

Belknap County Citizens Council Reviews Its Efforts

LACONIA: As part of futures planning, the Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families has recently produced two short publications, one that reviews accomplishments in 2008 and the second a list of achievements over its seven-year history. The Citizens Council was created in January 2002 as a County department with the charge to promote the well-being of children and families in Belknap County.

According to Alan Robichaud, the Council's Executive Director, the Citizens Council is a unique concept in New Hampshire and beyond. "Thousands of volunteer hours" have been donated by Council members - citizen representatives from communities throughout the County - in projects, activities, and planning on behalf of families.

The Citizens Council is by design not a service provider; therefore, all its work is done in partnerships with others including citizens, municipalities, schools, businesses, and service professionals.

Robichaud adds, "We are very grateful for our Council members and those many others we have worked with over the years. Much has been accomplished through their efforts."

The first publication, "In Seven Years", lists 60 of these accomplishments such as introducing state legislation designating Belknap County as a pilot site for information sharing among juvenile justice providers; organizing numerous forums and discussions around the county on substance abuse prevention, parenting support, and community development; leading the effort to develop and adopt a uniform Case Closing Form for juvenile justice providers; and organizing countywide observances of National Recovery Month and National Crime Victims Rights Awareness Week.

The publication also cites over \$3.6 million in grant funds generated by the Council for programs and services benefitting children and families in Belknap County over the past seven years. This new revenue provides a five-to-one return on the \$690,070. paid by county taxpayers over the past seven years to support the Council.

The second publication, the 2008 Annual Report, describes achievements of the Council during 2008. Among them is the third annual Report Card prepared, published, and distributed by the Citizens Council; the pilot information sharing project in Belknap County; and launching a major systems integration initiative to coordinate the child protection and juvenile justice systems in Belknap County.

As background to these projects, the Citizens Council spends time exploring specific issues affecting children and families in Belknap County. As a result, two Issue Briefs containing data and recommendations were issued in 2008 by the Council: Perspectives on Child Maltreatment and Belknap County Juvenile Justice System at a Crossroads.

Both publications are now available on the Council's website: www.bccj.org. One may call the Council office at 527-2432 for additional information.

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