

Local Presenters at Statewide Conference

LACONIA: Retired Juvenile Justice Willard Martin, and Andre Paquette, Chair of the Belknap County Citizens Council, were presenters at the “Heads Together ‘09” statewide conference on February 5th. They joined Deb Naro and Michelle Golden from the Communities for Alcohol and Drug Free Youth (CADY) Coalition in Plymouth to discuss the restorative justice model of community-based juvenile justice. Restorative justice principles focus on offender accountability, restitution to both the victim and the community, and the personal growth of the youth.

Sponsored by the Workforce Opportunity Council and the NH Department of Education, this annual event was held at the Grappone Center in Concord and attracted 200 educators, business leaders, local and state officials, and professionals. Each year this conference focuses on strategies for improved high school graduation rates and preparation of youth for the workforce.

The four panelists illustrated how restorative justice principles actually work in central NH via the Belknap County Juvenile Restorative Justice Program that began in 2001 and the younger CADY Restorative Justice Program, sponsored by the CADY Coalition to serve Grafton County youth. The panelists’ presentation, “Restorative Justice: Keeping Youth from Dropping Out of the Community”, emphasized the strong links between youth who are connected to their communities and their abilities to stay in school.

A review of the conference evaluations from those attending indicated overwhelming support for this annual symposium on dropout prevention and workforce preparation. Comments from those attending the Restorative Justice break-out session showed that the four panelists “offered an

incredibly interesting and positive topic and a well-balanced presentation” and that they were “very well prepared and very knowledgeable”.

The NH Workforce Opportunity Council was created in 1999 under the Workforce Investment Act funds. Their goal is to serve as a catalyst in building a secure and sustainable workforce in New Hampshire. Members of the Workforce Council are appointed by the Governor.

Judge Martin was instrumental in creating both the Belknap County Juvenile Restorative Justice Program and the Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families. Andre Paquette is serving his second term as a Council member since its creation in 2002 and is now the Citizens Council Chair.

The CADY Coalition, formed in 2000, works to reduce substance abuse by youth and promote healthy environment for youth and families in the 17 towns of the Lin-Wood, Newfound, and Pemi-Baker School Districts.

More information is available at the Citizens Council and the CADY websites: www.bccj.org and www.cadyinc.org

###