

“Helping Kids to Hope” Publication Released by Citizens Council

LACONIA: The Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families has recently released a publication titled “Helping Kids To Hope: Promoting Youth Aspirations in Community Settings”. This 12-page booklet summarizes comments from members of four focus groups that discussed how the hopes and dreams of children and youth can be promoted within the community. Led by the Citizens Council in partnership with the Appalachian Mountain Teen Project, this year-long project was a response to school efforts to incorporate



Youth with the Appalachian Mountain Teen Project enjoy an outdoor adventure.

personalized education into their classrooms, such as the Follow The Child initiative in Laconia.

“The Council saw an immediate connection to these local school efforts,” says Emily Clement, a Council member. “We liked that (they) were finding creative ways to celebrate, honor, and promote the personal, social, and physical achievements of kids along with their academic growth.” According to Emily who is the Director of Christian Education at the Laconia Congregational Church , youth who have “that special spark” and are “confident enough to set their own personal goals and think about their future” are better prepared to do well in school and more apt to be productive citizens in their communities.

Following an introduction to the “Follow The Child” project in Laconia, the Citizens Council began in early 2008 to identify how community groups can build on these school efforts. The Council organized four focus groups: Faith-Based, Early Childhood, Banking and Real Estate, and Agriculture and Forestry. Dan Kusch who is the Executive Director of the

Appalachian Mountain Teen Project facilitated the four discussions that involved 26 local residents.

“We heard some inspiring stories,” says Dan. “Such as from a local forester, Jon Martin, who asks to “walk an owner’s property with their entire family so that the children can learn about their own land and what this resource means for the future.” He also noted the “beautiful social action curriculum” used by the Temple B’Nai Israel in Laconia that involves their youth in all dimensions of a “hunger project, from harvesting the vegetables, to preparing and serving meals from this harvest for neighbors in need”.

Three participants from the focus groups, Joyce Selig from Temple B’Nai Israel, Emily Clement, and Jon Martin, joined Dan Kusch to talk in greater depth about their community projects and approaches as part of a special program, “Helping Kids To Hope”, that was taped by Lakes Region Public Access TV for airing throughout the summer. The program schedule is available at www.lrpa.org.

The Belknap County Citizens Council is a County department charged with planning, advocacy, networking, and resource development to support a positive environment for children and families in Belknap County. More information, including the “Helping Kids To Hope” publication, is available by calling the Council office at 527-2432 or visiting the Council website, www.bccj.org.