

Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families

Quarterly Report

2nd Quarter FY - 2003

The second quarter of 2003 continued to see the Council alert for opportunities to promote Community Justice throughout Belknap County. Council staff and members continue to participate in a myriad of activities with local partners as part of promoting the three principles of Community Justice (Prevention, Balanced and Restorative Justice and Community Development). As in our previous report, each initiative has been coded as follows: P = Prevention, BRJ = Balanced & Restorative Justice, and CD = Community Development. For more information about the Council and its activities, please call 528-3185 or visit our recently updated web site at www.bccj.org.

Administration and Operations

The Citizens Council continued to meet with its various sub-committees and followed along with the legislative process in areas found to be supportive of its work. Other areas of importance consisted of the continued work on its major task forces (e.g. Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, Addictions Task Force, Mentoring and the emerging focused effort on Parental Accountability). These leading efforts represent initial Council response to the major thematic issues identified during the community forums in the fall of 2002. As a result of these initiatives, the Council is re-examining its own organizational structure to be more responsive to the eleven individual communities of Belknap County. Over the next quarter, the Council will be exploring ways to become more visible and active with communities by looking at ways to engage professionals and citizens at the grassroots level.

Our website has received a new face lift with old information removed or placed into archive lists while new information has been added. Many thanks to Judy Buswell and David Stamps for keeping this resource updated and functioning as a major communication vehicle for the Council.

Another area that will demand Council attention in the weeks ahead is the recruitment of new members to fill three current Council vacancies. Interested individuals can check us out on our web site or may call the office at 528-3185 for more information.

Program Development

Belknap County Mediation Program (P, BRJ)

On June 3, the Youth Services Bureau (YSB), along with the Citizens Council, conducted a press conference announcing the beginning of the Belknap County Family Mediation Program. On hand to explain the program and answer questions of the press were Holly DeWald (YSB Executive Director), Linda Ferruolo (Mediation Consultant), Polly Sanfacon (Volunteer Mediator), Jay Apicelli (Supervisor of the Belknap County Juvenile Probation and Parole Office) and Alan Robichaud (Executive Director of the Citizens Council). The program is up and running and referrals may be made by calling the program phone line at 527-0200. This program is funded through a grant from the US Department of Justice, OJJDP, through the NH Division of Juvenile Justice Services, NH Department of Health and Human Services. The Citizens Council wishes to thank the NH State Advisory Group on Juvenile Justice for extending this grant to us. We further recognize the Youth Services Bureau, particularly Holly DeWald, Sue Batstone and Lee Duncan for their strong efforts to make this service available to families and adolescents throughout Belknap County.

Reclaiming Futures Project (P, BRJ)

Earlier this year, the NH District Court System received word from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Reclaiming Futures National Project Office, that New Hampshire was selected to participate as a full-fledged member of the initiative for substance abusing youth. Prior to this notification, New Hampshire was to be a pilot site for up to two years. Now we will benefit by our ability to receive full support from the project technical advisors, communications experts and ongoing participation with peer groups across the country by means of fellowships set up for community members, judges, probation and parole officers, treatment providers and state project directors.

Belknap County is fortunate to be a pilot site in the New Hampshire project and we are working closely with the NH District System, New Futures, the Division of Juvenile Justice Services, and the Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Recovery to enhance our capacity to serve youth involved with substance abusing behaviors and the district court system. The State initiative is guided by Project Director, Maria Gagnon, an experienced clinician in the field of alcohol and substance abuse and counseling.

Mentoring (P, CD)

One of the proven methods to assist youth who are substance abusing and one of the top issue areas defined to the Council through the various community forums, is that of mentoring. Again, through the guidance of the Reclaiming Futures project, Maria Gagnon has been facilitating focus groups and resource identification discussions on existing mentoring resources in Belknap County. Preliminary findings indicate that, while there is a breadth of programs addressing youth to youth or peer to peer mentoring issues, there is literally no adult to child program in existence in the county. The Council will continue to identify ways to implement mentoring programs in the county and thanks the Reclaiming Futures Project for its guidance and assistance in this effort.

