS

Letter of Information for Students

“Promoting the healthy development of young people: The developmental assets of a school as seen through the eyes of its staff members and students.”

Dear Grade 12 Students,

My name is Ally O’Grady, and I am a Master’s student at the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University. This letter is an invitation to participate in a research study that I am conducting. This research will contribute to my Master’s thesis, under the supervision of Dr. Lynda Colgan. The research you are invited to participate in will be a group interview on the topic of how the healthy development and wellbeing of young people is promoted at [school name]. This study was granted clearance by the General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans,” and Queen’s policies.

The purpose of this study is to describe the ways in which a school contributes to the healthy development of its students. To do this, I am planning to conduct focus group interviews which will involve 7 students in four separate groups. The groups will be divided by gender and whether or not you are a day student or a residential student. The purpose of the focus group interview is to allow you to discuss your views about the ways in which you believe your school contributes to the healthy development and wellbeing of students. You are invited to take part in this study because I am hoping to learn from you about the resources at your school you consider important for being healthy.

The focus group interview will be conducted at a time that is convenient for you. The location will be at the school in a neutral, inviting, and comfortable space. The focus group interview will be moderated by me, and will be approximately 60 minutes in length. You are requested not to discuss the content of the focus group discussion outside of the group. In addition, my thesis supervisor will be present as a note-taker and will take notes to make a written record of the sequence of questions and answers. These notes will be written up and maintained as a computer file. The focus group interviews will be audio-recorded on a digital audio file, and transcribed verbatim. The audio recording will be destroyed after five years in accordance with Queen’s University policy. The verbatim transcription of the interview will conceal your identity and the identity of people you might mention through the course of the focus group interview by using fictitious names. The entire transcription will be analyzed for data involved in the research study. The portions of the transcriptions that are used directly in the
thesis will be presented with all identifying features (e.g. location of your school) removed. Data will be secured and confidentiality can be guaranteed to the extent possible. Data will be secured in a locked office, and the transcripts will be destroyed after five years in accordance with Queen’s University policy.

After your participation in the focus group study, you will also have an opportunity to send any further thoughts, comments or questions using my email 0abs@queensu.ca. I will also provide you with a copy of the transcription for comment and clarification. You may request removal of all or part of your data by contacting the researcher via email or telephone. Any removed data will be destroyed immediately.

In asking you to participate in this focus group interview, be assured that you may choose not to answer any question that you find objectionable or that makes you uncomfortable in any way. There are no foreseeable risks, and your participation is entirely voluntary. It is possible that some interview questions could be viewed as sensitive or personal issues related to adolescent health and wellbeing. You may withdraw from the focus group interview at any time, without pressure or consequence of any kind. Counselling support will be available through the school health centre. Only those student participants with signed parent/guardian consent forms will participate. The list of participants will be developed well in advance of the focus groups, and eligible participants will be contacted about the time and date of the focus group.

I intend to publish the findings of the study in my master’s thesis and in professional journals and to report them at conferences. At no time will the actual identity of the participants be disclosed. Only the thesis supervisor and I will have access to raw data. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms (fictitious names) and these only will be used in publications. If the data are made available to other researchers for secondary analysis, your identity will never be disclosed.

If at this point, or any point in the future, you have any questions about this research study, you should feel free to contact Ally O’Grady, M.Ed. student, Faculty of Education, Queen’s University (0abs@queensu.ca, 705-872-1627).

Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Ethics Review Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

If you would like to participate in this research, please email confirmation to Ally O’Grady at 0abs@queensu.ca.

Yours Sincerely,

Ally O’Grady
Consent Form for Students

“Promoting the healthy development of young people: The developmental assets of a school as seen through the eyes of its staff members and students.”

The purpose of this study is to describe the ways in which a school contributes to the healthy development of its students. If you are willing to participate in the focus group interview with me for approximately 60 minutes, as described in the letter on the previous page, please follow the instructions below.

I have read the description of the research study and focus group interview on the letter of information and retained a copy of the letter for my records. My questions have been answered, and I understand that my participation in the focus group interview is voluntary, that I may withdraw at any time, that the information I provide will be treated as confidential, and that my identity will be protected. I understand that the focus group interview transcription will be used as data for analysis in the research study.

I understand that I will not be expected to answer any questions that might make me feel uncomfortable or that I find objectionable. I am aware that I may withdraw from the interview at any time without pressure or consequence. I have been notified that I may request the removal of all or part of my data without any consequences to myself. I have also been told the steps that will be taken to ensure confidentiality to the extent possible of all information.

