



Northern Berkshire Community Coalition



*“Improving the quality of life for people in Northern Berkshire by organizing, supporting, and empowering the community.”*

**2010**

**ANNUAL REPORT**



# Jeff Goldwasser Board President 2009-present

The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition was born twenty-four years ago in response to a crisis. Back in 1986, the Sprague Electric Company, and more than 4,000 jobs, vanished from the local economy. The Coalition was created to bring the community together, initiate conversations about our challenges, get people working together to solve problems, and help the region to reinvent itself by putting its people first.

Seems like old times.

We are now well into the third year of the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression and, once again, the northern Berkshires have been hit hard. Unemployment is high, wages and benefits are low, and the strain on the social service sector is intense. Fortunately, this time, we don't have to create something like the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition to bring us together. The remarkable people who staff the Coalition every day are keeping the conversations going, getting people to work together, and making a visible difference in the quality of life in our region.

You can see the Coalition at work in many of the key places where people come together to address their problems. Northern Berkshire Neighbors is helping local residents to see each other as natural allies to keep streets and homes safe, to give kids fun recreational activities, and to brainstorm solutions to neighborhood problems. Unity is giving young people opportunities to share their creativity with their peers, to develop as leaders, and to address the issues that are most important to them. The monthly forum continues to be a place for our community to ask the questions that don't get raised anywhere else -- what do our young people care about? What can our churches and synagogues do to make life better for us all? Who cares for the people who care for the elderly and infirm? From such questions come innovative and, sometimes, unexpected solutions to build a better community.

It is particularly inspiring to me that, especially in these hard times, the Coalition has the support and skills of so many remarkable people. Al Bashevkin, our executive director, continues to bring his tremendous energy, experience, knowledge and love of community to the leadership of the Coalition. The rest of the staff, too, have shown great resilience in doing such important work through such tough times.

The Coalition is also blessed with a board of directors of selfless men and women who truly understand what it is to be part of a community and what it takes to be a responsible member of that community. Over the last few months, members of the Board and staff have worked together in a long-term planning process that will help us serve the community and face the challenges of the current financial crisis. I am so grateful for all of their time and energy.

Hard times can grind a community down when people give in to despair. However, hard times also can be a catalyst for needed change and they can bring out the best in people. We are blessed as a community with people who are determined to choose the latter course. The whole purpose of the Coalition from its founding has been to guide our community toward hope and toward a vision of a better future, even in the worst of times. Once again, I see the Coalition striving to reinvent itself and the community by putting our people first.

With great thanks, Jeffrey W. Goldwasser



# Al Bashevkin

## Executive Director

### 1986-present

It's been a busy year, and the early spring reflects the sense that something is really happening here. As I write this, I'm thinking about my good friend, Natalie Cain, who will be retiring from the Coalition this summer. She's reached the magic age of retirement. For seventeen years, Natalie has helped many see the goodness that is Northern Berkshire and I know that wherever her next challenge is, she will continue to spread her positive outlook on others. Thanks, Natalie, for what you have done to make your town a better town.

This past year has been a year of change. We have a new Mayor in North Adams (welcome Mayor Alcombricht) and come November, will also have a newly elected State Representative. My thanks to John Barrett and to Dan Bosley for their commitment to the work of the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition over the past 24 years. We're almost two years in our new offices and have welcomed our newest neighbor, Western Mass Legal Services to our office suite. We're growing into our new skin.

The Northern Berkshire community continues to support the Coalition in its role as a convener for community issues. Our monthly forums have seen greater attendance than ever before. The topics have seemed to strike the right chord with our constituents. Beyond the planning for our monthly forums, we have also facilitated workgroups addressing homelessness prevention, caring for caregivers, and the intersection of the faith community and social action.

Northern Berkshire Neighbors has just completed a fifteen-week course for nine Community Outreach Workers. These Community Outreach Workers are great observers and will help us all better understand the issues that our communities face. In addition, they know about local resources and will provide that information to their neighbors. Neighborhood Watch is occurring in neighborhoods in North Adams, and Adams is talking about similar efforts. We've seen a revitalized Greylock Valley Neighborhood Group and one of our neighborhood groups, UNO, is celebrating their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Our work in the neighborhoods is always changing with changing populations. Thanks to all who share the philosophy of strong neighborhoods for their engagement in our local communities.

