



# Belknap County CITIZEN UPDATE

Belknap County Community Justice

October 2008

A Publication of the Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families  
www.bccj.org



## Belknap County Leads The Way

### To the Residents of Belknap County:

The Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families believes in the principles of Community Justice. Community Justice acts early to prevent problems before they happen. Community Justice means citizens can feel safe where they live. Community Justice values citizens that are actively interested and involved in what is happening around them. The Citizens Council promotes Community Justice so that children and families can live safely in their communities with dignity and respect.

*"We must ask ourselves:  
What kind of a community  
do we want to have?"*

Over the years the Citizens Council has brought hundreds of thousands of dollars into the county to support programs that help children and youth. This money has helped to develop mentor programs for youth, reduce underage drinking, prevent domestic violence, and provide adolescent alcohol and drug counseling.

The Council has sponsored community forums to both share information and listen to county residents. We have provided information to schools, law enforcement and community groups about community development, restorative justice, and family leadership. We believe that if youth and families can find and use these resources that are already available, they will be better able to lead productive and contributing lives in their communities.



Because all of us are very busy, we often forget to tell our own story. Individual Council members continue to make a difference in the lives of others! Many have donated countless hours of their own time to make Belknap County a safe place for all children and families.

Over the next five years the Citizens Council will be working on a special project to improve how the juvenile justice and child welfare systems work together. It should not be confusing to families who are using these services. We want to create a system that can identify

early problems and help families find the right programs and services. We want to help family members stay together in their own communities. This is how we make Belknap County a safe and friendly place to live.

To succeed, we need your help. We want to let others know that spending money earlier in the process, rather than later when the problems are severe, is a better use of taxpayer dollars. This Report Card will help the reader understand why this is true.

We must ask ourselves: "What kind of a community do we want to have?" This is a question of values and commitment. This is a question of investment. If we cannot invest in our children and families now, will we be able to pay the higher costs of treatment, incarceration and other services later? Again, what kind of a community do we want to have?

Get to know the Citizens Council and our work. Get to know your community. Be a part of a better tomorrow.

Sincerely,  
**Alan Robichaud**  
Executive Director  
Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families

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### Dear Readers:

All of us realize that Belknap County is a beautiful place to live. But there are other reasons to be proud of our county. We have an unusually rich source of "people power"! The Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families is one very fine example.

This Citizens Council is a county department and the only one of its kind in New Hampshire and probably throughout New England. Lay citizens from around the county - just like you and me - meet together regularly to discuss and work on ways to make our communities better places for children and families.

Our efforts involve working side-by-side with professional service providers and others on such projects as

producing this Report Card, organizing an annual Convocation to celebrate children and families, sponsoring a week-long, countywide observance of National Crime Victims Rights Awareness Week, and hosting educational forums throughout the county. Currently we are leading a county-state-local initiative to improve how two very large systems - juvenile justice and child welfare - can work together.

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All of this is only possible through the volunteer participation of members such as you. The Citizens Council always welcomes new members who care passionately about the well-being of children and families. You can learn more by visiting our website [www.bccj.org](http://www.bccj.org) or by calling 528-3185.

Sincerely,  
**Sarah Fox**,  
Chair  
Belknap County Citizens Council

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# Juvenile Justice in Belknap County

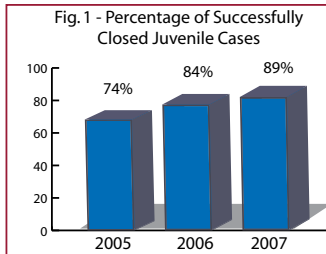
## Three Years of Juvenile Justice Data

When the Citizens Council began in 2002 there was little information available about juvenile offenders in Belknap County. Each agency working with young offenders collected data in a different manner. This made it very difficult to have a broad view of what was really happening with juveniles in Belknap County. There were no uniform ways to evaluate the success of these agencies.