Addiction Task Force (P, BRJ)

This Task Force of nearly 40 individuals representing a broad coalition of professionals concerned with substance abuse, has held its third meeting and is taking a look at ways to dovetail local need into a state plan for substance treatment. The Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Recovery (DADAPR) wishes to establish an advisory council in each of the ten counties of the state through which to devolve planning and local contracting. Riley Regan, Director of the Division has spoken with and received preliminary agreement from Governor Benson to proceed on this course.

The local task force is reviewing survey data from regional providers and will continue to identify gaps and needs for a sustained comprehensive prevention and treatment system for substance abusers in Belknap County. The Addictions Task Force generally meets on the fourth Monday of the month at 8:00 AM. Over the summer months, we will be meeting in the Community Room at the new Police Station on New Salem Street, Laconia.

Parenting and Accountability Task Force (P, BRJ, CD)

In response to the issue of parent accountability as heard during the community forums, the Council convened the first in a series of discussions with a broad coalition of people on June 24. Entitled "Prevention and Parent Accountability...the Dilemma between Support and Sanctions, the group of eighteen participants began by framing the issues, talked about what strategies, programs and services are currently in place to address parent responsibility and talked about what was missing to assure that parents were capable of parenting and accountable for their children.

Follow-up will continue with interested participants along with the Upstream Parenting Committee. If anyone is interested in participating in this group, please call Alan Robichaud at 528-3185.

Legislative activities consumed a good deal of Council time as we followed the various pieces of legislation pertaining to children and families. Of particular interest was the Capital Budget involving money for the District Court House and funding for the Governor's Commission on Alcohol Abuse Prevention and Treatment in the Operating Budget. While we worked as part of a large coalition of agencies and organizations around the state, the Governor's Commission money was restored to roughly \$2.3M, down from the original request for \$10M during the biennium. We were less fortunate in the Capital Budget attempt to maintain the House funding recommendation to place \$250,000 in the budget for work needed on the Court House. Last minute attempts to place \$1 in the budget to hold open the line item, also failed. The Court House must now wait until FY 07 and FY 08 for funding to restore and expand operations in the rapidly deteriorating building.

Other legislative activity included presenting at a forum with Senator Carl Johnson as budgets were quickly flying between the House and the Senate; writing letters and emails to Legislators regarding the state's operating Budget; and presenting to a **Study Committee on Civic Education and Engagement** (HB1151/'02) in New Hampshire as part of the promotion of the **Center for Civic Engagement**

Community Outreach

Staff has continued their involvement with multi-agency committees functioning as fact-finding, training, and coordination groups to maximize use of existing resources throughout Belknap County. For more information on what each of these groups do, who is involved and how to become involved, please contact the Council (528-3185).

- Lakes Region Community Development Clearinghouse (CD)
- New Hampshire Rural Development Council (CD)
- NH Community Technical College System Board of Trustees and Laconia Campus Human Services Advisory Committee (P, BRJ, CD)
- Dropout Prevention Task Force (P, BRJ)
- Domestic Violence Advisory Committee (P, BRJ)
- UpStream (P)
- Best Schools Leadership Initiative (P, BRJ)
- Human Relations Committee (P, BRJ, CD)
- Center for Civic Engagement (CD)
- Main Street Visioning Session (CD)

Additionally, the Council continues to work with its members in those communities that have yet to convene **community forums**. We may need to think of a different approach with Barnstead, Gilmanton and New Hampton. Special factors and relationships with surrounding communities may suggest that there are other ways to conduct public input sessions in these towns.

Follow-up continues to occur in the communities of Gilford (Communication Committee); Alton (Youth Center) and Tilton (Safe Schools Initiative) where members of the Council from these respective communities are making inroads to involve themselves and the Council in local efforts that effect positive change for children, youth and families.