Please sign one copy of this consent form and return to Allyson O’Grady. Retain the second copy for your records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s name:</th>
<th>______________________</th>
<th>Signature:</th>
<th>______________________</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>______________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I grant permission for audiotaped recordings of me to be used during data analysis</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Initial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I grant permission for any of my raw data to be used in the future for secondary analysis.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Initial</td>
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Any questions about study participation may be directed to Ally O’Grady, M.Ed. student, Faculty of Education, Queen’s University (0abs@queensu.ca, 705-872-1627). Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Ethics Review Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.
APPENDIX G: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

FOR PARENT/GUARDIAN

Letter of Information for Parent/Guardian

“Promoting the healthy development of young people: The developmental assets of a school as seen through the eyes of its staff members and students.”

Dear [Name of parent/guardian],

My name is Ally O’Grady, and I am a Master’s student at the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University. Your son/daughter has expressed an interest in participating in a research study that I am conducting. This research will contribute to my Master’s thesis, under the supervision of Dr. Lynda Colgan. The research your son/daughter will participate in will be a group interview on the topic of how the healthy development and wellbeing of young people is promoted at [school name]. This study was granted clearance by the General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans,” and Queen’s policies.

The purpose of this study is to describe the ways in which a school contributes to the healthy development of its students. To do this, I am planning to conduct focus group interviews which will involve 7 students in four separate groups. The groups will be divided by gender and whether or not your son/daughter is a day student or a residential student. The purpose of the focus group interview is to allow students to discuss their views about the ways in which they believe their school contributes to the healthy development of students.

The focus group interview will be conducted at a time that is convenient for your son/daughter. The location will be at the school in a neutral, inviting, and comfortable space. The focus group interview will be moderated by me, and will be approximately 60 minutes in length. Participants are requested not to discuss the content of the focus group discussion outside of the group. In addition, my thesis supervisor will be present as a note-taker and will take notes to make a written record of the sequence of questions and answers. These notes will be written up and maintained as a computer file. The focus group interviews will be audio-recorded on a digital audio file, and transcribed verbatim. The audio recording will be destroyed after five years in accordance with Queen’s University policy. The verbatim transcription of the interview will conceal your son/daughters’ identity and the identity of people they might mention through the course of the focus group interview by using fictitious names. The entire transcription will be analyzed for data involved in the research study. The portions of the transcriptions that are used directly in the thesis will be presented with all identifying features (e.g. location of your school) removed. Data will be secured
and confidentiality can be guaranteed to the extent possible. Data will be secured in a locked office, and the transcripts will be destroyed after five years in accordance with Queen’s University policy.

After their participation in the focus group study, your son/daughter will also have an opportunity to send any further thoughts, comments or questions using my email 0abs@queensu.ca. I will also provide your son/daughter with a copy of the transcription for comment and clarification. Your son/daughter may request removal of all or part of their data by contacting the researcher via email or telephone. Any removed data will be destroyed immediately.

In asking your son/daughter to participate in this focus group interview, be assured that they may choose not to answer any question that they find objectionable or that makes them uncomfortable in any way. There are no foreseeable risks, and their participation is entirely voluntary. It is possible that some interview questions could be viewed as sensitive or personal issues related to adolescent health and wellbeing. Counselling support will be available through the school health centre. Also, your son/daughter may withdraw from the focus group interview at any time, without pressure or consequence of any kind. You also have the option to withdraw consent for your son/daughter’s participation at any time. Only those student participants with signed consent forms from you will participate. The list of participants will be developed well in advance of the focus groups, and eligible participants will be contacted about the time and date of the focus group.

I intend to publish the findings of the study in professional journals and report them at conferences. At no time will the actual identity of the participants be disclosed. Only the thesis supervisor and I will have access to raw data. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms and these only will be used in publications. If the data are made available to other researchers for secondary analysis, your son/daughter’s identity will never be disclosed.

If at this point, or any point in the future, you have any questions about this research study, you should feel free to contact Ally O’Grady, M.Ed. student, Faculty of Education, Queen’s University (0abs@queensu.ca, 705-872-1627).

Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Ethics Review Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

If you would like your son/daughter to participate in this research, please email confirmation to Ally O’Grady at 0abs@queensu.ca. In addition, please return the consent form below using the return envelope and postage provided.

Yours Sincerely,

Ally O’Grady
Consent Form for Parent/Guardian

“Promoting the healthy development of young people: The developmental assets of a school as seen through the eyes of its staff members and students.”

If you are willing to allow your son/daughter to participate in the focus group interview with me for approximately 60 minutes, as described in the letter on the previous page, please follow the instructions below.

I have read the description of the research study and focus group interview on the letter of information and retained a copy of the letter for my records. My questions have been answered, and I understand that my son/daughters’ participation in the focus group interview is voluntary, that they may withdraw at any time, that the information they provide will be treated as confidential, and that their identity will be protected. I understand that the focus group interview transcription will be used as data for analysis in the research study.

