

BELKNAP COUNTY
CITIZENS COUNCIL ON CHILDREN AND



2003-001

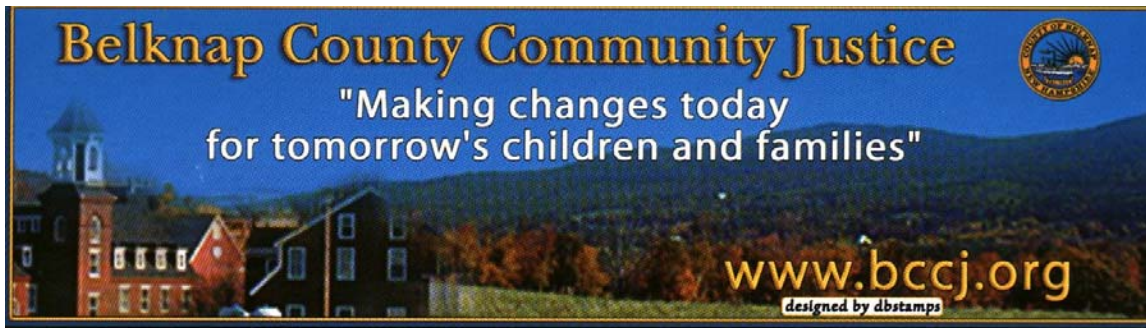
2003-002

2003-003

2004-001

Data Report Number 2004-002

**A Summary Analysis of the Four Reports to Date
Including
Recommendations for Further Data Gathering
and
Identification of Other Areas of Needed Study**



TO: Members, Belknap Citizens Council on Children and Families

FROM: The Council Data Committee

SUBJECT: Report Number 2004-002

DATE: 2/13/04

This is the fifth in a series of reports to Council members. The reports are designed to help members understand more about Belknap County as a whole and about the issues which affect the well being of children and families in the county.

This report presents the observations of a professional program evaluator from outside Belknap County. He has volunteered his time and is very interested in the Council's work. He is experienced in the collection, interpretation and use of data.

We are extremely fortunate to have John B. Cook provide his input and insight into our work. John regularly attends meetings of the Council's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee.

We ask members of the Council to study the data in this report to:

1. Learn more about balanced and restorative juvenile justice in Belknap County;
2. Make suggestions for improving the presentation of the data; and,
3. Raise questions about the data itself as well as issues raised by the data in this and other data reports.

Any comments or observations regarding this report may be addressed to F. André Paquette, Council member and member of the Data Committee. He can be reached via Email at fap@worldpath.net, by telephone at 524-8598, or by U.S. mail at 149 Franklin St. Laconia, NH 03246.

**To: André Paquette, JJAC Facilitator and Member, Citizens Council
Alan Robichaud, Executive Director, Citizens Council**

From: John B. Cook

**Re: Summary of Reports #2003-001, #2003-003, #2003-004, #2004-001,
KIDS Count and NH Center for Public Policy Studies Dropout Data**

Date: January 30, 2004

Introduction

The Mission of the Belknap Citizens Council on Children and Families is “to promote Community Justice in Belknap County so that children and families can live safely with dignity and respect.” Underscoring this focus is the fact that [almost one in four Belknap County residents is under eighteen years of age.](#) The goal of this report is to aggregate and analyze data previously presented in a series of four reports to Citizens Council members. The intent is to highlight key statistics, identify data gaps and needs, and to suggest areas that warrant further inquiry.

[Highlights and Statistics of Interest](#)

Population, Education and Community Profile:

Population trends in Belknap County mirror those in New Hampshire:

Belknap County:	1970-2001 (+78%)	1990-2000 (+14%)
New Hampshire:	1970-2001 (+71%)	1990-2000 (+11%)

These statistics support the notion that Belknap County is a bellwether with regard to population trends in the State. Scrutiny of the numbers provides further evidence that Belknap County, like many other areas of NH, is not experiencing population growth in traditional urban settings, but in outlying towns. For example:

[In 1970, Laconia accounted for 46% of the County’s population](#)

[In 2001, that number dropped to 29%](#)

Surrounding towns have accounted for the bulk of the population expansion. Notably, towns such as Barnstead, Gilmanston, Alton and Belmont have doubled or almost tripled in size in the past thirty years.

Based on 2000 US Census data, the Annie E. Casey Foundation¹ has identified a number of key indicators available by County. Data is compiled in a number of key areas including population, housing, income/poverty, employment and families. Much like population trends, Belknap County data for most of these indicators are consistent with those for New Hampshire as a whole. For example:

Percent of children ages 5 to 17:	Belknap Co. (78%)	NH (76%)
Total households with children:	Belknap Co. (33%)	NH (36%)
Percent of County age 18 and under, in poverty:	Belknap Co. (8%)	NH (8%)
Percent of children under 18 with parents working:	Belknap Co. (74%)	NH (74%)

Some differences and changes to note:

Sixty-one percent (61%) of Belknap County parents with children six years old and younger are in the labor force, compared to 70% for all of New Hampshire

Proportionately, more grandparents in Belknap County care for grandchildren (40%) than NH grandparents (31%)

The percent of Belknap County children living in single-parent households has increased from 17% in 1990 to 23% in 2000.

In spite of the 14% growth in population from 1990 to 2000, total school enrollments for Belknap County have remained fairly constant from 1999-2002.

