

Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families

Quarterly Report

3rd Quarter FY - 2003

INTRODUCTION

The Council will submit its county plan for Community Justice with its budget this winter. Several goals and objectives will serve to guide the Council's work as we enter our third year this coming January. The great news is that Belknap County currently has no youth at the Youth Development Center (YDC) in Manchester. When the Council was formed in January, 2002, Laconia had the state's second highest number of youth, per capita, placed at YDC. At that time, Belknap County as a whole had 14 youth at YDC. Today, as a result of members of the law enforcement, probation, school, providers and citizens of local communities working together, these numbers have, for the time being, been eliminated. Everyone deserves credit for this phenomenon. But, before we rest too long on our laurels, threats to this progress abound.

In 2002, the Council wrote a grant for mediation services in partnership with Youth Services Bureau. Second year funding was just recently approved amounting to over \$80,000 cumulatively, in new service dollars to Belknap County children and families. Similarly, the JOLT program became highly successful bringing in nearly \$11,000 matched with state dollars to implement the state's only county-wide Juvenile Offender Locator Team program. This model of juvenile accountability was successful due to the tremendous coordination efforts among the DHHS District Office of Juvenile Probation and Parole, the county Sheriff's Office, and the Laconia Police Department. In addition to acknowledging the efforts of Jay Apicelli, Supervisor of Juvenile Probation and Parole, Sheriff Dan Collis, Chief Tom Oetinger, their respective staff members who carried out the program on a daily basis must not be forgotten. This is incredible collaboration toward a project that everyone deems a success.

However, because juvenile services are so dependent on state and federal resources, their stability and sustainability fluctuate with the times and "the times...they are a changing". Both of these programs have had their funding eliminated through a series of federal prioritization of programs for next year. Our state colleagues have been instrumental in assisting this county to "patch work" funding in order to continue these programs to the last days possible but priorities change.

The Citizens Council calls on all citizens of Belknap County to weigh in on the issues affecting children and families. Our work is targeting prevention, justice, and community participation to alleviate the stress on families and children. Each one of us is only an accident, an injury or an illness away from poverty, homelessness and isolation. Issues of poverty, lack of health care, addictions, domestic violence, and abuse and neglect are factors that lead to dependency, delinquency and crime. These issues can and will only be solved through sustained collaboration and new ways of thinking. But these are not issues solely for service providers. They are community issues. They are our issues! As citizens we must not look away but look ahead to how we, as families, friends and neighbors can reach out, not with a hand out but a hand up to redirect and reclaim the futures of our families and children.

Administration and Operations

The Council continues its facilitation of the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee and the Addiction Task Force, two key areas coming out of the community forums last fall. These Professional Advisory Committees serve to inform and direct the Council in identified areas of concern.

The Addiction Task Force will serve to guide county-wide prevention and treatment efforts as the Council develops a partnership with the NH Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Recovery. The impact of this effort will be to make addiction and substance abuse a primary focus in Belknap County; one that pervades juvenile justice, domestic violence, child abuse, mental health and other detriments to healthy children, families and communities. The Task Force will seek ways to place decision making about how available resources from the state and federal governments, as well as local resources, are placed in the hands of local people.

To kick start this new initiative, several organizations participated in a press briefing amplifying the impact alcohol and other drugs have on individuals and communities. This briefing was sparked on by a Proclamation of the Belknap County Commissioners declaring September 2003, Belknap County Recovery Month. This session was taped by Lakes Region Public Access Channel 25 and is available for loan through the Council. People interested in finding out more about the Task Force are encouraged to call 528-3185. People in Recovery are especially encouraged to participate in this important work.

Prevention

As one key component of Community Justice, *prevention* is an area of primary focus for the Council. Quarterly efforts in this area have included assisting Lakes Region Community Services Council (LRCSC) in seeking a grant to outreach

their *Family Resource Center* model to the Alton area. Family Resources Centers serve as a base for supporting families through training, education and access to services. The Council believes strongly in local connections and developing supports that work for individual communities. Fashioned after the Giggles and Grins model in Laconia, the LRCSC has submitted a grant to begin a small scale satellite program that will evolve in ways which the community would be willing to support. News of the grant should be known sometime in October.

The Council has been active in discussions for bringing an *adult mentoring program* to Belknap County. Working with several provider agencies and Reclaiming Futures (a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation project for juveniles involved with substance abuse and the courts) the Council is in support of a pilot project targeting youth affiliated with Drug Court to be linked to adult mentors. Approximately \$8,000 is being made available through Reclaiming Futures for this purpose and we hope to see something on line by the first of the new year. Visit Reclaiming Futures at www.reclaimingfutures.com.

Continuing the Mentoring theme, the Council introduced the Belknap County UNH Cooperative Extension Service to the Appalachian Teen Project for collaborating on another small grant prospect for development in the Alton/Barnstead area. Funding for this endeavor, if it materializes, would come from a Cooperative Extension source.

Dick Wallace, Council member from Alton, continues to spearhead *teen activity programs* through a collaborative initiative among volunteers, schools and law enforcement. Known as Community Youth Activities, Dick has made some wonderful in-roads to establishing a youth center that will host pro-social activities for Alton area youth.

The Council is also represented on the National Alliance for Mental Illness of New Hampshire's *Teen Suicide Prevention* project. This initiative is aimed at preventing teen suicide in New Hampshire. Statistics show that 25 New Hampshire teenagers died from suicide from 2001 to 2002, 88% of these losses were young men. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-19 year olds in New Hampshire. For more information on this initiative, go to NAMI's web site at www.naminh.org.