I was privileged to attend the annual Writer's Workshop Reading, led by Robin Lehleitner with assistance from Writer's Workshop graduate, Jake Snow. Amazing is the word that best describes that experience for me. Coupled with the work of the Youth Leadership Program in creating a Youth Commission in North Adams, I would say that UNITY leader Kate Merrigan and all that work with her, have done the job of strengthening the place for youth in the Northern Berkshire community.

The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition is about community. The Coalition is proud to play its role in sustaining the health of the Northern Berkshire region. Thanks to all who have committed their time and resources to helping the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition become the community convener that it is today.

# PROGRAMS

## Coalition Core

The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition Core works to provide information about community services and resources through its monthly meetings and newsletter, special events, and local television show, *Northern Berkshire Tonite*. Scott Nichols, a Coalition Board member, has once again co-hosted our TV show this past year with Al Bashevkin. In addition, the Coalition has a unique role as the facilitator of community conversations that address local issues. This year we were in conversations beyond our monthly meetings impacting homelessness prevention, social action in the faith community, our environment, youth suicide prevention, and resources for caregivers.

An important function for the Community Coalition is its capacity to bring necessary services to our rural region. The Coalition brought to the community BerkshireRides, a transportation network that provides over 3000 work-related rides each month to Northern Berkshire residents and this past year worked with others to keep alive our youth transportation network.

Initially started in 1994 as a means for the community to address issues of peace and tolerance, the Martin Luther King Day celebration is an annual opportunity, directed by Alex Daugherty, to support diversity in the Northern Berkshire region. With support of North Adams Regional Hospital, the Coalition trained nine Community Outreach Workers as part of our Community Outreach Team that intends to provide information to isolated residents about community resources as well as provide to the community agencies information about our isolated residents.

The Berkshire Youth Development Project (BYDP) continues to bring the Coalition together with the Pittsfield Prevention Project and the South Berkshire Community Coalition to gather risk and protective data about Berkshire County youth, plan community campaigns based on that data, and continue to learn best practices for youth development from each other. An initiative started by the Berkshire Youth Development Project brought a federal program, Compassion Massachusetts to Berkshire County, offering over \$100,000 each year in small grants to local organizations. That project is slated to end in October, 2010. The BYDP has been made possible through the support of the Berkshire County Legislative Delegation.

Thanks to the support of SAMHSA and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition continues to work to prevent underage drinking and substance use through science-based prevention programming. Our initiative to prevent underage drinking, Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol, now has active strategy teams facilitated by local residents in towns representing the Adams-Cheshire Regional School District and in the towns representing the Mt. Greylock Regional School District that are creating media advocacy and parent education to curb underage drinking. Both communities had successful public forums to address various aspects of underage drinking.

The Coalition monthly meetings are public forums intended to help explore local issues. Topics covered this year included "Annual Needs Assessment," "Federal Health Care Reform with Congressman Olver," "Children's Behavioral Health Initiative," "Caring for Our Caregivers," "MLK Day," "A Conversation with Mayor Alcombright," "Myths about our Teens: A Meeting Facilitated by Teens," "Intersecting the Faith Community with Social Issues," and "Teen Pregnancy."

Thanks to all who participated in our important community discussions.

**"It is in times as difficult as these that the need for the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition is the greatest!"**

**--Robert Calway**  
Board Member

# Northern Berkshire Neighbors

**Northern Berkshire Neighbors (NBN)** is dedicated to building strong community through connecting residents both in neighborhoods and in the wider community. NBN creatively links residents with local agencies, state institutions, government officials, police, landlords, local colleges and other resources as partners in developing the neighborhood conditions needed for families to flourish. Our Community Outreach Program provides the peer based, grassroots community organizing needed to help facilitate positive change. Outreach workers provide resources and forums for people to express ideas, and they work to find creative solutions for improving their quality of life.

Neighborhood Groups and Summits are tools which NBN utilizes to bring people together. Neighborhood groups provide forums with a safe space for residents to work together to assess concerns and take action to improve their neighborhood. Neighborhood Summits serve as a forum for resident leaders to network and garner support from each other, as well as to help guide NBN programming. Training and information about community resources are part of the regular leadership development provided.

Neighborhood programming, including the Summer Basketball League, Active!, nbStep Dance, and Neighborhood Based After-school programs build confidence in youth, provide family activity and instill neighborhood pride.