A new **community outreach** effort has begun in Lakeport this last quarter. On April 24, the Council, along with neighbor folks, the Restorative Justice Program and the Laconia Police Department, convened a forum at Leavitt Park Club House. The purpose of the forum was to determine what the neighborhood could and would do to reclaim **Sanborn Park** (P, BRJ, CD), an area overridden with vandalism, speeding, drug use and bullying. Expecting about 20 people to show up, organizers were overwhelmed when over 100 people attended the forum. The Council facilitated the group through a series of questions including what's going on in the park now, what would people like to see happening and who is willing to assist. It was made clear during the planning and the conductance of the forum that nothing would change unless the neighborhood takes responsibility and control for what change they want to see.

From the first gathering, a leadership team of volunteers signed up to meet again and form strategies to work on as a neighborhood. A second gathering was held on May 22 at the Community Center. Michelle Griffin of the neighborhood led the discussion and committees were formed to draft incorporation papers, set up activities for the park and continue to organize for the future needs of the park. Over 40 people attended this session along with Selectman Bob Luther, and members of the Restorative Justice Program, Laconia Police Department and the Citizens Council. Teens, senior citizens and mothers and fathers attended for a vibrant discussion of issues and solutions. Additional people were recruited to participate in the organizing effort and Michelle Griffin and David and Christina Miles were elected Co-Chairs of the Organizing Committee. Tina Paul volunteered to Chair the Activities Committee and Jeff Routhier emerged as the leader on By-laws and incorporation.

A third meeting was held on June 18 at the park as plans are in the works to conduct a Block Party at the park for neighbors and friends. Michelle Griffin was nominated by the Council to receive a Volunteer Recognition award for her efforts in the park and attended the Leadership Lakes Region "Stand Up and Shout" annual luncheon to receive her praise and award along with approximately 40 other Lakes Region volunteers.

This effort will continue to be supported as defined by the neighborhood organizers. For now, they seem to be well in control!

Staff and Council members attended the **Annual Meeting of the Lakes Region Community Services Council**. Guest speaker of the evening was noted professor, storyteller and renown developer of asset based community development, John McKnight. Also presenting was a young Gilmanton woman, Alyssa Best who shared her story of friendship with another young woman who has autism. Alyssa's story was very moving and reinforcing to John McKnight's stories of hospitality among community members offering welcome to "strangers."

System Coordination

Council members and staff continue to provide leadership and assistance to a growing network of providers and coalitions. On April 25, the Council Executive Director served as host to the **batterers' intervention (P)** workshop for over 50 professionals in domestic violence, law enforcement, the judiciary and other human service providers throughout the region. This was a very successful gathering planned and produced by the Belknap County Domestic Violence Council. Special thanks to Laurie Dunleavy (New Beginnings) and Diane Lane (Laconia District Court) and other members of the planning committee for putting this important session together.

The **Belknap County Restorative Justice Program Advisory Committee (BRJ)** and the **Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (P, BRJ)** have continued to address the juvenile justice system and create awareness of how the system currently operates and where changes need to be made. In the next quarter, these groups will make specific recommendations to the Council, and the County, on ways to improve the current juvenile justice system. Special thanks to Council members Andre Paquette, Leo Sanfacon and Gil Schohan who represent the Council on these advisory bodies.

Council staff attended a follow-up reporting session to a focus group on child abuse presented by **Prevent Child Abuse New Hampshire (P)**. Data reflects that in 2002, the Laconia District Office of the Division of Children, Youth and Families reported 490 cases of child abuse were assessed while 463 were found unsubstantiated and 27 (6%) were substantiated. Statewide, 16,800 referrals were made to DCYF with 58% being screened out. Prevent Child Abuse New Hampshire is suggesting there be an Advisory Council in each region (county) of the state. The Council will explore how this would relate to other local efforts now underway.

The **Center for Civic Engagement (P, CD)** is a new entity formed by several organizations/agencies in the county. This partner between community organizations and the New Hampshire Community Technical College has, as its stated Mission, the following statement:

"The Center for Civic Engagement is an educational and experiential learning collaborative between the Community Technical College and the Community that promotes leadership development, stimulates broader community action, maximizes the use of local assets and engages citizen participation."