The Council will begin to examine the issues of child abuse and neglect as they pertain to Belknap County families. We will include in our investigatory studies, incidences and patterns of child abuse and the effects on children, families and community as we move into the next phase of planning. The Attorney General's office and County Attorney's office recently conducted a presentation on the creation of *Child Advocacy Centers* within each county of the state. The Council will work to support this endeavor.

Balanced and Restorative Justice

Through a Professional Advisory Committee focused on juvenile justice reform and development, the Council will delve into the development of an *integrated juvenile justice information system*. The Council will seek external sources of support to inform decisions of equating capacities and resources to the needs of children and families in Belknap County.

The Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee has also targeted certain program development elements for exploration and possible development. There is interest in establishing detention and shelter capacity for Belknap County youth within Belknap County. There is also interest on the part of the state to develop a *Youth Attendant Program* in each county of the state. While there are questions as to the level of use for such a program in Belknap County, the committee will meet with representatives of the State to determine next steps to take in this area.

Key to the success of juvenile justice reform will be sustainability once programs are up and running. The Council will seek alternatives to traditional models of services to assure that providers are compatible with the needs of youth and families and seek alternatives that rely more heavily on local capacities than programs that demand hefty, ongoing investments that cannot be sustained long-term.

The Council will begin to more publicly address the needs of children and families through its local efforts. Council members will continue to schedule one on one interviews with local leaders and facilitate community forums of various natures to involve members of the community in understanding and assisting in issues affecting youth and families. These matters are extremely complex and interact with one another. The importance of our work in the substance abuse arena cannot be under-estimated. The prevalence of alcohol and other drug use in accidents and incidents of domestic violence, child abuse, juvenile and juvenile and adult crime and its co-occurring relevance to mental health issues cannot be challenged. These issues and therefore their respective service responses, must be coordinated and work together to create the response needed here in Belknap County.

In the realm of *parent responsibility*, the Council is working closely with the Upstream Parenting Committee to develop staff development programs for professionals who come into contact with families. This is not an area that should segregate services to families. It is an area that families must receive assistance and support in a consistent, integrated fashion that teaches and reinforces the parents' role and responsibility in rearing responsible children.

Professionals must be equipped with the right information to assure consistent support to families and prevent the traditional “agency bounce” from one provider to another to another. This adjunct to parent training will hopefully add to the base of support currently available in Belknap County.

Community Development

The Council is teaming up with Upstream, Reclaiming Futures New Hampshire, and the Center for Civic Engagement to provide a January conference featuring Laura Nissen, National Project Director for Reclaiming Futures. The theme, “*Making Safe and Healthy Communities Everybody’s Business*” will be held on January 13 at the Winnepesaukee Expo Center. For further information contact the Council (528-3185) or Upstream (527-2966).

The Council participated in Multi-Cultural Market Day on September 13. This wonderful event brought hundreds of people to the Laconia downtown area as the community celebrated the richness of diversity in our region. Our work must become and remain culturally sensitive to our refugee and immigrant neighbors who are adding a dynamic new dimension to our community. We look forward to participating in this annual event next year.

The Council was also represented at a Community Policing Roundtable hosted by the Laconia Police Department on September 20. A frequently referenced example of success at this session was the Sanborn Park community-directed project in Lakeport. The combined effort of the neighbors of the park, the Laconia Police Department and the media have made this project a huge success in a very short time.

One sure sign of success that things are working and that citizens are participating, is when one can step back and see, as a result of an initial intervention, that others pick up the idea and make it their own. Examples of some of these over the past couple of years include Sanborn Park. The Laconia Police Department through its success in working with the neighbors of Sanborn Park is now carrying this approach to community partnerships to other neighborhoods of the City. The people of Sanborn Park who have made this story a success are being asked to share their success with other neighborhoods and will present their story to a class at the Community Technical College on Community Justice on November 18. Visit <http://www.laconia.nhctc.edu/> for more information on this course.

Another example of collaboration that spawns community development is seen in the replication a Council-sponsored fifteen week course/workshop series on Evolving Community Justice through the New Hampshire Community Technical College/Laconia. This year, through the efforts of Tom Grogan, head of the Human Services Department of the NHCTC, a new course is being offered called Justice and the Community. This course again offers several ways for citizens to participate from enrollment in the course to individual workshop registrations. For more information on how to participate in this ongoing series, contact the Donna Cornelius at 524-3207, ext. 747 or go onto their web site.

The Council will continue to create opportunities to collaborate with community partners through its affiliations with the Center for Civic Engagement and other collaborative relationships throughout the county and state. We are continuing to explore asset-based community development as a means to build community capacities and engage members of the public in informal associations that response to local needs. A series of forums on community centering will be presented by Steven Bingler and Bobbie Hill on October 16th and 17th in direct response to community forums conducted by the Council last fall. These sessions are made possible in part through a grant by the Lakes Region Charitable Foundation.

Concluding Remarks

The Council wishes to thank the numbers of people and agencies who have partnered in directing focus to juvenile justice reform, substance abuse and community development. Our successes will only be realized through this continued collaborative approach. As we move forward, we must continue to seek the involvement of families and youth in the work that we do. Without their voice and participation any change is simply “rearranging the deck chairs” not a personal investment by the people for whom such change is intended. We look forward to the challenge and to the change!

Thought to Ponder

“The world is moving so fast these days that the man who says it can’t be done is generally interrupted by someone doing it!”
~ Elbert Hubbard

Respectfully,

Alan Robichaud