

Citizens Council on Children and Families

RETREAT SUMMARY

July 12, 2002

Attending: Scott AndersEn, Evelyn Auger, Linda Brewer, Jim Carroll, Wes Colby, John Irwin, Peter Michaud, Alida Millham, Andre Paquette, Jim Pilliod, Bob Rovella, Leo Sanfacon, Gil Schohan, Susan Smith, Richard Wallace, Mary Alice Warner, Kevin Washburn, Sheila Weeks

Excused: Cathy Apfel, Mark Condodemtrakey

Absent: David Russell

Staff: Judy Buswell, Alan Robichaud **Facilitator:** Deborah White, Helms & Co. Inc.

Gil Schohan welcomed Council staff and facilitator Deb White. Sheila Weeks provided a review of the founding of the Council beginning when Judge Willard Martin was invited to visit a program in Deschutes County, Oregon. Following this initial visitation, Judge Martin returned to New Hampshire and organized a body of local citizens and professionals to examine the issues and impact of the County's Juvenile Justice System.

At Our Roots

Sheila recalled that the current county expenditures at the inception of the Belknap Juvenile Justice Initiative (April 2000) were said to be approximately \$4.2M, with 25% of this cost contributed by the County with literally no say in how the money is spent. The Belknap Juvenile Justice Initiative (BJJI) met continuously over the next 18 months and studied the issues confronting the system and thus leading to ineffective outcomes for children, families and the communities of Belknap County. Issues were identified in the Courts, the system of providers, among professionals, data and information capacities and the need of more accountability in how resources were expended.

In the Oregon model, Denny Maloney's Juvenile Justice program was deemed a national model of Balanced and Restorative Justice (terms are used interchangeably) and consists of a three-dimensional view of crime. It focuses on the needs of the victim, community and the offender. This model represented a departure from the often fragmented process of juvenile justice exercised in New Hampshire and provide the stimulus for change by the BJJJ.

A second feature of the Oregon model related to a construct known as the Commission on Children and Families. While the Oregon "Commissions" are mandated by state law, Belknap County, due to potential confusion with other named "Commission" entities, refers to its comparable body as the Citizens Council on Children and Families.

The Deschutes County Commission on Children and Families extends focus on issues affecting children and families by looking at a more comprehensive "Community Justice" model. Community Justice encompasses elements of Prevention, Balanced and Restorative

Justice and Community Development. Additionally, the Commission is supported in its work through a designated Professional Advisory Council of professionals affiliated with the various aspects of child and family services. While Denny Maloney's Balanced and Restorative Justice program deals with issues of juvenile justice through a more progressive and accountability-based model, the Commission of Children and Families became the model adopted by the Belknap County Commissioners to create the Citizens Council on Children and Families (Citizens Council).

Among the issues which the Citizens Council must address are:

- Resources (\$'s as well as social capital)
- Prevention
- Abuse and Neglect
- Collaboration with schools, law enforcement, businesses, others
- Mental Health
- Substance abuse
- Family Support
- Legislation and policy
- Information and data identification and integration

In January of 2002, the Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families was sworn in and has since developed its organizational structure (i.e. vision, policies, by-laws, committees) and, through this retreat, the Mission it wishes to convey to the communities of Belknap County.

Cascade Mountain Survival – Teambuilding Activity

Deb White introduced the Council to a survival activity. Four teams were constructed and worked toward consensus of use of items needed to survive in the wilderness. The activity compared individual scores to team scores and ultimately to the scores of survival experts and discussed the implications of individual and group decision-making.