I understand that my son/daughter will not be expected to answer any questions that might make them feel uncomfortable or that they find objectionable. I am aware that my son/daughter may withdraw from the interview at any time without pressure or consequence. I have been notified that my son/daughter may request the removal of all or part of their data without any consequences. I have also been told the steps that will be taken to ensure confidentiality to the extent possible of all information.

Please sign one copy of this consent form and return to Allyson O’Grady. Retain the second copy for your records.

Participant’s name: ____________________________

Signature: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________

| I grant permission for audiotaped recordings of my son or daughter to be used during data analysis. | YES | NO | Initial |
| I grant permission for any of son or daughter’s raw data to be used in the future for secondary analysis. | YES | NO | Initial |

Any questions about study participation may be directed to Ally O’Grady, M.Ed. student, Faculty of Education, Queen’s University (0abs@queensu.ca, 705-872-1627). Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Ethics Review Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca. Please write your email or postal address at the bottom of this sheet so I am able to contact you with the study results.

email or postal address: ____________________________
APPENDIX H: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM
FOR STAFF

Letter of Information for Staff

“Promoting the healthy development of young people: The developmental assets of a school as seen through the eyes of its staff members and students.”

Dear [Name of Staff Member],

My name is Ally O’Grady, and I am a Master’s student at the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University. I am writing to request your participation in a research study that I am conducting. This research will contribute to my Master’s thesis, under the supervision of Dr. Lynda Colgan. The research you are asked to participate in will be an individual interview on the topic of how the healthy development and wellbeing of young people is promoted at [school name]. This study was granted clearance by the General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans,” and Queen’s policies.

The purpose of this study is to describe the ways in which a school contributes to the healthy development of its students. To do this, I am planning to conduct several focus group interviews with Grade 12 students, and individual interviews with four staff members. The interview will allow you to discuss your views about the ways in which you believe your school contributes to the healthy development of students.

The interview will be conducted at a time, and in a private location on the school campus that is convenient for you. The interview will be approximately 60 minutes in length. I will be making a written record of the sequence of questions and answers. These notes will be written up and maintained as a computer file. The interview will be audio-recorded on a digital audio file, and transcribed verbatim. The audio recording will be destroyed after five years in accordance with Queen’s University policy. The verbatim transcription of the interview will conceal your identity and the identity of people you might mention through the course of the interview by using fictitious names. The entire transcription will be analyzed for data involved in the research study. The portions of the transcriptions that are used directly in the thesis will be presented with all identifying features (e.g. location of your place of work) removed. Data will be secured and confidentiality can be guaranteed to the extent possible. Data will be secured in a locked office, and the transcripts will be destroyed after five years in accordance with Queen’s University policy.
After your participation in the interview, you will also have an opportunity to send any further thoughts, comments or questions using my email, 0abs@queensu.ca. I will also provide you with a copy of the transcription for comment and clarification. You may request removal of all or part of your data by contacting the researcher via email or telephone. Any removed data will be destroyed immediately.

In asking you to participate in this individual interview, be assured that you may choose not to answer any question that you find objectionable or that makes you uncomfortable in any way. There are no foreseeable risks, and your participation is entirely voluntary. Also, you may withdraw from the interview at any time, without pressure or consequence of any kind.

I intend to publish the findings of the study in professional journals and report them at conferences. At no time will the actual identity of the participants be disclosed. Only the thesis supervisor and I will have access to raw data. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms and these only will be used in publications. If the data are made available to other researchers for secondary analysis, your identity will never be disclosed.

Any questions about study participation may be directed to Ally O’Grady, M.Ed. student, Faculty of Education, Queen’s University (0abs@queensu.ca, 705-872-1627). Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Ethics Review Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

If you would like to participate in this research, please email confirmation to Ally O’Grady at 0abs@queensu.ca.

Yours Sincerely,

Ally O’Grady
Consent Form for Staff

“Promoting the healthy development of young people: The developmental assets of a school as seen through the eyes of its staff members and students.”

If you are willing to participate in the individual interview with me for approximately 60 minutes, as described in the letter on the previous page, please follow the instructions below. The purpose of this study is to describe the ways in which a school contributes to the healthy development of its students.

I have read the description of the research study and interview on the letter of information and retained a copy of the letter for my records. My questions have been answered, and I understand that my participation in the interview is voluntary, that I may withdraw at any time, that the information I provide will be treated as confidential, and that my identity will be protected. I understand that the interview transcription will be used as data for analysis in the research study.

I understand that I will not be expected to answer any questions that might make me feel uncomfortable or that I find objectionable. I am aware that I may withdraw from the interview at any time without pressure or consequence. I have been notified that I may request the removal of all or part of my data without any consequences to myself. I have also been told the steps that will be taken to ensure confidentiality to the extent possible of all information.