**“The Coalition has done very well with helping youth and people in need by introducing them to new things they do not know about, like employment services and other help-ful resources. I think NBN is a great benefit to the community.”**

**--Kelly Heller**  
Greylock Valley resident

Community Connections works within neighborhoods and the community to support and strengthen families. NBN works with the community to provide support for foster families as well as those in need of parent development skills. The Parent Resource Group collaboratively plans for parent and family programming to fill gaps in needs in the community.

NBN works with residents to plan events and activities that bring the community together for safe and positive experiences including National Night Out, the Neighborhood EXPO and Community Recognition Awards. Activities

and programs for children and families take place in their neighborhoods and children are connected with community programs outside with transportation provided.

A core base of 300 residents and a broader base of 2000+ residents from throughout Northern Berkshire are involved with NBN through neighborhoods, community events and special activities.

# UNITY

**UNITY (United, Neighboring, Interdependent, Trusted Youth)** promotes youth development in the northern Berkshire area through a wide range of programming that includes youth-led community service-learning projects, leadership training, creative arts workshops, and a teen arts management and concert series. We also facilitate networking and collaboration between youth workers and youth-serving organizations through monthly meetings of our Northern Berkshire Youth Collaborative. This year was marked by increased engagement with community leaders and support from some old friends, including the return of Robin Lehleitner to the Teen Writing Workshop and help from UNITY alumni in new leadership roles.

Twenty-two teens from 5 schools participated in this year's Youth Leadership Program, which is in many ways the heart of UNITY. YLP members met

weekly to explore community needs, develop service projects, and discuss issues important to teenagers. Early on, the group determined they were interested in advocating for a skateboard park in North Adams. Throughout the year, the group met with community leaders to share their vision for this project and a better community for teens. At different points in the year, the group had conversations about their passions and needs with Mayor Barrett, Representative Bosley, Mayor Alcombright, City Councilor Boland, City Councilor Bona, and NAPD Officer Mark Bailey. We made trips to City Hall to participate in City Council meetings. These opportunities to interface with community leaders helped the group to feel empowered to share their ideas. We continued sharing at the March nbCC forum, at which YLP members facilitated a dynamic, energetic conversation about stereotypes and myths about teenagers. UNITY helped the City of North Adams with the development of an ordinance to create a Youth Commission; this idea first emerged in the YLP meeting with Mayor Alcombright. Finally, group members helped clean up parks at the MCLA and North Adams Community Day of Service. It was a fun year for a group marked by an almost palpable new sense that community leaders care about them and believe their voices are important.

Thanks to a generous anonymous donation, the Teen Writing Workshop and Grooove were able to continue. The TWW had its highest attendance ever, with over 35 teenagers attending throughout the program's 20 sessions. Staff agreed that this is in part because of the powerful contributions of Jake Snow, workshop alum, as an intern with the group. The Grooove continued to host concerts - several at St. John's Parish hall and one at MASS MoCA - and look at ways to expand audience. Grooove hired a part-time Advisor, Greg Caproni, who has experience as a musician, promoter, producer, and educator.

New this year, UNITY convened the SUPARs (Special UNITY Participatory Action Researchers), a team of 5 youth who were trained to conduct in-depth community research on a variety of issues. With funding from The 84 and the federal Service To Science initiative, they engaged in two main projects: researching and educating people about the availability of smokeless tobacco products marketed to children in local stores and becoming Participatory Action Researchers. For the work with The 84, one group member - UNITY senior Brittany Shepard - received a statewide Youth Achievement Award.

UNITY helped plan and run the 4th Annual 411 in the 413 Youth Conference, sponsored by the Berkshire Youth Development Project. We co-founded this conference in 2007 with Railroad Street Youth Project and worked with them again—with leadership from Suzannah Grant, a Drury Intern—to put on a very successful event planned by youth and adults. The conference, held overnight in early April at YMCA Camp Becket Chimney-Corners, drew about 65 students from 12 Berkshire County high schools to meet, network, learn new skills, and explore issues of key interest to local teenagers. This year, UNITY staff also helped develop and run a parallel event for youth workers; the first Berkshire Youth Worker Summit was held in September, 2009 and drew over 70 people who work with children and teens.

