

## **Three Years of Belknap County Juvenile Justice Data Now Available**

**October 2008**

LACONIA: The third annual Citizen Update Report Card, prepared and distributed by the Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families, will soon be in the mail to all households in Belknap County.

“Our hope is to get this information to every Belknap County resident. So do keep a careful eye on your mail for the next several weeks,” says Alan Robichaud, Citizens Council Executive Director. He explains that this four-page tabloid may arrive in mailboxes bundled with shopping circulars. Copies will also be inserted in one issue of the Laconia Citizen.

This annual Report Card is part of the Citizens Council mandate to share information on the well-being of children and families in Belknap County. The current issue provides data and trends shown in the juvenile justice system in Belknap County over the past three years, 2005-2007. It also introduces the systems integration initiative, a new effort led by the Citizens Council to improve how the juvenile justice and child protection systems work together in assisting Belknap County children and their families.

“Much of this data on our juveniles is encouraging,” notes Andre Paquette, Chair of the Belknap County Professional Advisory Council, a Citizens Council-sponsored network that develops this annual report. “The number of juvenile cases that successfully close has increased each year. As well these youth are staying in school. And in 2007, they completed more hours of community service than was ordered in their contracts.”

“However, what is troubling is that our community-based court diversion programs - significantly less expensive than residential placements - are losing key funding from county municipalities because of real

budget issues. While this is understandable, it is still short-sighted. It will end up costing the taxpayer much more when they have to pay for these kids in the deeper end of the system,” says Paquette.

Robichaud agrees, adding that one important goal of the Citizens Council is to “help county residents understand that their tax dollars are more effectively and efficiently spent by supporting court diversion and rehabilitation for young juvenile offenders after their first encounters with the law”.

Robichaud and others are currently making presentations on juvenile justice issues to a variety of audiences around Belknap County. “We now have town-specific data that shows what communities are now paying for juveniles in diversion programs and for those in court-ordered placements.”

The Citizens Council is a county department with volunteer members who are residents throughout Belknap County. Council members meet together regularly for long-range planning, identification of resources, community project development, and regular reporting on community well-being. For more information, call 527-3185 or visit [www.bccj.org](http://www.bccj.org).