Review of Survey Findings

Deb White had developed an email survey and sent it to all Council members. The findings of the survey are listed below as verbatim responses to the following questions:

- Why did you join the Council; and
- How will you determine success in Three years

❖ Why I Joined the Citizens Council

Personal Beliefs

- It's Who I Am – Long History / Commitment / Pride
- Reflects My Values - Each Life, Compassion, Personal Responsibility
- Compelled to Reach Out to People
 - Eliminate Barriers
 - Empower People
 - Teach People to/ Help Each Other
- To Make a Contribution / Make the Community Better / Make a Difference

- It's My Obligation
- Children Are Our Future

Have Applicable Skills

- Comfortable Talking To Youth
- Value / Listen to Youth
- Understand the System
- Aware of Gaps

The Concept Appeals to Me

- Strong Belief in the Concept
- Believe in Prevention
- Key to Educate and Engage the Community
- Need a Coordinated Public Voice for Children and Families
- Need a Plan for Coordinated Efforts
- I've Seen the Consequences of Poor Parenting, Domestic Violence, etc.

To Address Problems in the Juvenile Justice System

- Frustrations and Burnout
- Largest Population in YDC
- High Cost with Less than Stellar Outcomes
- Inefficient/Fragmented/Lack Communication and Community Understanding
- Lack Accountability
- Need Meaningful Options

Real Need for Children and Families

- Support Families as They Parent Their Children
- Tools and Resources to Families
- Safe and Supportive Environment
- Help to Deal with Life's Issues

To Seize the Opportunity

- First Opportunity in 40 Years to Take Seriously How We Respond as a Community
- Commissioners Committed to Change
- Council is a Wonderful Vehicle to Improve Public Awareness and Promote Community Justice
- County can Develop a Model Program
- The Council Can Make a Tangible Difference in Many Families' Lives

❖ Success in 3 Years

Organizational Structure

- Structure in place that makes it possible to be responsive to the needs of children and families without costing an arm and a leg.
- Council will be organized, united and ready to be proactive. Rome wasn't built in a day.

- Working knowledge/understanding of all services and supports available to all children and families – preventing abuse/neglect and juvenile crime.
- Ready to assert positive influence over young peoples lives by taking a proactive role in community affairs.
- Funded by the County.

Awareness

- Council will be well known throughout the County by citizens and service providers.
- Have high name recognition
- Be known as an advocate for children and families
- Community knows who we are and what we are here for and that we are the public voice for community justice.
- Greater public understanding of all issues related to children and families – prevention, intervention, costs, etc.
- We have raised the priority of supporting families, children and youth to a high level in the communities in the County.

Image

- Professionals will view the Council as the leading and coordinating force in support of children and families.
- Commissioners and legislative delegation will recognize the Council's worth and support it financially and through legislation.
- People view the Council as having been one of the key players in that success.
- Belknap County will be recognized as a model where all members of our community embrace the concept of community justice. It will be the cornerstone of how we function as a community.

Plans

- Specific plans to provide a County facility to house juvenile offenders, to house youth in need of shelter and to co-locate providers of related services, including juvenile court.
- Set another set of goals for the juvenile justice system.
- At end of year 2, formal action plan for years 3 – 5, including greater long term strategic planning, with a truly comprehensive Countywide plan at year 5 for implementation during years 5 - 10.

Programs

- Specific programs will be in operation in juvenile justice that will offer a graduated sequence of consequences for offences (2 mentions).
- Short-term detention center north of Concord.
- Community based system and open.
- System only moderately as successful as Deschutes County – significant resources diverted from costly non-local solutions now provided in prevention. Define the pool of potential youthful offenders at a very young age and provide significant resources to see these youth do not end up as juvenile offenders.

- Will be easily accessible programs for teens that are fun but also function as deterrents against crimes that occur through boredom or peer pressure.
- Programs to help families with the parenting skills and enable them to interact with their teens in ways to help them support their children in a positive way
- Juvenile justice system effectively dealing with addiction and substance abuse, through treatment and community based/ supported restorative justice, not punishment.
- Evidence of specific programs put in place by Council members, both for the County and as individual members in their respective communities
- Funding good schools with after school programs, offering drug free programs for youth at night and activities for youth to keep them off the streets as preventive measures.
- Improving the juvenile justice system.
- Intervention services in response to preventing abuse/neglect and juvenile crime
- Redistribute the costs, spend no more money, but have a better product.