Fortunately, this is changing. The Citizens Council now has three years of data on the County's juveniles. This information is being collected through a Case Closing form that is now used by all four of the juvenile justice service providers. The Citizens Council received a three-year grant from the NH Division of Juvenile Justice Services to help develop this Case Closing form. Currently Belknap County is the only county in New Hampshire to use this form and to have this type of data. Highlights from three years (2005-2007) of Case Closing data follow:

**1. The percentage of successfully closed cases is increasing each year.**

Belknap County is doing a better job each year in assuring that juvenile offenders complete the requirements of their restorative contracts.

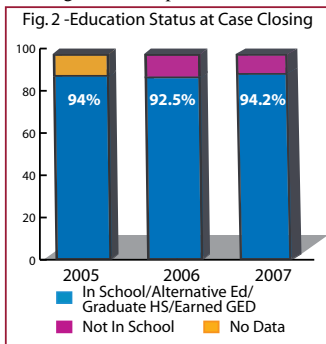


**2. Over the past three years, the most frequent juvenile offenses have been:**

- Theft
- Criminal Mischief
- Simple Assault
- Drug Offense
- Possession of Alcohol
- Vandalism and Property Destruction
- Shoplifting

**3. Belknap County is doing a good job of keeping juvenile offenders focused on their education.**

Juvenile offenders in Belknap County are expected to remain in school and to earn their high school diplomas.



Educational goals and career exploration are a part of restorative contracts for juveniles in Belknap County. Statistics

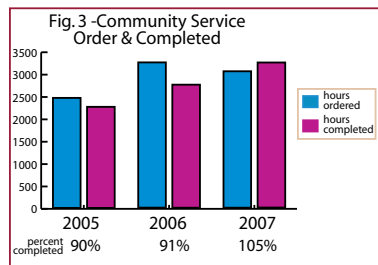
show that youth who complete their high school education are less likely to be involved in problem behaviors that continue into their adult lives.

**4. Belknap County juveniles are making financial restitution to their victims.**

In 2007, 33 youth were ordered to pay restitution fees to their victims. The amounts ordered varied but the average request was \$407.12. Thirty of these 33 juveniles paid back all that was owed or more than what was owed. There is a Belknap County Restitution Fund for victims of juvenile crime that can make payments quickly to victims. Juvenile offenders then make their restitution payments back to this fund.

**5. Each year, Belknap County juveniles are completing more hours of community service as part of their restorative obligations.**

In 2007, 73 juveniles were ordered to complete a total of 3,190 hours of community service. The number of hours ordered varied for each youth but the average was 44 hours. In 2007, these juveniles exceeded this total request to complete a total of 3,343 hours for an average of 46 hours per youth. Community



service is designed to build skills and abilities in juveniles. These skills include decision making, reasoning, citizenship, vocational, social skills, and knowledge. Belknap County juveniles have completed their community service at sites such as: Adopt-a-Highway, Timberman Triathlon, Salvation Army, Baby Threads, Goodwill Industries, Laconia Christmas Village, Winnepesaukee Playhouse, and the Bread and Rose Soup Kitchen.

### PILOT INFORMATION SHARING PROGRAM IN BELKNAP COUNTY

Up until the early part of the 20th century, young offenders were treated in the same manner as adult criminals. Children as young as eight were put in prison side-by-side with adults. The sweeping reforms at the turn of the last century were based on the understanding that youth differ from adults. Most youth are not as easily able to grasp the consequences of their choices. Reformers also believed that young offenders should be "rehabilitated" rather than punished. Strong confidentiality provisions were passed to shield the identities of these youth.

However, these laws that were designed to protect young people often present

*"...This is a good start for Belknap County and we hope soon for all of New Hampshire. I am happy to be a part of this process."*

*Rep. Alida Millham, Gilford*

communication challenges among the agencies that work with these youth and their families. Case workers from one agency have not been able to discuss specific juveniles with another agency who may have had the same juvenile in its case load. It has not been possible to effectively track the flow of juveniles within the system.