The Mission of the CCE will be realized through such activities as: Service learning and capstone projects for students; Forums for dialogues on issues impacting community; Collaboration on seminars, workshops, and courses in response to local needs; Certification of professional development activities; Linkage of leadership participants to existing community organizations; Clearinghouse for volunteers; and Leadership development programs that build strong communities.

The first two events which were sponsored in partnership with the Center for Civic Engagement were "*The Future of Health Care in New Hampshire*" with Genesis Behavioral Health Services as prime sponsor, (May 29) and the "*Building Communities From the Inside Out*" workshop featuring John McKnight on June 17, with the Lakes Region Community Services Council serving as primary sponsor. As the Center for Civic Engagement continues to evolve, the Greater Lakes Region area will continue to be brought in for dialogue around key current issues impacting local residents.

Through the invitation and efforts of Citizen Council member Kevin Washburn, the Council has begun a dialogue with the **Safe Schools Committee of SAU 59 (P)** to examine access to service issues for youth seen by the Franklin District. As youth of Sanbornton and Tilton use the Franklin District Court, they do

not receive the same outcomes of their interaction as the service delivery system differs from one county to the next. The Council needs to provide an orientation to the Court in Franklin so all of our youth have equal access to whatever services currently exist in Belknap County.

Training and Technical Assistance

The grant the Council applied for through the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, to conduct a consultant residency on **community planning and design**, was received (CD). The Council is now in negotiation with a nationally recognized expert in the field of community planning and architectural design on making communities livable spaces. Partners in this venture are shaping up to be Municipal Resources, Inc. of Meredith, New Hampshire and the Cooperative Extension Service of the University of New Hampshire. A community event during the week of October 13th is being considered at this time. More information will be made available as plans take shape.

Several other training and technical assistance opportunities were attended this past quarter including the following: Upstream's **Weaving a Safety Net for Families** (4/12); Reclaiming Futures' **Villians, Victims, Resources** (4/15) presented by Dr. Laura Nissen; Reclaiming Futures' **Urban Institute** T.A. Session (4/17); A tele-presentation on **Mapping Community Assets** presented by the NH Institute for Health Policy & Practice (4/22); **Reclaiming Futures Fellowship Conference**, Atlanta, Ga. (5/14-16); **What Youth Fear and How We Can Protect Them**, presented by Dr. James Garbarino and sponsored by the Appalachian Teen Project (5/21); and a presentation on the Citizens Council made at the **New England Community Policing Partnership** (6/18) at St Anselm College.

Concluding Remarks

This past quarter has been one marked by legislative gyrations as we were concerned with resources in both the state operating and capital budgets. While the state continues to struggle with resources adequate to meet the needs of New Hampshire citizens, the Council continues to look for ways to collaborate and partner with other agencies and organizations to find ways where citizen participation can enrich the processes effecting services they need. To promote citizen engagement, the Council has continued to reach out to the communities at the neighborhood level (e.g. Sanborn Park); at the County level (e.g. Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, Addiction Task Force, Mentoring, Parental Accountability Task Force, etc.); and regional level (e.g. Center for Civic Engagement). Through these and like entities, the Council will continue to elicit the involvement of private citizens as volunteers, mentors, mediators, and other ways people may share their talents with one another.

While the Council moves closer to compiling a plan for the county, we will realign our own organizational structures to best support the outcomes we seek. Over the next quarter, we will look at models of engagement such as developing Community Action Networks that brings the work of the Council down to the community and even the neighborhood level. Through these processes, we invite participation by youth, families and citizens. For more information and ways to become involved, call Alan Robichaud at 528-3185 or email ajrobich@bccj.org.

Thoughts to Ponder

"I do the best I know how, the very best I can; and I mean to keep on doing it to the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me will not amount to anything. If the end brings me out all wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference."

~ Abraham Lincoln

Respectfully submitted,

Alan J. Robichaud

Executive Director