Community Involvement

- Community invigorated with enthusiasm to dedicate themselves to volunteering in worthwhile programs – supervise a youth event, talk with youngsters, assist in a mentoring activity, be a mentor to the young.
- Activism for prevention, the rallying call for the Council, conditioned with a child’s eye. A child is a child, does not have maturity and knowledge, but we adults have also made mistakes, so that understanding is important. “I know better” or it is “just because” are not the phrases that work with the young.
- More community participation and involvement in the juvenile justice system.
- Large number of community volunteers working with offenders.
- See increased involvement in community members supporting each other by reaching out to help at earlier stages with increased awareness of services available.
- Ongoing, structured process for broad citizen input solicited on a regular basis – community forums, surveys, etc.
- Greater public participation in helping to resolve the issues.

Collaboration

- Improved collaboration among juvenile justice providers.
- See a difference in the continuity of care and services provided to individuals and families.
- Support each other and the teens, rather than vying with each other for numbers to bring in dollars.
- Eliminate redundancy and bring people together is a Herculean task.
- Effective collaboration with all agencies and organizations, which have a stake in serving children and families.

Outcomes

- Quality of life for many children and their families has been positively affected.
- Juvenile crime rate in Belknap County will be lower.

- Reduction in the numbers of teens entering the system (juvenile and adult).
- I can point to specific persons whose conditions have been improved because the Council existed to aid in that improvement.
- Develop and use evaluation statistics (2 mentions) to show positive effects of the Council's efforts on community safety, youth convictions, recidivism rates and coordinated programs for crime prevention and the return of troubled youth back into communities
- Population of Belknap County's juveniles lowered in YDC.

Unsure

- Not sure what successful is.
- Not decided what we are about yet. The mission seems so overwhelming.

Interpretation of the Council Mission

Deb White conducted a discussion of the Mission Statement. It was generally felt that the Mission Statement is principally contained within the Proclamation of the Citizens Council. However, it may be that individual Council members do not feel comfortable giving a presentation or otherwise interpreting purpose of the Council as it is currently stated. Following discussion and word-smithing of the charge to the Council through the Proclamation, and some discussion of the values which drive the work of the Council, the following Mission Statement was proposed as well as talking points to aid Council members when speaking about the Council:

Mission Statement

The Mission of the Citizens Council on Children and Families is to promote Community Justice in Belknap County so that children and families can live safely with dignity and respect.

The Citizens Council will realize its mission through the following actions:

- active citizen participation;
- comprehensive planning;
- advocacy and collaboration; and
- stewardship through governance, funding and advisory roles within the County.

Values

- Bring community into the whole equation
- Community involvement
- Promote community awareness and involvement in well being
- Safe and just environment
- Dignity and respect toward children and families
- Citizen responsibility for making the community a better place
- Collaboration
- Advocacy

Talking Points

Balanced and Restorative Justice ~

- The juvenile justice system needs improvement
- So many families in trouble
- Families need support
- Do not have dependable information
- Continuity lacking –
 - 8-12 weeks before court
 - Staffing
 - Volunteers – monitor/mentor
- Judge needs information on youth
- System has no teeth – lacks accountability
- Access – so many agencies doing different things; people need to know where to go
- Inventory of services needed.
- Discharge from YDC for new admission = back door
- Negative environment while child fulfills contract of 30 – 90 days
- Parents need to sign contract
- Give kids better supports outside of family
- Let people know what the issues are
- Partnerships with providers and lay people
- Build citizen awareness

Prevention ~

- 3rd Grade literacy and kindergarten “at-risk” indicators = intervention
- Work with schools
- Have someone read to children
- Identify problems in the home
- Parenting programs
- DARE
- List for referrals to community involvement opportunities

Community Development ~

- Collaboration
- Issues why children are not succeeding (e.g. Hungry kids stealing food)
- Homeless kids without shelter
- Work with those already involved
- Public voice to raise awareness about issues
- Advocate
- Voter education
- Candidate recruitment
- “Did you know that?”
- Talking Points
- Editorials

Community Justice Model