In late 2006, the Citizens Council began working with Rep. Alida Millham to draft legislation establishing Belknap County as a pilot program in the state for an integrated juvenile justice information sharing system. Rep. Millham, the Bill's primary sponsor, was joined by Reps James Pilliod, Judie Reever, Beth Arsenal and Sen. Kathleen Sgambati, all from Belknap County, and Rep. David Bettencourt from Rockingham County. The legislation passed and was signed by Governor Lynch. It became effective on August 10, 2008 as Chapter 178.

The Citizens Council is now leading a work group of juvenile justice professionals in Belknap County who are designing the protocols for implementing this new law.

Says Rep. Millham, "This additional data will let us know how successful we have been in working with juvenile offenders. This is a good start for Belknap County and we hope soon for all of New Hampshire. I am happy to be a part of this process."

**Belknap County leads the way in juvenile community justice reform!**

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL JUVENILE OFFENDERS: WHO PAYS FOR THESE PROGRAMS?

Services and programs for juvenile offenders in Belknap County are a continuum of graduated sanctions. Each step increases the expectations and monitoring of the juvenile. Each step is necessary and together they provide the greatest opportunity for juveniles to learn from their mistakes and become productive members of society.

**Who Pays?** In all cases, it is the Taxpayer! Each step will continue to be supported with tax-payer funds, taxes citizens pay to their towns, the county, NH, or as

Federal Taxes. NH House Bill 2, effective July 1, 2008, has only rearranged which taxpayer pocket these dollars come from. The entry-level programs (Steps 2 and 3) are the most cost-effective and the first line of defense for keeping youth away from the more expensive Step 4. At \$366 a day, it is very expensive for NH taxpayers to place youth in the Sununu Youth Services Center. Better long-term outcomes for juveniles and less-costly solutions for taxpayers require consistent investment in their community-based, Pre-Court Diversion and Court Diversion programs (Steps 2 and 3).

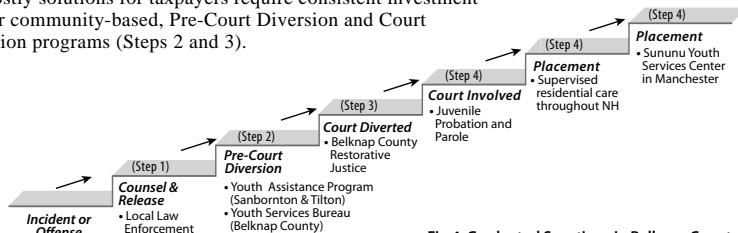


Fig. 4 Graduated Sanctions in Belknap County

# A New Direction for the Council

## Jacob's Story: CHILD MALTREATMENT IN BELKNAP COUNTY

Seven-year-old Jacob has dark brown eyes and a shy smile revealing the space where his two front baby teeth once were. Six months ago his life was one of chaos and confusion. His father was serving a sentence in the county jail and his mother was using drugs and alcohol. She frequently did not come home at night to care for Jacob. When Jacob went to school he was always dirty, hungry, and quiet. His neighbor, an elderly woman who lived alone in the next door apartment and who often gave him a piece of toast in the morning, finally reported his status to the police.

Jacob was a neglected child. The courts said he must be removed from his home so that he could be safe and cared for. He was placed in a foster home. Day by day as he gets used to a comfortable routine his gap-tooth smiles come more often.

National research shows that children who are abused or neglected are more likely to have problems in life. These struggles include getting in trouble with the law and spending time in jail or juvenile detention.

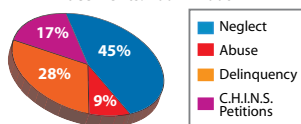
This is also true in Belknap County. Jacob, like many other neglected and abused children, is more likely to make choices that could push him into the juvenile justice system.

