

Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families

Quarterly Report

4th Quarter FY - 2003

INTRODUCTION

January 15, 2004 will mark the second anniversary of the Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families. Since its inception, the Citizens Council has attempted to bring individuals, agencies and organizations together to look systemically at the changes needed to support children and families throughout Belknap County. System change is not easy as often there is no clear path to take. The willingness to work together as we proceed into the unknown is the greatest asset we can have as we incrementally inch our way forward building one piece upon the other. As we begin our third year as a Council and as a collaborative of many partnering agencies, we wish to thank the many people who, as volunteers, paid professionals, or interested citizens, have committed endless hours in discussion, planning and refinement of services to make the very most of scarce resources. Their commitment to keep at the work each and every day while being pulled in several directions is both heartwarming and testimony to their commitment, courage and tenacity in making Belknap County a safe and healthy environment for all children and all families. To each and every one of them we give our deepest appreciation.

ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS

The Council will be conducting its *Annual Meeting* on the evening of Tuesday January 13, 2004. This year, a presentation by Dr. Laura Nissen, National Project Director of the Robert Wood Johnson Reclaiming Futures project will focus on "*Making Safe and Healthy Communities Everybody's Business*". The event will be held at the Exposition Center in Lakeport and is co-sponsored with Upstream, Reclaiming Futures NH and the Center for Civic Engagement. For information regarding registration for the Annual Meeting, please contact the Council's office before January 7, at 528-3185.

As we prepare for another round of budgeting, we will be asking the county to fund a portion of our 2004 *operating budget*. Based on former agreements, the Annette P. Schmitt Fund fully funded the first two years of the Council's work. Beginning with the budget for 2004, the County will be asked to fund 25% of the operating budget or slightly under \$47,000. The budgeting process will continue through March 2004 with a final budget approved by March 31. The work of the Council is seen by many to be making a difference in how we look at prevention, juvenile justice, substance abuse, and community development. Making these issues increasingly part of broad community dialogue, we will be better positioned to apply new strategies to old issues truly making safe and healthy communities everybody's business.

In addition to preparing for the Annual Meeting, our Public Relations Committee has been busy developing additional *promotional materials* for use throughout the County. We have contacted Deschutes County, Oregon and received permission to use some of their fine public relations posters designed specifically around juvenile justice, substance abuse and domestic violence themes. The Oregon Ad Council has designed straightforward, provocative messages which we will adapt for use local use over the next year. We wish to thank the Commission on Children and Families of Deschutes County, Angela Curtis, and the Ad Federation of Central Oregon for their accessing use of their promotional work. This wonderful contribution allows us to benefit from their design and production work and saves us both reproduction time and costs which would exceed our ability. What a terrific example of resource sharing from the opposite side of the nation. Thank you Oregon!

Council officers will be elected at the Annual Meeting and we are still *recruiting* additional Council members especially from the communities of Meredith and Barnstead where we currently have no representatives. All other communities are encouraged to consider representatives as well. *Applications* may be obtained from our web site www.bccj.org or by calling the office (528-3185). For information on registering for the Annual Meeting presentation contact Judy Buswell at 528-3185 or Judi Taggart at 524-6864, ext 104.

Formal **presentations** on the Citizens Council were made to the following organizations: Greater Laconia Ministerial Association; Belmont Rotary; Sullivan County Drug Juvenile Justice Coalition; Reclaiming Futures Community Fellowship (Chicago); and WEMJ Radio Station (Allan Harrison's Show).

Additionally, 18 elementary school youngsters throughout the Lakes Region received framed Citizen Council certificates at an Elks Club poster competition entitled, "**Proud to be Me – I'm Drug Free**". These 18 youth were winners in six age categories. We would like to thank Sue Flanders, Beverly Collins and the Laconia Elks Lodge for their invitation to attend and recognize our youth for their positive attitudes toward alcohol and other drugs. This is where it all begins!

