

Report Card on Belknap County's Juvenile Justice System
Garners National Attention

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LACONIA: The Card describing the Belknap County has comments from across the country. by the Belknap on Children and



recently released Report juvenile justice system in attracted positive juvenile justice leaders Prepared and distributed County Citizens Council Families, this Report Card

ANDRE PAQUETTE, Chair of the Belknap County Juvenile Justice Advisory Council, holds several bundles of the first Belknap County Juvenile Community Justice Report Card that was recently distributed throughout Belknap County and to a national network of juvenile justice leaders. Paquette, a retired school superintendent and a Council volunteer, led the 18-month effort to produce this first formal report on those programs in Belknap County that focus on returning juvenile offenders to productive lives. As one of only a handful of juvenile justice systems across the country that have been able to document its results in an organized and consistent manner, Belknap County has earned the praises of nationally recognized leaders in the field of juvenile justice.

“places Belknap County among a small but emerging number of juvenile justice programs around the country that are documenting the actual results of their work,” says Alan Robichaud, Executive Director of the Council.

The report sets “important benchmarks and moves us towards accountability for the public and private funds that support services in Belknap County,” says Robichaud. He says this first report “highlights our performance during 2005 in the area of juvenile delinquency and

measures progress as we change to a restorative justice model.”

Robichaud and Andre Paquette, the Chair of the committee that organized this project, have been receiving praise and comments from national leaders in juvenile justice since the Report Card was released to the public during the week of July 10.

From Denny Maloney, Associate Director, Cascades Center for Community Governance at Oregon State University-Cascades Campus in Bend, Oregon, “Your entire team can be proud (of this report). Congratulations for becoming a national leader in what I predict will become the next great movement for our nation’s Juvenile Justice System.” Maloney has also served as a consultant for the national Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).

“Congratulations! This (report) is a tremendous accomplishment,” says Delores Hereis Ward, Director of the National Juvenile Justice Prosecution Center, American Prosecutors Research Institute (A.P.R.I.).

And from Doug Thomas, Research Associate with the National Center for Juvenile Justice, “While a joint effort involving many people, the Belknap County report project was led by the remarkable F. Andre Paquette, a retired school Superintendent and a volunteer.” Andre was among a group of five from Belknap County that attended the A.P.R.I.-sponsored Performance Measures workshop in South Carolina in early 2005 that generated the Belknap County Juvenile Justice Report Card.

This first Belknap County Report Card quantifies in an organized and uniform manner the results of pre-court, court diversion, and court-involved programs for juvenile delinquents in Belknap County. The Report records outcomes at the point that juvenile cases are closed and relies heavily on the cooperation of all service providers. A juvenile delinquent is a youth under

the age of 17 who has violated a law that if committed by someone older than 17 would be considered a crime.

Paquette, who is also the Chair of the Belknap County Juvenile Justice Advisory Council, a network of juvenile justice professionals and citizens coordinated by the Citizens Council, explains that this Report Card measures where Belknap County stands according to key restorative benchmarks: restoring justice to victims, restoring justice to the community, and restoring juvenile offenders to productive citizenship. Charts, graphs, and text explain types of offenses, case closings, financial restitution to victims, residence of juvenile offenders, hours of community service, educational status of juvenile offenders, and the development of competencies of juvenile offenders.

According to this report, only a small number (3 percent) of youths in Belknap County are actually committing offenses. However, both Paquette and Robichaud note there are still many children and youth who are involved in the system, either as victims of child abuse or neglect or identified as Children in Need of Services (CHINS). They say that data and other information on child abuse and neglect and CHINS will be included in future reports issued by the Citizens Council.

As prevention plays a significant role in the juvenile justice system, this report also describes a number of youth development programs now operating in Belknap County. Information is provided on programs such as the Teen Center of the Lakes Region, the CoRe and COOL programs at Inter-Lakes and Prospect Mountain High Schools, and the NH Teen Institute.

Adds Robichaud, “We see here the beginning of an integrated juvenile justice information system that can be used and maintained locally. Andre has time and again proven

the value of volunteer capacity. His efforts have given us a process that we would never have gotten elsewhere.”

More than 40,000 copies of this first Report Card were distributed as inserts in The Citizen, Laconia Daily Sun, Gilford Steamer, Winnisquam Echo, Baysider and the Meredith News during the week of July 10th. Additional copies are available at public venues throughout the County and by contacting the Citizens Council office at 528-3185.

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