

Looking Forward With A Vision

A Report to the Citizens of Belknap County

January 21, 2003

2002: A Year of Organizing

According to Lester Bittel, 20th century management professional, “Good plans shape good decisions.....and good planning helps to make elusive dreams come true.” However good planning also requires time and patience.

As this Inaugural Year of the Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families ends, its members point with pride to the organizational development and preparation that has occurred during this past year.

Says Gil Schohan, Council Chair, “Now we can move ahead with the dreams of the Belknap Juvenile Justice Initiative.”

Which is where it all began.

In early 2000, the Honorable Willard G. Martin, a Juvenile Judge at the Laconia District Court, convened a group of dedicated professionals and volunteers. Long frustrated by a fragmented and non-responsive juvenile justice system, Judge Martin asked this group—the

Belknap Juvenile Justice Initiative (BJJI)—to identify problem areas, study other juvenile justice systems, and then define a process of change for Belknap County. Judge Martin secured fund-

in all facets of the child and family service system whenever and wherever possible.

The vehicle to bring about this major shift is the **Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and**

Schmitt Trust Fund will continue to support this major initiative.

During its first year, the Council has:

- Organized itself with bylaws, goals, and active committees,
- Held regular meetings with juvenile justice professionals
- Facilitated six public forums to gather input from throughout the County
- Conducted an extensive public education series through the local Community Technical College
- Assisted agencies and organizations in securing outside resources.



“Belknap County is a safe community where children and families can live with dignity and respect.”

ing from the Annette P. Schmitt Trust Fund to support their efforts.

After 21 months of study and research, BJJ members concluded that these sought-after changes could only happen when community citizens are actively engaged

Families. Established by a Proclamation from the County Commission, Council members were selected from all 11 towns in the County and were sworn in on January 15, 2002, becoming the first such entity in New Hampshire. The

Dialogue and interaction with community citizens and professional providers will continue. A County-wide plan for children and families will emerge that reflects the core community values, priorities, as well as the “good decisions” of everyone involved.

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From Our Perspective...

During our inaugural year, I, along with numerous members of the Citizens Council, had the privilege of meeting hundreds of people who live and work in Belknap County. We met you at the Community Forums we held; at the “Evolving Community Justice” series we co-sponsored with the Community Technical College; at Council meetings; and in a range of inter-agency committee work. We who live in this area can boast of our sparkling lakes nestled among fields, forests, and mountain ranges as its significant asset. However, what I’ve learned as a Council member and the first Council Chair is that our stunning scenery does not even begin to outshine the other resource we can also brag about—and that is the energy, creativity, commitment and power I have witnessed first hand in so many of you.

After all is said and done, it is this “People Power” that will get our job done!

Gil Schohan
Council Chairperson

After a year as Executive Director, I can see that the resources in Belknap County hold rich potential for making a difference in the lives of all children and families. Our work as a Council this past year has set a firm base

to begin those initiatives made possible by community input, local and state partnerships, the continued support of the our County Commission, and the principles of Community Justice.

These solutions seem simple. Yet I wonder just what is the magic key that we need to make it all happen? The answer lies right in front of us. And that answer is US!

We, as a community of people who will commit ourselves to one another,

“We, as a community of people who will commit ourselves to one another, are the solutions we seek.”

Alan Robichaud

are the solutions we seek. But, do we have the courage and the humility to set out on such an adventure? This is a quest we must all seek together if we are to be a caring society.

Alan Robichaud,
Executive Director

“Community Justice” in Belknap County

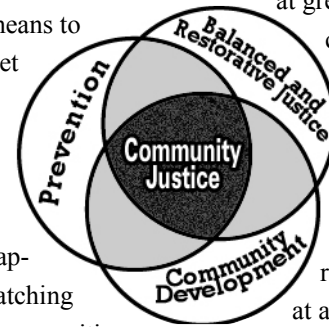
Community Justice is really a means to an end. It is a set of three principles that mesh together like a finely-tuned watch. It is an approach that is catching the interest of communities nationwide.