The Citizens Council understands the connection between children who have been abused or neglected (maltreated) and their greater potential for later criminal activity. In 2007, the Council began gathering data and facts on children and youth in the county who had been court-ordered into out-of-home placements. In early 2008, this information was shared in a report<sup>1</sup> that showed there is reason for county residents to be concerned about its children and youth who are maltreated.

### Reasons for Out-of-Home Placements in Belknap County (2002-2006)

■ During this time period, 977 Belknap

Fig. 5 - Belknap County Out-of-Home Placements: 2002 - 2006



County children and youth were court-ordered into placement. There are four reasons for these placements:

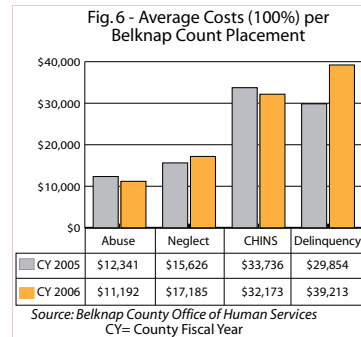
1. 45 % of these children and youth were neglected (*Child Maltreatment*)
2. 9% of these children and youth were abused (*Child Maltreatment*)
3. 17% of these children and youth ran away from home or did not obey their parents (*Children In Need of Services or C.H.I.N.S.*)
4. 28% of these children and youth were alleged or were found to have committed offenses that if committed by adults would be considered criminal acts (*Juvenile Delinquency*)

The majority of these placements (54%) were children and youth who were maltreated.

### Costs of Out-of-Home Placements

These court-ordered placements into foster care, group homes, or the Youth Services Center are very expensive. These costs in 2005 and 2006 varied from \$11,192. to \$39,213. per child, per year.

■ These costs include board and room



and other court-ordered services such as transportation, legal representation, counseling, treatment, health care, Guardian Ad Litem services, and crisis intervention.

■ During 2005 and 2006, there was a 30% rise in the daily rate charged for delinquency placements, explaining why the costs of placing a delinquent child increased sharply in 2006.

■ In recent years, Belknap County has placed an average of 34 children/youth each year through C.H.I.N.S. petitions. The total costs for these C.H.I.N.S. placements are proportionally higher than abuse, neglect, or delinquency cases. (See Fig 6)

### Systems Integration: A Plan for the Future

In Belknap County and elsewhere, two large and independent systems of services manage court-ordered placements. The child welfare system handles children and youth who are abused and neglected. The juvenile justice system handles children and youth who are cited through C.H.I.N.S. petitions and those who are delinquent. Yet in many instances, both systems are working with the same families, such as with Jacob.

The Citizens Council believes that these two huge systems can, and should work more effectively. Jacob's mother should not have to spend so much time and energy understanding what is happening in her family. For this reason, the Council is now leading a major initiative that will bring these two complex systems together in Belknap County.

## Jacob's Family

### A NEW DIRECTION: GETTING SYSTEMS TOGETHER

Seven year old Jacob with the toothless shy smile is doing well in his supportive foster care family. But there are still many struggles and challenges for everyone. Jacob's older brother, 15-year old Eric, has just begun his second year of placement at an outdoor treatment program after several sprees of alcohol-related shoplifting. Mom, who is now actively trying to get Jacob back with her, is enrolled in a local outpatient substance abuse treatment program. However, she has recently missed several classes. Dad is spending some of his time in jail trying to understand why he loses his temper so easily. He is also working with a tutor to improve his reading skills which at one point measured at early 4th grade level.

A number of different organizations and agencies are working with this troubled family of four. At a minimum Jacob's mother talks with people from law enforcement, child protection, juvenile justice, criminal justice, substance abuse, mental health, domestic violence, foster care, and public and adult education. She is often confused and lost as she tries to keep all this straight. Sometimes she just gives up and pours herself another glass of wine.

The Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families recognizes that many families in Belknap County find themselves in the same difficult situation as Jacob's family. This is why the Council is now directing a broad effort to change the way these many systems work with each other and with families.

*The Council is now directing a broad effort to change the way these many systems work with each other and with families.*

In June 2008, the Council sponsored a Symposium with state and local leaders to learn more about how large systems can be changed to be more efficient and effective. Data and information collected by the Council was shared with participants. It was agreed that because of the outreach and accomplishments of the Council over the past six years, Belknap County is ready for this type of undertaking.

The Council has many partners that will help with this project. Administrators and policy makers at the top levels are now working with the Council and its many associates in Belknap County. John Tuell of the Child Welfare League of America, who is leading similar change initiatives in other parts of the country, will be closely connected with this Belknap County effort.

## BELKNAP COUNTY CITIZENS COUNCIL ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

[www.bccj.org](http://www.bccj.org)

- ACTIVITIES, PROJECTS, INITIATIVES
- MEETING SUMMARIES
- REPORTS
- COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP
- NEWS RELEASES
- GLOSSARIES
- PHOTOS
- LOTS MORE!

<sup>1</sup>Highlights from the report, "Perspectives on Child Maltreatment, CHINS and Juvenile Delinquency in Belknap County." Full report available on BCCJ.org.

# The Council Has Many Partners

## Citizens at the Center

The Citizens Council is a County Department that was created by the County Commissioners in January 2002. The goal of the Council is to improve the environment for families in Belknap County through the principles of "Community Justice".

The Citizens Council helps to develop programs and services that support children and families. Council work cannot happen unless local citizens take an interest in their own communities.

Council members are residents of Belknap County and have many different types of experiences and backgrounds. They are appointed by the County Commissioners through an application process. Current members are:

- Betty Anson – Laconia
- Laurie Belanger – Gilford
- Emily Clement – Laconia
- Christie Corrigan – New Hampton
- Sarah Fox – Sanbornton
- Rasim Gusinac – Gilford
- Amy Hall – Belmont
- Pam Kuczkowski – New Hampton
- Sandy McLaughlin – Gilford
- Richard Moed – Gilford
- Ruth O'Hara – Laconia
- Rep. James Pilliod – Belmont
- Nancy Porosky – Gilmanton
- Micheline Roy – Laconia
- Gil Schohan – Belmont

Council Associates are former members of the Citizens Council. They are:

- James Carroll – Laconia
- Ruth Castonguay – Laconia
- Peter Michaud – Center Harbor
- Kate Miller – Meredith
- Rep. Alida Millham – Gilford
- Andre Paquette – Laconia
- Leo Sanfacon – Gilford
- Susan Smith – Gilford
- Richard Wallace – Alton
- Kevin Washburn – Tilton

For more information, visit [www.bccj.org](http://www.bccj.org).

## Bring Data!

"In God we trust; everyone else, bring data!" This quote is used widely in non-profit and government circles, including the Belknap County Citizens Council. However, up until recently, reliable juvenile justice data has not been available.

The Citizens Council took this challenge to heart and created a Council Data Committee. This committee of professionals has worked hard to collect, analyze, and report outcomes of juvenile justice programs in Belknap County. This data has been the basis of the annual Report Cards to the Community, prepared and distributed by the Citizens Council (2006, 2007, and 2008).

This Data Committee will have a critical role in the new systems change initiative led by the Citizens Council.

## Prevention First

Preventing a problem before it occurs makes good common sense. Yet when funds are scarce, it is very difficult to make prevention a priority.

This challenge does not deter members of the Citizens Council Prevention Work Group. In order to make the best use of limited resources, they have joined with other strong prevention efforts in Belknap County. These partnerships have helped to strengthen efforts in substance abuse and family violence prevention and in community education.

The Prevention Work Group will also have an important role in the systems integration initiative now underway. They will help family members who have been involved with these systems to share their experiences.