**“UNITY has played a huge role in developing a new personality trait in me. I’m much more confident in expressing my views, and I’m learning about community issues from a leader’s point of view.”**

**--Urooj, YLP participant**

# SNAPSHOTS



# Financial Report

The following is a Statement of Revenue, Expenses and Changes in Net Assets for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2009 and ending June 30, 2010 for the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition, Inc.

## Revenue\*

State Contracts	\$306,000
Federal Contracts	\$140,970
Misc. Income & Contributions	\$33,099
Local Grants	\$42,350
Local Charities & Foundations	\$27,409
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$549,828</b>

## Expenses\*

Administration	\$90,563
Program Expenses	\$351,002
Office Maintenance & Expenses	\$71,250
Subcontracted Services & Consulting	\$52,206
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$565,021</b>

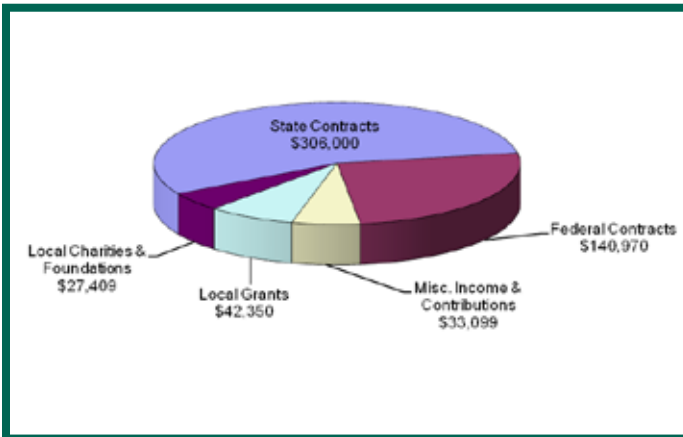
**Net Revenue** **-\$15,193**

## Net Assets

Net Assets, July 1, 2009	\$295,128
Net Revenue	-\$15,193
<b>Net Assets, June 30, 2010</b>	<b>\$279,935</b>

\*Projected revenue and expenses through June 30, 2010.

## 2009 Revenue Chart



nbCC is a member agency of:



# Coalition Supporters

The Coalition thanks the following individuals and organizations for their generous support. Many thanks as well to those who chose to remain anonymous.

## Funding Partners

Anonymous  
BTCF Fund for North Adams  
BTCF New World Fund  
Berkshire Youth Development Project  
Catholic Campaign for Human Development  
MA Cultural Council  
MA Department of Children & Families  
MA Department of Public Health  
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**For Neighborhood Basketball:**  
Berkshire Bank

# The Year in Review

**The Coalition Core** served as a forum for discussion, a vehicle for information exchange, and a catalyst for the development of new community initiatives through:

- Facilitation of eight monthly forums that brought together an average of seventy-nine participants each month to discuss emerging community issues.
- Production of 10 installments of our monthly TV show, *Northern Berkshire Tonite*, to further promote community conversation around the forum topics.
- Publication of ten issues of our monthly newsletter, which is now mailed to approximately 550 organizations and homes and e-mailed to over 1000 recipients.
- Re-design and maintenance of our website, which includes information about Coalition programs and community services.
- Facilitation of the Northern Berkshire Youth Collaborative, a North County organization that brings together youth service providers to share ideas and work together in developing a consistent approach to working with youth.
- Leadership in facilitation of the Berkshire Youth Development Project, a consortium of youth development coalitions throughout Berkshire County that is working to build a stronger Berkshire County prevention platform.
- Office space support for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Berkshire County and the Western MA Legal Services office.
- Support for numerous community initiatives that include the Hoosic River Revival Coalition; The Take Charge Campaign to Save Energy; and the annual Martin Luther King Day celebration.
- Facilitation of workgroups addressing the issues of Homelessness Prevention, Caring for our Caregivers, and the Intersection of the Faith Community and Social Action.