Community Justice can be a map, a prism, an umbrella, or a lens. Its principles are what will guide members of the **Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families** to their long term goal of creating “safe communities where children and families can live with dignity and respect”.

Just what are these three guiding principles? Communities thrive when there is:

- A strong emphasis on **preventing** problems before they begin;
- A **Restorative Justice** approach used in any setting that has a need to resolve incidents of crime or misconduct;
- A priority placed on using the best practices of **community development**.

For us in Belknap County, “Community Justice” would mean many things. Such as listening to primary school teachers who can predict which of their young students



are headed for stormy waters, at great expense for the communities where they live. It would mean supporting these young citizens today with the resources they need at a cost far less than what would be required to fix more complicated problems in their later years.

Community Justice in this County would mean that the needs of victims of crime are considered before designing penalties for the offender. It would mean holding offenders accountable for their choices while helping them to develop their own unique strengths.

Community Justice principles develop communities by first respecting the people who live there. It means emphasizing that every person is a resource somewhere and somehow. It uses its citizens in teams and partnerships and stresses that local problems have local solutions.

None of this information is difficult to understand. The challenge lies elsewhere—in knowing how to juggle these concepts with the other components of our fast-paced lives. But this is where the Citizens Council can play a role. Through its special focus of advocating for children and families, perhaps the juggling that we all do, will become just a little bit easier.

Accomplishments

Guided by the three principles of “Community Justice”, the Citizens Council has moved ahead in its first year with a number of projects and initiatives. Each one has required thoughtful participation, the development of new relationships, and a creative sharing of resources. Each Council initiative reflects at least one principle of “Community Justice”.

PRINCIPLE # 1



- **“Evolving Community Justice”**

In partnership with the NH Community Technical College/Laconia, a semester-long, credit-bearing course detailing the County’s evolving system of Community Justice, was offered to the community. Guest presenters came from numerous public and private agencies serving families and youth. Forty people from 15 different communities participated.

- **Reclaiming Futures**

Belknap County is one of two pilot sites in NH for a Robert Wood Johnson grant focused on developing new community-based management and evaluation strategies for juvenile delinquents who also have problems with alcohol and drugs. Resources and leadership for the Belknap County site have been provided by the Council.

- **Mentoring**

Resources and networking development were offered to community partners who sponsor mentoring programs for children and youth in Belknap County.

- **Family Mediation**

Ongoing leadership and resources from the Council remain focused on the anticipated opening of a Family Mediation Program in the spring of 2003.

- **Foster Care**

Council leadership has convened a network of professionals for a collaborative recruitment of foster care families in Belknap County.

PRINCIPLE # 2



- **Juvenile Justice Advisory Council**

The Council convened a network of more than two dozen professionals and lay citizens who meet monthly for problem solving and networking around juvenile justice issues.

- **Juvenile Crime Enforcement Plan**

Council leadership worked with the *Juvenile Justice Advisory Council* to develop and write countywide goals around reducing juvenile crime. Called the “*ABC Plan*”, it addresses existing needs around Accountability, Better data, Communication, and Capacity building.

- **Juvenile Integrated Information System**

Council leadership and resources are facilitating strong effort around improved data collection, both to frame the issues and to evaluate specific outcomes. This effort is part of the “Data Goals” found in the Countywide Juvenile Crime Enforcement Plan.

- **Juvenile Offender Locator Team (JOLT)**

Council leadership and resources were devoted to develop NH’s first countywide partnership of law enforcement and Juvenile Probation and Parole officers to monitor the compliance of juveniles with their court-ordered restrictions. Effort is part of the “Accountability Goals” in the countywide Juvenile Crime Enforcement Plan.

- **Youth Attendant Program (YAP)**

Council resources continue to support an ongoing countywide effort to develop an appropriate alternative to secure detention for juveniles who have committed minor delinquent offenses, or who are Status Offenders (CHINS). This effort is part of the “Accountability Goals” in the Juvenile Crime Enforcement Plan.