One statistic of concern however, is the high school student dropout rate. Approximately 25% of NH public school students drop out before graduating high school². Dropout rates for Belknap County students are likewise of concern:

Laconia High School:	18% cumulative dropout rate	(4.7% annually)
Winnisquam Reg. H.S.	14% cumulative dropout rate	(3.8% annually)

¹ Source: www.aecf.org

² NH Center for Public Policy Studies. One in Four: School Dropouts in New Hampshire. June 2002

Data Needs & Areas Warranting Further Inquiry:

Other indicators, aside from KIDS Count, can augment the generation of “community profiles” for Belknap County. For example, [the percentage of children in schools eligible for free/reduced meals](#) may provide useful context for a host of subjects. In New Hampshire, the average percentage of children eligible for free/reduced meals in all schools is 17%³.

Selected averages within Belknap County to note:

Pleasant Street School (Laconia):	43% eligible
Woodland Heights Elementary (Laconia):	43% eligible
Elm Street School (Laconia):	42% eligible

Other data, such as spending per pupil, could be collected and included in a Belknap County community profile. The collection of more localized data such as the above suggestions, as well as the tracking of this information over time, would be beneficial to the Citizens Council.

Court Diversion and Restorative Justice

Two programs potentially available to juveniles arrested in Belknap County include Court Diversion (CD) and Restorative Justice (RJ).⁴

Court Diversion is “an early-intervention program that works with first-time juvenile offenders...[and] is a one-shot deal. The intent of the program is to help youths and their families learn to make better choices, so that they may reach their greatest potential as valuable members of society.” Diversion is financed by six County communities, including Laconia. Court Diversion is administered by the City of Laconia through the Youth Services Bureau. The Youth Services Bureau encourages other Belknap County communities to support and use Court Diversion.

Restorative Justice, a county wide program, is also intended for juveniles and “uses accountability, restitution, mediation, advocacy, support, patience and forgiveness to bind parties together in a justice process that closes the wounds of crime.” Although housed at the Belknap County Sheriff’s Department, it is an independent program of the County Commissioners.

³ NH Department of Education, Bureau of Information Services, March 4, 2003

⁴ A third, the Youth Assistance Program (YAP), is also a Court Diversion program, available to juveniles in the towns of Tilton (Belknap County), Sanbornton (Belknap County), and Northfield (Merrimack County)

Similarities exist between the two programs. For example, the average age for Diversion participants is between 12 and 16 (2000-2002: 84%), and 13 and 16 (2001-2003: 83%) for Restorative Justice, and for every three males, one female is referred to each program respectively. Both Diversion and Restorative Justice have experienced a recent drop in referrals:

2002 Diversion Referrals:	83 (36% drop from 2000)
2002 RJ Referrals:	52 (23% drop in 2003 referrals to 40)

On the other hand, there are also important differences to note between the two programs: Court Diversion usually caters to first-time, non-violent offenders, while Restorative Justice usually accepts juveniles who are not first-time offenders, and face more serious charges.

The age of referrals also exemplifies how the different programs cater to differing needs of the Belknap County juvenile justice system:

From 2000-2002, Court Diversion has had 14 participants 10 years old or younger, while Restorative Justice has had no referrals that age from 2001-2003.

Court Diversion has also had 16 participants 17 years old or older in that same time period; Restorative Justice has had only one.

Diversion tends to be pre-adjudication, with local police, the Sheriff's department, prosecutors and the District Court referring juveniles to the program. Restorative Justice, on the other hand, tends to be court-involved, often involving the appearance of the juvenile before a judge.

Theft offenses account for a similar percentage of referrals for each program (12%), although again, important differences exist with respect to the types of crimes each program accommodates:

Two most common offenses referred to Diversion:	Simple Assault (38%)
	Shoplifting (12%)
Two most common offenses referred to RJ:	Criminal Mischief (24%)
	Conspiracy to Commit Criminal Mischief (14%)

Data Needs & Areas Warranting Further Inquiry:

“Referral by residence” data is needed for Court Diversion: Where do these juveniles live?

2003 data for Court Diversion is needed: This will allow for a more up-to-date program profile.

“Source of referral” is needed for both Court Diversion and Restorative Justice: Where, specifically, do referrals come from: which schools, police departments, prosecutors, courts?

2000-2003 programmatic statistics for the Youth Assistance Program in Tilton would provide further context into diversionary programming for Belknap County juveniles.

“Case studies” for both Court Diversion and Restorative Justice would be a useful tool.

Court data are needed: Specifically, the number of CHINS, Delinquency, and abuse/neglect petitions each year from 2000-2003. Additionally, it would be ideal if a sample (N=50?) could be examined from Court data regarding the number of days from CHINS petition or arrest to disposition.

Data are needed from the NH Division for Juvenile Justice Services (DJJS). Specifically, the number of children from Belknap County in placement due to CHINS/Delinquency, their age, gender, type of placement, length of time in placement, and number of placements.

Data are also needed from the NH Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). Specifically, the number of children from Belknap County in placement due to abuse/neglect, their age, gender, type of placement, length of time in placement, and number of placements. It would also be helpful to have statistics on Belknap County foster parents.

Data are needed from Belknap County with regard to any available fiscal expenditures related to the placement of children and youth.

As has been stated in other documentation, a Cost/Benefit analysis would be helpful not only for Restorative Justice, but for Court Diversion as well. Extolling the financial benefits of these

programs is a necessity given shrinking budgets and level of scrutiny directed toward these programs.

Solicit available data/program evaluation from other Diversion programs in New Hampshire (e.g. Merrimack County)

If the Citizens Council is to truly be the “clearinghouse” for any and all youth/juvenile interventions ongoing within the County, data from all available programs should be solicited,

For example: Reclaiming Futures/Juvenile Drug Court data

Family Mediation

Challenge

Teen Court data

School Resource Officer impact data

Other school data and indicators

These data should be collated, and shared in a formal manner; i.e., an Annual Comprehensive Data Report).