Additional **forums attended** this past quarter by staff and Council members, include the Alliance for Civic Engagement (a collaboration to promote civic engagement in student throughout all grade levels promoted by the NH Department of Education and the NH College and University Council); Genesis Behavioral Health's Annual Meeting; Monthly meetings of the NH Regional Community Technical College System's Board of Trustees; Child Abuse and Neglect Conference; CoRe Public Hearing on the findings of 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Surveys; Bi-monthly Human Relations Committee meetings; UNH Cooperative Extension Focus Session; and Attendance at a Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico hosted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The Council will welcome a **practicum student** of the Community Technical College/Laconia. Preliminary discussions have occurred and we are hopeful that Marlys Rich will be joining us later in January. The wonder about community connections is that we meet so many interesting and interested individuals. We first met Marlys when planning the *Beyond Bricks and Mortars* sessions with Steven Binger and Bobbie Hill. Marlys was our event coordinator at the Margate who took a keen interest in our work. Marlys is enrolled in the Human Services curriculum at the College.

PREVENTION

Several activities and events marked Council prevention initiatives this past quarter. We have been working closely with the UNH Cooperative Extension and Upstream in key areas to promote **parenting skills and professional development** for individuals who work closely with families. We are investigating the possibility of convening a workshop or mini-conference on the topic of character development in conjunction with local schools. If feasible, we would see this occurring either late spring or early fall. Additionally, two training sessions are scheduled in March and April on **Home Visitor Safety**.

In direct response to community forums, the Council sponsored three sessions with Steven Binger and Bobbie Hill of Concordia, Ltd. in October. Entitled, **Beyond Bricks and Mortar**, over 150 individuals from across the county attended one or more sessions and learned of various architectural and community design projects for how schools serve as community centers and at-risk students are succeeding beyond expectations. A model called the MET in South Providence, Rhode Island is capturing the attention of the Bill Gates Foundation to recreate such models throughout the country. The first senior class of the MET had a 99% graduation rate. Every graduate went on to college and collectively acquired \$450,000 in scholarship aid in doing so. With so many school building projects underway in the county, these events fostered a great deal of interest among participants. Anyone interested in learning more about the MET is referred to the book by Eliot Levine entitled, "One Student at a Time" and to the web site www.bigpicture.org.

The Council is supporting and assisting in the development of a countywide **prevention network**. As a means to identify and develop appropriate responses to substance abuse and addiction throughout the region, Renee Hill of CoRe and Rob O'Hannon of the Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Recovery, have convened initial meetings with Council staff, Claudia Rein (SAU 59), Gary Steinbach (Alton Central School) and others to lay a foundation for collaboration across program. Such a

collaborative opportunity will enhance our collective efforts to attract resources as a coalition of community agencies. An initial step in identifying assets and one which may be aided by the Council's practicum student, is the use of an inventory tool to determine current and needed levels of prevention strategies. This survey tool was adapted using the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment prevention strategies and will be reviewed for use by schools and faith-based organizations throughout the region in the near future. For more information about the Prevention Network, please call Renee Hill at 279-6162

Council staff continues to facilitate the ***System of Care*** subcommittee of the Addiction Task Force. The committee has identified what it feels constitutes the current array of responses to substance abuse and addictions in Belknap County and has moved to identifying what components are needed to assure access to appropriate interventions and treatment services. The work being conducted by the above mentioned Prevention Network will add the prevention component to the system of care and we will be sure to weave their findings into the work of the Addictions Task Force as our planning continues.

In working with the Belknap County Domestic Violence Advisory Committee, the Council is supporting the provision of an April 2, 2004 conference on the ***Impact of Domestic Violence on Children***. This conference will be held at the St. Charles Church Hall in Meredith. For further information on this conference, contact Laurie Dunleavy at New Beginnings (528-6511), Diane Lane at Laconia District Court (524-4128, x229) or Alan Robichaud at the Citizens Council (528-3185).

The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill - New Hampshire, continues to develop protocols for ***youth suicide***. The Council has been represented on the frameworks subcommittee for youth-serving organizations. For more information on this effort, contact Ken Norton at NAMI (225-5359).