**Our prevention efforts** worked to address issues of underage drinking, substance use, and other social ills through:

- Leadership of Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol in the towns of the Adams-Cheshire Regional School District and the Mt. Greylock Regional School District; a project to limit access to alcohol by teenagers.
- Outreach to community members to join one of our strategy teams.
- Continued leadership for the implementation of the Prevention Needs Assessment Survey, an assessment of risk and protective factors affecting our young people's lives. Over 1400 Northern Berkshire and over 3000 Berkshire County 8th, 10th, and 12th graders were surveyed in 2009, providing helpful data for substance abuse prevention programming. The survey will next be implemented in the Spring of 2011.
- Working with law enforcement, community members, and liquor establishment owners to pass a Town Ordinance in Adams requiring server training for all employees.
- Presenting 5 community forums in the Mt. Greylock and Adams-Cheshire school districts about the effects of alcohol on the developing brain and body.
- Training 21 Youth In Action volunteers from 4 schools to participate in compliance checks, sticker shock and alcohol purchase surveys.
- Facilitation of the Safe Homes of North Berkshire program, including the collection of parent/guardian pledges and distribution of the 2009-2010 Safe Homes Resource Guide.
- Facilitation of a monthly forum addressing teen pregnancy.

**Northern Berkshire Neighbors** utilized community organizing and resident leadership to:

- Support 8 neighborhood groups in Northern Berkshire, involving 200+ residents in community work.
- Involve over 200 people in Community “Neighborhoods” Event, recognizing people and organizations for positive contributions to the community.
- Present the 12th Annual Neighborhood EXPO “Food Matters” with a world cafe style discussion about sustainable foods, an organic, locally prepared lunch and local vendors.
- Coordinate the annual National Night Out safety program and community celebration with over 250 residents, police and agencies in attendance.
- Develop neighborhood-based programs involving parents and residents as well as college students and local organizations including: Summer Neighborhood Basketball (80+ youth), nbStep Dance (35+ youth), Brayton Hill After-School Program (20 youth), Friends of Foster Families (24 youth, 9 MCLA students), Active! (13 youth), Movie Nights (160+ residents) and Picnics (200+ residents).
- Connect (30+) neighborhood youth and their families with community summer programs led by Take Charge and Active!.
- Collaborate with local agencies, especially parenting programs, to continue a Parenting Course for Department of Children and Families referred parents with an attendance of 12.
- Support foster families through collaboration with Department of Children and Families and MCLA; monthly support group and family outings to local events. NBN provided foster parents with updated information about community resources to increase community awareness of foster care needs.
- Organize transportation for youth and families to activities/programs through collaboration with BerkshireRides.
- Complete 15-week Resource and Community Leadership training for nine Community Outreach Workers, while offering additional training for neighborhood leaders.
- Initiate Neighborhood Watch Program with Mayor Alcombright and North Adams Police Department (17 neighborhood leaders)

**UNITY** promoted youth development in North Berkshire through:

- Engagement and training of 22 teenagers from 5 high schools in the Youth Leadership Program, an initiative that provides opportunities for youth to identify community needs and create service-learning projects in response to those needs.
- Helping the City of North Adams create a North Adams Youth Commission.
- Offering a workshop on how youth and adults can work together better at the statewide Connecting for Change Youth Empowerment Conference.
- Helping a UNITY alum become the youngest member of the nbCC Board of Directors.
- Participation of 40 youth from area high schools (as well as some college-aged UNITY alumni) in arts programming; regular public concerts and open mic nights; successful public reading of student creative writing; publication of the 11th edition of the teen literary journal *Somewhere Between*.
- Outreach visits at school lunches at all 5 northern Berkshire high schools.
- Offering creative writing and performance experiences for young people at the 4th Monday community nights at St. John’s Parish Hall, sponsored by Catalyst.
- Helping to advance a new Berkshire Youth Suicide Prevention Project.
- Planning and convening 2 countywide Summits for people who work with youth.
- Arranging for 2 teens to attend New Hampshire Teen Institute 2009 Summer Leadership Program.
- Participation of 5 teens in a new UNITY group, the SUPARs; surveys done on availability of smokeless tobacco products and how they are marketed to youth in local retail stores; exploration on what it means to be an “outsider” in our community.
- Facilitation of the Northern Berkshire Youth Collaborative, which this year held conversations and training on topics including youth anxiety issues, service-learning, and emerging tobacco products.
- Co-sponsoring and planning the 4th Annual 411 in the 413 Youth Conference, a unique opportunity for Berkshire County high school students to gather, meet new people, and learn about the many opportunities available to young people in the Berkshires. All told, 65 youth from 12 schools were present.

# Board of Directors

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Crystal Garrity, Suzannah Grant, Ben Shiner,  
& Jake Snow, UNITY Interns

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Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

## Northern Berkshire

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