- **Satellite Video Conferences on Juvenile Justice Issues**

Sponsored in partnership with LRGHealthcare that provides downlink capabilities, the Council has provided access to a series of national satellite videoconferences on juvenile justice issues. This effort is part of “Capacity and Communication Goals” in the countywide Juvenile Crime Enforcement Plan.

- **Restorative Justice Advisory Committee**

Several Council members and staff serve on this committee which provides support, advice, and the link from this County program to the Council.

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Accomplishments

(continued from page 3)

PRINCIPLE # 3



- **Our Website**

Working together with David Stamps of *db stamps consulting* who has donated much of his time and resources to Council initiatives, the Council now has a comprehensive website. Dedicated to promoting the concepts of “Community Justice”, this website is continually updated with activities of the Council and its community partners.

• **Community Forums**
Six Forums were held during November 2002. In a process facilitated by UNH Cooperative Extension, more than 250 citizens from 8 of the County’s 11 communities were invited to comment on the assets and needs of their own community.

Forum par-

ticipants also completed an Opinion Survey that is being compiled by the Community Technical College. All this information will assist the Citizens Council in developing their priorities for the next several years. Forums are planned for the remaining three communities in early 2003.

- **Laconia District Courthouse**

The Citizens Council facilitated a series of discussions with over 20 municipal and judicial personnel, NH and District Court administrators, Laconia Main Street Board members, and others to explore potential future uses for this historical facility. This effort will continue into 2003.

- **Professional Providers Advisory Council (PPAC)**

The Citizens Council is building a relationship with the many professional providers of services to children and families in Belknap County. Their skills and knowledge enrich and inform Council goals and activities. Professionals in this emerging network are focusing their expertise around the three principles of “Community Justice” and have already proven to be invaluable partners with the Council. Part of this PPAC is the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council (*page 3*) that was organized by the Citizens Council and now clearly illustrates how a partnership of citizens and professionals can effectively resolve local issues with local resources.

The skills and knowledge of the professional providers enrich and inform Council goals and activities.

Council Members in 2002

Scott Anders.....Center Harbor
Cathy Apfel.....Barnstead
Evelyn Auger.....Sanbornton
Linda Brewer.....Meredith
James Carroll.....Laconia
Wes Colby.....Laconia
Mark Condodemetraky...Belmont
John Irwin.....Laconia
Peter Michaud.....Center Harbor
Alida Millham.....Gilford
Andre Paquette.....Laconia
James Pilliod.....Belmont
Bob Rovella.....New Hampton
David Russell.....Gilmanton
Leo Sanfacon.....Gilford
Gil Schohan.....Belmont
Susan Smith.....Gilford
Dick Wallace.....Alton
Mary Alice Warner....Ctr Harbor
Kevin Washburn.....Tilton
Sheila Weeks.....Gilford

Staff

Alan Robichaud.....Executive Dir.
Judy Buswell....Planning-Research

Moving Forward Toward The Vision....

Over the next several years, the Citizens Council will take steps to its vision of Belknap County as “*a safe community where children and families can live with dignity and respect*”. Goals for 2003 and beyond can be summarized as strengthening the following areas:

- * **Collaboration**...with public and private stakeholders;
- * **Public Education**... on community justice issues confronting children and families;
- * **Stewardship**...of taxpayer resources and investments;
- * **Resource Development**...by diversifying and stabilizing the funding base;
- * **Access to Services**...that are available and affordable for all children and families;
- * **Accountability**...of all stakeholders, including families, but in a manner that is based on reliable and valid information;
- * **Planning**...with citizens and the professional providers in Belknap County, locally driven and community-based, and that results in a better alignment of the numerous independent plans, programs, activities, and services for children and families; and
- * **Policies and Practices**...local, County, and State that will support a positive environment for children and families in Belknap County.

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