Alan Robichaud was asked to join Chief Oetinger on a taping for Lakes Region Public Access on November 24. Chief Oetinger has been instrumental in hosting neighborhood forums on ***community policing and public safety***. Tom has been extremely proactive in developing a number of strategies and training sessions that focus specifically on neighbors looking out for one another and working closely with the police department in reporting suspicious behaviors in their neighborhoods. The park association meetings drew scores of people interested in preserving the safety of their neighborhoods and community.

BALANCED AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Balanced and Restorative Justice is a philosophy and a component of Community Justice which includes the majority of the formalized service delivery system for children and families. In our efforts to develop a effective and efficient system that addresses issues impacting children and families, the Council serves as a facilitator of groups seeking to understand how communities, agencies and organizations can best respond to issues involving children and families.

The issues that confront children and families are interwoven and complex. As an example, substance abuse should not be separated out from other factors (e.g. domestic violence, child abuse, mental health) that impact or are impacted by other issues. Substance abuse effects and is affected by other behaviors (see accompanying diagram) and must be treated in ways that complement multiple treatments modalities. The Council works across issue areas to understand the impacts, resources and collaborative methods that must exist to assure continuity and coordination of one to the other, making the system as seamless to children and families as possible. Consequently, the Council convenes necessary forums in order to understand, promote and sometimes lead an effort to bring about needed community response. As the Council does not perform direct services, our charge is that of planning, development and advocacy for those services and supports deemed essential to Belknap County families and children.

The County Attorney's Office is leading the effort in Belknap County to create a ***Child Advocacy Center*** as a means to conduct safe interviews with children involved in abusive situations. The Council supports this effort to assure that children of abuse are treated in a manner that respects their rights to privacy and safety. For further information on the status of this effort, contact the County Attorney's Office at 527-5440.

Members of the Council and the local Juvenile Probation and Parole Office, have been discussing the need for data on youth served by the juvenile justice system. A small contingent met with representatives of the New Hampshire Center for Public Policy Studies to determine steps needed to collect, analysis and disseminate information based on needs and outcomes of programs serving Belknap County youth. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of having access to data and the ability to discuss with our providers the need to apply data to our long term planning efforts. The Council recognizes and commends the volunteer efforts of Andre Paquette and John Cook for their dedication and expertise in developing a **unified data system** use in Belknap County.

Second year funding for the **Belknap County Family Mediation Program** was secured through a grant from the Division of Juvenile Justice Services (DJJS). The Council wishes to thank Pam Sullivan of the DJJS for her continued support of our efforts. Holly DeWald, Executive Director of the Youth Services Bureau, assisted by Judy Buswell, the Council's Planning and Research Coordinator, worked diligently to secure second year funding. For further information on the grant and how to become a Mediator, please contact Holly DeWald at 524-9457. To inquire about Mediation services, call 527-0200.

At the January 6, 2004 meeting of SAU 59 (Winnisquam Regional School District) Safe Schools Coalition, recommendations developed by the **School, Courts and Community Liaison Committee** (SCCL) will be presented. At the request of Superintendent Norm Couture, the Council facilitated the SCCL committee to make recommendations for ways in which schools, community, court and law enforcement officials to collaborate on mutually involved youth . The Council extends its thanks to all of the individuals who contributed to the discussions and recommendations being forwarded to the SAU Coalition.

Continuing to pursue needed services for Belknap County youth, the Council's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee has defined needed levels of support that permit youth being served in Belknap County. Early in 2004, the Council will convene a meeting of state level policy and program leaders to determine what levels of support we can rely on to develop needed services. An array of service models would typically include such services as foster care, intensive foster care, shelter accommodations, tracking, and other short and long term detention alternatives. As state and federal funding continues to be reduced, we will need to get more creative and work even closer with our state and county partners, getting commitments to collaborate on program planning, design, funding and evaluation. The Council will continue to seek outside resources that match Belknap County needs as new resources reveal themselves.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Council continues to follow early forays into community building efforts. In addition to the **Beyond Bricks and Mortar** sessions mentioned under the above prevention section, other follow-along activities which emerged from the Community Forums of November 2002 include the Gilford Communication Committee, park association meetings conducted by Laconia Police Chief Tom Oetinger and additional Community Technical College course offerings related to issues of concern to the Council.