## Linking with Professional Providers

Promoting Community Justice requires a team approach. This is why the Citizens Council has many partners to help with their work.

In early 2002, the Citizens Council organized the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council (JJAC) as its first partner. JJAC is a network of providers of juvenile justice programs and services. Over the past six years, their goals have been to:

- Educate each other and the citizens of Belknap County about the juvenile justice system
- Communicate more effectively with each other
- Share resources
- Strengthen and improve the juvenile justice system in Belknap County

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE MANY

JJAC members have been meeting together each month. As a result, JJAC and the Citizens Council have:

- Collected and organized data and information on juvenile justice programs in Belknap County
- Developed a uniform Case Closing Form for collecting data on juvenile offenders. This form is now used by all four providers of juvenile justice services in Belknap County.
- Organized several information seminars on juvenile justice topics for other professionals, citizens, and parents
- Prepared and distributed two "Community Report Cards" (2006 and 2007) on the county's system of juvenile justice. This Report Card is the third.
- Organized a week-long observance of National Crime Victims Rights Awareness Week in 2006
- Wrote and received federal and state grant funds to support changes and improvements in the juvenile justice system
- Developed a Victim Restitution Fund for victims of juvenile crime in Belknap County
- Prepared an Issue Brief on Child Maltreatment in Belknap County (see *Jacob's Story*, pg 3)
- Produced and distributed an information brochure for victims of juvenile crime
- Vastly improved the communication among the numerous providers

### A NEW EXPANDED ROLE FOR 2009

Over the next several years, the Citizens Council will lead a systems integration initiative.

This initiative will help the child welfare, juvenile justice systems, and other professional providers in Belknap County to better coordinate their programs and services for children, youth, and families. While this is a pilot project in Belknap County, what is learned will eventually be shared and repeated throughout New Hampshire. (See *Jacob's Family*, pg 3)

This systems integration project cannot succeed unless the professional service providers in Belknap County are involved. For this reason, JJAC is expanding its membership beyond juvenile justice to other areas that also affect children and families. New representatives from child welfare, domestic violence, substance abuse and addictions, and mental health etc. will join JJAC. This enlarged network of providers is now the **Belknap County Professional Advisory Council (PAC)**. PAC is the critical communication link for the providers to the Citizens Council and this systems integration initiative.

## Why We Are Members

**From Jena Vincent, Director: Belknap County CoRe Coalition**

"(It) has reinforced the importance of collaboration with Belknap County agencies and community members... (There's a) variety of people at the table. The meetings are personal and the information presented gives those attending a clear insight into the issues."



**From Alicia Morey, Director: Youth Services Bureau**

"Being a part... is extremely important to our agency, so much so that I send every member of my staff to these meetings. It is a great way to collaborate with other agencies in our field. (It) also makes us a part of what is happening ... in our county. We have a voice when it comes to changes that we want to see in the field and we are given the opportunity to be a part of that process."



**From Jim Sawyer: Laconia City Prosecutor**

"I attend... to participate in discussions on how we might utilize the current resources more efficiently. Bringing together people and systems that impact children is important."

**"I see PAC as the vehicle to get to system coordination and integration." -- Brian Loanes**

A single person or agency does not have the expertise to address the many issues facing today's youth. ...it is imperative that service providers develop relationships and open lines of communication so that when a particular child is in need, referrals for appropriate services may occur swiftly."



**From Brian Loanes, Director: Belknap County Juvenile Restorative Justice**

"It's all about relationships. PAC is a place where you meet and talk with others who have the same goals. It is networking where you can develop needed relationships that allow you to work collaboratively. It is where you can learn about a resource you were not aware of. I see PAC as the vehicle to get to system coordination and integration."



**From Martha Douglass, Director: Youth Assistance Program (Tilton)**

"I attend PAC meetings to keep informed about activities that affect our young people in and around Belknap County. Each program serves a unique population, but we have strength and knowledge by our connection with others who care about our kids."