Please sign one copy of this consent form and return to Allyson O’Grady. Retain the second copy for your records.

| Participant’s name: | __________________________ |
| Signature:           | __________________________ |
| Date:               | __________________________ |

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<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>Initial</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I grant permission for audiotaped recordings of me to be used during data analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I grant permission for any of my raw data to be used in the future for secondary analysis.</td>
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Any questions about study participation may be directed to Ally O’Grady, M.Ed. student, Faculty of Education, Queen’s University (0abs@queensu.ca, 705-872-1627). Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Ethics Review Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

Please write your email or postal address at the bottom of this sheet so I am able to contact you with the study results.

email or postal address: __________________________
APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

“Promoting the healthy development of young people: The developmental assets of a school as seen through the eyes of its staff members and students.”

Questions for Staff

Introduction
Below you will see a list of positive, external influences on healthy youth development that has been established in published research. Please take some time to review the items listed. If you were to choose the top three most important external influences on young people, from this list below, please tell me about the three you would choose and why.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Family support</strong></th>
<th>Family life provides high levels of love and support.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult relationships</strong></td>
<td>Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caring school climate</strong></td>
<td>School provides a caring, encouraging environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community values youth</strong></td>
<td>Young person perceives that the adults in the community value youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth as resources</strong></td>
<td>Young people are given useful roles in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service to others</strong></td>
<td>Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School boundaries</strong></td>
<td>School provides clear rules and consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult role models</strong></td>
<td>Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive peer influence</strong></td>
<td>Young person’s best friends model responsible behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High expectations</strong></td>
<td>Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creative activities</strong></td>
<td>Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theatre, or other arts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth programs</strong></td>
<td>Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1) Please tell me about your role at [school name].

2) How do you think that [school name] implements its vision around healthy development? Provide some examples of ways in which the school has set up structures and resources for this purpose.

3) Please describe some of the strategies that [school name] enlists to support the healthy development of students.
   Probes: Describe how health education is delivered. Tell me about how a student in crisis may be supported. Describe the school approach to student discipline. Describe how students are empowered at the school.

4) Please describe some of your experiences in helping to maximise the healthy development of students.

5) Please tell me about where students might turn for health support at [school name].
   Probe: Please describe the role of a residential Head of House. Tell me about the health centre.

6) When students are learning and accomplishing at their best, what are the elements that you believe contribute to this state?

7) From your perspective, what do you think are some of the challenges to the healthy development of students at [school name]?

8) If you could imagine a school in which student health and wellbeing were maximized, what would this ideal educational space be like?
   Probes: What would it look like? Who would be there? What would help students achieve health and wellbeing? What might happen there?
APPENDIX J: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Below you will see a list of positive, external influences on healthy youth development that has been established in published research. Please take some time to review the items listed. If you were to choose the top three most important external influences on young people, from this list below, please tell me about the three you would choose and why.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family support</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth as resources</td>
<td>Young people are given useful roles in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to others</td>
<td>Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School boundaries</td>
<td>School provides clear rules and consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult role models</td>
<td>Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive peer influence</td>
<td>Young person’s best friends model responsible behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative activities</td>
<td>Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theatre, or other arts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth programs</td>
<td>Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1) Please describe your experiences at [school name] that have enhanced your overall health and wellbeing.

*Establish student perspective on the elements of their school experience that contribute to their healthy development at the school.*

_Probes – what elements (in class, out of class) of your high school experience help you to be healthy, feel good, make good decisions, learn better, have self-esteem)_

2) Please tell me about where you and your peers turn for health support at school.

*Probe student perspectives about where students seek support on health issues and healthy development._

_Probes – to peers, residential assistants, residential Heads of House, parents, teachers, friends, health centre staff, internet, media?)_

3) Please describe some of the specific programs or resources [school name] uses to promote the health and wellbeing of students.

*Explore participants’ understanding of what contributes to the healthy development of students._

4) When students are learning and accomplishing at their best at [school name], what are the elements that contribute to student health and wellbeing._
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5) Please describe some of the challenges to health and wellbeing that you and your peers face at school.</th>
<th>Gather data on student perspectives of challenges to healthy development in high school.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6) Please tell me about some of the ways in which Grade 12 students help to maximize the health and wellbeing of students at [school name].</td>
<td>Identify student contributions to the healthy development of young people at the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Key Question: If you were to imagine a school in which student health and wellbeing were maximized, what would this ideal educational space be like? (Probes- What would it look like? Who would be there? What would help students achieve health and wellbeing? What might happen there?)</td>
<td>Identify student perspectives on additional ideas and strategies for addressing and maximising the healthy development of students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>