After many months of discussion of how best to boost citizen participation in their community, the **Gilford Communication Committee** decided to increase access to information about what activities, committees and associations exist throughout their community. Through the contributions of several Gilford residents, it was determined that a web site specifically designed for this purpose would be a way to go. In the truest spirit of community development and utilizing the existing assets of local folks, Dale Dormody stepped up and designed a web site which hosts organizations' and associations' activities, times and places of meetings and contact information. A special volunteer section invites people to list ways in which citizens can become more active in their community. While this does not address all of the communication needs of the community, it is an excellent use of technology for reaching out to the public and engaging citizen participation. The gift that Dale brought was his expertise in web site design. The gift of the committee members who kept at it for so many meetings is that of caring...for their community and all who reside within it. The web site can be visited at www.gilfordevents.com. Congratulations, Gilford, for taking action!

Chief Tom Oetinger conducted a series of forums throughout the City of Laconia. Based on an approach to **Community Policing** that reinforces partnerships among law enforcement and community members, Tom

created opportunities for citizens to voice their concerns for public health and safety and to find ways to collaborate and compromise on ways to take an active part in their neighborhoods. The discussions were remarkable and provided public discourse on community issues. The Council was represented at four of the five community sessions in Laconia. Chief Oetinger as been an ever-present force in relating Community Justice principles to community-policing practices. He is an active supporter and partner in many of the Council's initiatives. Thanks Tom!

In the first year of the Council's existence, we conducted a course through the Community Technical College entitled "Evolving Community Justice". Not only did we develop a model for educating the public on what we were appointed to do, we also developed a model which the college has adopted for developing courses in contemporary issues and increasing access to students, professionals and members of the public interested in select topics. This past year, the college developed a fifteen week course focused on *Violence and the Community* at which the Council was asked to presence a segment on Community Development. Three members of the *Sanborn Park* initiative were invited by the Council to share their experience and participated with the class in an asset mapping exercise. Thanks go to Tom Grogan and the Community Technical College for adopting this topic and model as a way of educating our community on prevailing issues of the day.

The Council continues to share leadership and facilitation of the *Center for Civic Engagement*. This eclectic body of college and community partners continues to develop effective means to communicate and coordinate activities, events and resources for the betterment of our communities. The Center co-sponsored the Beyond Bricks and Mortar sessions in October and will co-sponsor, along with Upstream and Reclaiming Futures / NH, the annual meeting keynote presentation with Laura Nissen. For more information on the Center for Civic Engagement, contact Alan Robichaud (528-3185).

As we continue to understand the importance of community development to the issues that impact children and families, more and more of our efforts need to align the formal clinically and habilitative components of service delivery to other factors that impact more of the causal relationships to substance abuse and crime (e.g. healthcare, education, poverty, livable wages). As we make our way through the maze of community resources and begin bridging gaps between specialized and generic societal issues, we need to explore possibilities with new partners. Pulling people together and creating opportunities for dialogue is one of the ways the Council serves it cause. At the request of Reclaiming Futures and New Futures, a meeting was scheduled with representatives of the *School of Community Economic Development (CED)*, Southern New Hampshire University, to explore information sharing and possible collaboration among these entities. SNHU hosts the only CED doctorate program in the country and has developed amazing international relations with several third world and other countries. This initial meeting was arranged for the purpose of discussing ways that projects can engage community organizing and development techniques in developing community support for addressing substance abuses.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Council will soon release its goals and objectives for 2004. Entitled, *Moving Forward Together*, the report includes summaries of community forums, surveys and other initiatives facilitated by the Council to date. We encourage citizens to call to find out more about the Council's work and how to get involved in issues impacting children, families and communities throughout Belknap County.

THOUGHT TO PONDER

When contemplating the importance of personal involvement in things that seem so complex remember this:

"The Ark was built by an amateur; the Titanic was built by professionals."

Respectfully,

Alan Robichaud